

**Report of the UNISON
delegation to
Palestine and Israel
27 November – 3 December 2010**

Introduction

A UNISON delegation visited the occupied Palestinian territories¹ and Israel from 27 November to 3 December 2010. The delegation was composed of:

Angela Lynes, UNISON President
Alison Shepherd, Chair of the NEC International Committee
Frank Hont, Regional Secretary, North West
Nick Sigler, Head of International Relations
Nick Crook, International Officer

It should be noted that a delegation was planned for April 2010 which would have reported to National Delegate Conference in 2010. However, this delegation had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the travel disruption caused by the Icelandic volcanic ash-cloud.

This report was discussed and approved by UNISON's International Committee on 26 January 2011 and endorsed by the National Executive Council at its meeting on 23 February 2011.

Remit of the delegation

UNISON National Delegate Conference has given the NEC a clear remit to review our relationship with the two PSI affiliates of the Histadrut in the context of the statement made by the Histadrut in January 2009 about the Israeli attack on Gaza, the attack on the Free Gaza Flotilla and the wider issue of the Histadrut's position on the occupation.

Composite J, Palestine, from 2009 stated: *"Conference also expresses its grave concern at the statement of 13 January 2009 of the Histadrut (General Federation of Labour in Israel) supporting the military assault on Gaza and in general at its lack of opposition to the occupation. We therefore agree to a review of our relationship with the Histadrut's PSI affiliates, the Union of Clerical, Administrative and Public Service Employees (UCAPSE) and the Government Employee's Union.."*

Emergency composite 1 from NDC in 2010 said: *"Conference condemns the Histadrut's statement of 31 May which supports uncritically the Israeli Government's action against the Flotilla and agrees to suspend our relations with the Histadrut pending the outcome of our review of our relations as previously agreed by National Delegate Conference."*

Composite J, Palestine, from 2009 also called on the NEC: *"To work with and support civil society organisations in Israel, including the cores of young Israelis imprisoned for refusing to take part in the army of occupation, who oppose the continuing occupation and support the rights of Palestinians such as Workers' Hotline, workers' advice centres and Sawt el-Amel."*

¹ Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Syrian Golan Heights in 1967. The Palestinian Liberation Organisation which is recognised by the United Nations as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, declared Palestinian independence in 1988 at the same time as recognising the State of Israel. The 1993 Oslo Accords saw the creation of the Palestinian National Authority with limited powers of self-government in the major towns of the occupied West Bank and Gaza. The PLO and PNA's objective is Palestinian statehood in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem within the pre-1967 borders of the Green Line. There is, as yet, no Palestinian state. UNISON policy is to support a viable, contiguous Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel.

Organisations met by the delegation

To undertake this review the delegation met with both the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and with the Histadrut and its two public service affiliates. The delegation also met with a number of Palestinian and Israeli NGOs that either provide employment related advice and representation, advocate on behalf of the Palestinian people and campaign for an end to the occupation and a two-state solution. The delegation's programme of meetings is attached as an annex. This section however provides a brief description of each organisation.

Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions

The PGFTU is the largest and most representative of the trade union centres in the occupied Palestinian territories. It is a full member of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and two of its affiliates, the Public Services Federation and the Health Federation, are members of Public Services International (PSI). UNISON has had a long relationship with the PGFTU and has supported projects both with the PGFTU and with its public service affiliates. The delegation had meetings with representatives of the Public Services Federation and the Health Federation, as well as with the General Secretary of the PGFTU, Shaher Sa'ed.

Histadrut

The Histadrut, the General Federation of Labour in Israel, is the largest trade union centre in Israel. It is a full member of the ITUC and its two public service federations, the Union of Clerical, Administrative and Public Service Employees (UCAPSE) and the Government Employees' Union, are both members of PSI. UCAPSE is largest federation in the Histadrut, making up about a third of the overall membership.

The delegation met with representatives of both UCAPSE and the Government Employees' Union, including the Presidents of both federations Arnon Ben-David of UCAPSE and Ariel Yacobi of the Government Employees' Union. The International Secretary of the Histadut, Avital Shapira was also present.

Sawt el-Amel

Sawt el-Amel (the Labourer's Voice) was set up in 2000 as an NGO to give advice and representation to Palestinian citizens of Israel². Based in Nazareth in northern Israel where the majority of Palestinian Israelis live, it changed its status from that of an NGO to a trade union in 2008 although it currently only has about 900 members. It does not currently have any collective agreements with employers. Due to the high levels of unemployment in the Palestinian community in Israel, especially amongst women, Sawt el Amel has been particularly active in representing unemployed workers who have been made to take part in the Israeli state's version of 'workfare', called the Wisconsin Plan. It has also taken on a series of legal cases for Palestinian workers living in Gaza who worked for Israeli companies prior to the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 and who have not received benefits to which they are entitled from their employers.

² There are approximately 1.5 million Arabs living in Israel (1967 borders) making up 20% of the population. 270,000 live in East Jerusalem and have residency but not Israeli citizenship. The remaining 1.2 million are Israeli citizens, making up 17% of Israeli citizens. The Israeli state has traditionally called them Arab citizens of Israel, however, in recent years a majority of them would now define themselves as Palestinian citizens of Israel or Palestinian Israelis. A minority of the Arab population define themselves as Bedouin or Druze, two historic minorities amongst the Arab population.

Sawt el-Amel has received international funding from organisations such as Oxfam and Christian Aid in the past. Since 2008 it has sought to establish links with the international trade unions and has received support from unions in France and Belgium. It also has links with PCS in the UK on its work against the Wisconsin Plan.

Kav LaOved

Kav LaOved (the Worker's Voice) is an Israeli NGO that provides legal advice and representation to vulnerable, non-unionised workers in Israel. Originally set up in 1990 to give advice to Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories, it now mainly works with migrant workers who have been brought to Israel to replace the Palestinian workforce who are no longer able to work inside Israel following the Second Intifada in 2000. It also works with refugees and asylum seekers and has also worked with Palestinians working inside Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Kav LaOved has taken a decision to remain as an NGO and does not aspire to be a trade union.

Kav La'Oved receives funding from a range of international organisations, including trade unions, as well as the European Union. UNISON has part-funded two Kav LaOved films about the working conditions of Palestinians working in Israeli agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley and in the Industrial Zones along the 1967 Green Line.

Workers Advice Centre (WAC/Ma'an)

The Workers Advice Centre (WAC/Ma'an) was set up as an NGO to give legal advice and representation to mainly Israeli Palestinian workers. In the past three years it has sought to become a trade union defining itself as 'a progressive current in the Israeli trade union movement' and it aims to organise both Jewish and Palestinian Israeli workers. It defines itself as a general union and has targeted sectors of the economy with low rates of union membership, especially in transport, construction, archaeology, agriculture and private education. It has one collective agreement in the Mussara Art College in Jerusalem. It is taking a legal case to get recognition for another agreement in the Sal'it quarry, an Israeli owned quarry in the occupied West Bank. It is also running a major organising project, part-funded by the Dutch trade union centre FNV, amongst lorry drivers. In addition to funding from the FNV, WAC/Ma'an has received project funding from CGIL in Italy and CCOO in Spain.

Koach LaOvdim

Koach LaOvdim (Power to the Workers) is a new Israeli trade union set up in 2007. Some of its founder members had previously been in the Histadrut; others came from sectors of the economy with low or no levels of union organisation (security guards, cleaners, temporary agency workers). It organises Jewish, Palestinian and migrant workers. It claims 6,000 dues paying members and represents 10,000 members overall through collective agreements³, 25% of whom are Palestinian Israelis, mainly women. Its largest branch is amongst social care workers (approximately 1,500). Koach LaOvdim receives no external funding and does not have a network of international contacts as it has sought to concentrate on organising so far.

³ Under Israeli law a union needs one-third of workers in a bargaining unit to be in membership to get recognition by an employer. Recognition agreements are between the employer and one union organisation only, there is no scope for multi-union representation or recognition. This is the main reason why the new unions being set up in Israel are seeking to organise non-union workplaces - there is little chance to challenge the Histadrut in an already unionised workplace. Once a collective agreement has been signed the union gets a 'fee' from the employer to cover the representation costs of non-union members covered by the collective agreement. This system is also used in other countries such as Canada.

Mossawa Centre

The Mossawa Centre is the advocacy centre for Palestinian citizens of Israel. 'Mossawa' means equality in Arabic. It aims to promote their economic, social, cultural and political rights and to achieve recognition of this community as national, indigenous minority in Israel.

One Voice

One Voice is an international grassroots movement that seeks to build support for a two-state solution. It calls for an end to the occupation, security and peace for both sides, for all final-status issues in relation to two states to be in accordance with international law and previous bilateral agreements.

The delegation met separately with One Voice Palestine in Nablus and One Voice Israel in Tel Aviv. It is important to point out that although the two organisations are part of One Voice internationally, their work is overwhelmingly developed and run independently from each other. One Voice describe this as working 'in parallel but autonomously'. One Voice Palestine supports the boycott of Israeli settlement goods for example whereas One Voice Israel does not. Importantly One Voice does not seek to do 'normalisation' work between Palestinian and Israeli citizens. Its primary goal is to build support for a two-state solution and an end to the Occupation amongst the Palestinian and Israeli public.

Key issues

The central issue for the delegation was the Histadrut's position on the creation of a viable Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel and consequently its position on the Occupation, the settlements and the status of East Jerusalem and the blockade of Gaza. However, this issue can not be considered in isolation from the Histadrut's relationship with the PGFTU and the rights of Palestinian workers inside Israel and the settlements. The systematic replacement of Palestinian workers by migrant workers from other countries⁴ and their working conditions has been of growing interest and also formed part of the delegations agenda, as did the issue of systematic discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel. The delegation did not set out to address the question of Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions yet this issue was raised with us throughout our visit and is therefore covered by this report.

The relationship between the PGFTU and the Histadrut

In 1995, two years after the Oslo Accords, the PGFTU and the Histadrut signed a co-operation agreement. This agreement related solely to the representation and rights of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories working in Israel. Before the Second Intifada around 140,000 Palestinians worked in Israel. The agreement related to those Palestinian workers in workplaces covered by a Histadrut collective agreement and for which the Histadrut received a representation fee (see 3rd footnote). The Histadrut agreed to remit a percentage of this money to the PGFTU and in return to provide legal advice and representation to Palestinian workers.

The Histadrut froze the payment of monies to the PGFTU after the Second Intifada in 2000. One of the consequences of the Second Intifada was a significant reduction in the number of Palestinian workers being allowed to enter Israel for employment and their systematic replacement by

⁴ The Israeli government has pursued an active strategy of replacing workers from the occupied Palestinian territories with migrant workers from other countries since the second Intifada of 2000 citing security reasons. Before the second intifada 140,000 Palestinians from the Occupied territories worked legally in Israel compared to just 30,000 today.

migrant workers from other countries. Under the auspices of the ITUC, negotiations were held between the PGFTU and the Histadrut and in 2008 the Histadrut finally agreed to pay the frozen money owed to the PGFTU.

Israel currently issues 30,000 work permits to Palestinians from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, mainly in the construction and retail sector. An estimated further 20,000 Palestinians work illegally inside Israel. It is widely recognised that these workers are subject to exploitation and discrimination. Most are paid on or below the minimum wage and are denied access to work related accident and sickness benefits. The PGFTU, Kav LaOved and others made it clear to us that these workers do not have access to information about their employment rights or to representation.

In our meeting with Shaher Sa'ed he was very critical of organisations who sought to use this relationship for political ends, both inside Palestinian civil society and internationally. In particular he criticised Trade Union Friends of Israel (TUFI) for the way in which they sought to portray the relationship to justify the concept of 'normalisation'⁵ between the Palestinian and Israeli trade union movement and accused TUFI of acting dishonestly in its dealings with the PGFTU. The PGFTU was very clear that their relationship with the Histadrut was based primarily on the representation of Palestinians working inside Israel and that they could not have normal relations with the Histadrut whilst they were living under occupation. In fact Hussain al-Foqaa of the PGFTU Public Services Federation described the relationship between the PGFTU and the Histadrut as a "relationship under pressure."

It has been reported that two global union federations, the International Transport Workers Union (ITF) and the Building and Wood Workers International (BWI) have run joint projects between the PGFTU and Histadrut. The ITF project was originally aimed at providing a telephone hotline for Palestinian transport workers experiencing problems at Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank. The PGFTU told us that as a result of the improved security situation in the West Bank the number of checkpoints had been reduced significantly and that the project had changed to provide a telephone hotline for Palestinian transport workers loading or unloading goods for export and import between the occupied territories and Israel. However, the PGFTU also said that due to Israeli restrictions on such trade they thought there was only limited use of this facility.

The BWI had proposed to run a project aimed at providing health and safety training for Palestinians working in the construction sector inside Israel. However the PGFTU made it very clear that although the BWI had offered to run this project, funding had never been found for it and no training had ever taken place. Nevertheless TUFI and other organisations continue to promote the BWI project as an example of good co-operation between the PGFTU and the Histadrut. The PGFTU is asking TUFI and others to stop using the example of the BWI project as it has never been put into practice.

⁵ Normalisation in this context means the creation of normal relations between two organisations as part of the process of conflict resolution. It is often used in the context of the Middle East Process and was especially in vogue after the Oslo Accords. However, the concept is increasingly criticised, especially by Palestinians who assert that there can be no normal relations whilst the Occupation continues and that normalisation can only truly take place once there is a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Normalisation implies two equal partners and negates the reality of the Occupation and the imbalance in power between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel's responsibility for the Occupation. This point was made strongly to us by both the PGFTU and One Voice Palestine. The Histadrut, TUFI and others continue to use the language of normalisation which, despite their professed support for a two-state solution, downplays or even denies the reality of the Occupation for the Palestinians.

The Histadrut's position the peace process

The Histadrut issued public statements at the time of the attack on Gaza in early 2009 and the assault on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in 2010 that sought to justify the actions of the Israeli government. These statements were widely condemned by many trade unions around the world and led to the call to review UNISON's relationship with the two public service federations of the Histadrut.

The Histadrut has also issued statements in the past calling for a two-state solution and for a resumption of final status negotiations. It has criticised the checkpoints within the West Bank and some of the restrictions imposed as part of the blockade on Gaza. However, the Histadrut has not taken a clear stance on the illegal Israeli settlements, the Separation Wall, or the status of East Jerusalem.

The PGFTU are critical of the Histadrut's attitude to the Occupation. The PGFTU have repeatedly stated their support for the peace process, for a two state solution and have consistently condemned acts of terrorism. This is a particularly important issue to them because their relationship with the Histadrut has been attacked by elements within Palestinian civil society. The PGFTU issued an uncharacteristically blunt criticism of the Histadrut in a press release dated 3rd June 2010 in response to the Histadrut statement on the Gaza flotilla. The PGFTU press release said, *"We condemn any attempt by the Histadrut to hide behind Union to Union cooperation to justify brutal assaults against civilians who tried to offer humanitarian assistance to 1.5 million Palestinians, mostly working people in Gaza."*

Hussain Al-Foqaa, the President of the PGFTU Public Services Federation said in our meeting with him that the Histadrut had failed to make a significant statement on the peace process. He criticised the Histadrut for only wanting to talk about trade union issues and not taking a leading role in supporting the peace process. Such a position was untenable in the context of the Israeli Occupation. Shaher Sa'ed also criticised the Histadrut's stance. He wondered why the Histadrut could not take a different position from that of the Israeli government and he wanted the Histadrut to take a clear position on the Occupation and the settlements.

The representatives of the Histadrut justified their stance in three ways. Firstly they argued that as a trade union they did not take a stance on wider political issues. In particular they felt that their international relations with other trade unions should only be based on trade union related matters. Secondly, they argued that whilst as individuals many of the leadership did oppose the actions of the Israeli government and had taken part in protests, they could not do this collectively as they would alienate a large number of their members who did not support negotiations with the Palestinians or a two-state position. Thirdly, they argued that pressure on the Histadrut from the international trade union movement and others to take a more public stance risked weakening their position within Israeli society as it was used against them by the rightwing in Israel. However, when pushed on the matter a representative of UCAPSE admitted that the Histadrut could do more to be seen to be supportive of the Israeli peace camp and criticised the Histadrut's statements on Gaza.

Interestingly, this position was also echoed by some of the other NGOs and new trade unions we met in Israel. Although many of the representatives we met were all individually on the progressive wing of Israeli society and openly critical and opposed to the Occupation, they also felt that their organisations could not take public positions on the matter.

The settlements

Between 25 -30,000 Palestinians from the West Bank work in the illegal Israeli settlements. They work in construction, in agriculture and in the industrial zones that are mainly located along the 1967 Green Line although some are also in the settlements. The Palestinian National Authority, as part of its *'Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State'* policy has said that it will prohibit Palestinians from working in the settlements from early 2011.

The PGFTU said that it supported the objectives of the policy as the settlements entrenched the Occupation and were the major obstacle to a viable Palestinian state. However, the PGFTU also realises that Palestinians work in the settlements out of economic necessity rather than choice and that the Palestinian National Authority needs to provide alternative means of employment for them. The PGFTU called for greater Foreign Direct Investment in the West Bank to create jobs for Palestinians and specifically for job opportunities for young Palestinian graduates. The PGFTU has developed an Economic Plan which it has submitted to the Palestinian Authority and to international donors.

The PGFTU is unable to organise in either the West Bank settlements or amongst Palestinian workers in occupied East Jerusalem. As a consequence both Kav laOved and WAC/Ma'an have sought to provide advice and representation for these workers. Kav laOved initiated a case that went to the Israeli High Court and led to a judgement that Palestinian workers working in the settlements should be employed under Israeli law. Previously Palestinians had been employed under Jordanian labour law. If this judgement were properly enforced it would lead to significant increases in both minimum wages and social benefits. Kav laOved has also worked with the PGFTU Jericho branch on health and safety for workers in agriculture. WAC/Ma'an has been organising Palestinian workers in a quarry in Sal'it, in the occupied West Bank and has a union recognition case currently before the Israeli labour courts.

What is also clear is that the Histadrut has not been proactive in either initiating legal cases on behalf of Palestinian workers in the settlements nor in seeking to enforce the recent High Court rulings. At the same time the Histadrut does organise Israelis employed in the settlements, especially in government bodies and municipal services.

Settlement goods and wider Boycotts, Disinvestment and Sanctions

The Palestinian Authority has initiated a campaign for Palestinians in the West Bank to boycott settlement goods and is seeking to prevent their sale within the areas under its control. The PGFTU made it clear they fully supported the boycott of goods from the illegal Israeli settlements and welcomed the campaign initiated by UNISON and the TUC for these goods to be banned from the UK and in the meanwhile for a consumer boycott of settlement goods. Shaher Sa'ed said that if the British trade union movement chose to support a wider policy of BDS it was up to us to do so. However, he thought that the boycott of settlement goods was the best strategy because it highlighted the settlements as the major obstacle to a Palestinian state. He also said it exposed the rhetoric of organisations such as TUFU who talk about two-states but say nothing about the settlements.

The Histadrut, unsurprisingly, is opposed to any policy of BDS, including settlement goods. With regard to the latter they argued that it would hit Palestinian workers in the settlements the worst and that they would run the risk of losing their jobs. However, their main argument against trade union-led BDS campaigns was that they were counter-effective and only served to harden Israeli

public opinion and were used by the Israeli nationalist right to attack the Histadrut and the peace camp.

The other Israeli NGOs and trade union organisations were not particularly supportive of BDS either. However, it should be noted that there is currently draft legislation in the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, that would make it an offence for Israelis to advocate support for BDS, deny entry to Israel to international advocates of BDS and penalise Israeli NGOs who receive funding from international organisations supporting BDS.

The Mossawa Centre did say however that they supported a boycott of settlement goods internationally. However, they also argued that European organisations should put more pressure on the European Union to enforce the human rights clauses in the European Union - Israel Association Agreement which not only covers trade issues but Israeli participation in many EU projects including the Research Framework Agreement.

Migrant workers

The State of Israel has pursued a deliberate policy of replacing Palestinian workers with migrant workers from other countries since the Second Intifada of 2000. These migrant workers are only allowed to work in certain economic sectors where there are labour shortages and have time-limited work visas and are expected to leave once their visa has expired and if it is not renewed. The overwhelming majority receive their visas through agencies or gang-masters in their country of origin only after having paid substantial amounts of money in advance.

The Israeli state imposes severe restrictions on them. They may not bring family or partners with them, they are not allowed to marry another migrant worker whilst they are in Israel and if they do so one member of the couple has to leave the country. Children born to migrant workers whilst they are in Israel are meant to be sent back to the country of origin for care by the worker's extended family, although this policy has not always been rigorously enforced and recent attempts to do so by the authorities led to major protests by migrant workers themselves and also their supporters in Israeli NGOs and the Histadrut. Migrant workers have equal rights in terms of labour law but many are ignorant of their rights because they are not made available in their own languages. Migrant workers do not have equal rights in terms of medical and social insurance. Israel is currently in the process of revoking its signature to the ILO conventions on the rights of migrant workers.

Kav laOved has a long history of providing legal advice and representation to migrant workers, mainly because migrant workers were forbidden from joining the Histadrut (by its own internal rules) until the end of 2009. The Histadrut was forced to change its rules due to criticism by the international trade union movement and because the new trade union Koach laOvdim was beginning to successfully recruit and organise them.

Kav laOved estimate that there are 200,000 migrant workers in Israel, half with legal work visas and half without. Of the 100,000 legal migrant workers 60,000 have visas to work in the personal social care sector, 25,000 in agriculture and 5,000 in construction. In the social care sector fifty percent come from the Philippines with substantial numbers also from Nepal, India and Sri Lanka. The majority of agricultural workers come from Thailand, whilst the construction workers are mainly from China. Kav laOved reported that the number of work visas being issued in the construction sector was being reduced because they have become too expensive and that Israel is once again issuing permits to Palestinians to work in this sector.

Migrant workers in the social care sector are subject to high levels of exploitation. They are not allowed to work in care homes; they only receive visas to work in personal social care given in their client's home. They are often required to be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and the most frequent complaints to Kav laOved relate to non-payment of wages and abuse from the members of the client's family. Kav laOved's detailed research on the employment of migrant workers in the personal social care sector is highly relevant to the UK as local authority cut backs and the 'personalisation' agenda take deeper root and UNISON should work closely with Kav laOved on this issue.

As stated above, the Histadrut changed its rules at the end of 2009 position to allow migrants to join. Kav laOved argues that the Histadrut has only really focussed on the construction sector where they have existing collective agreements. Koach laOvdim has sought to actively recruit migrants in the social care sector and in cleaning. WAC/Ma'an opposes the use of migrant labour arguing that they are not real migrants but a form of indentured labour. WAC/Ma'an would prefer that more permits be given to workers from the occupied Palestinian territories and to Palestinian Israeli women who have very high rates of unemployment.

Discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Palestinian citizens have long been subject to systematic discrimination in housing, education, local authority funding and employment despite a commitment to equality in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, one of the key documents of Israel's unwritten constitution. This has been recognised by the Israeli state itself which set up the Or Commission in 2003 to examine the matter.

Inequality in employment is evidenced in several ways. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics found that in 2008 Palestinian citizens earned only 61% of the average Jewish salary. Unemployment for Palestinian men is 2% higher than for Jewish men and 4.5% higher for women. There are major differences in employment with 55.4% of Palestinian workers performing manual labour compared to only 23.3% of Jewish workers.

There is significant under-employment of Palestinian Israelis in the public sector. The Civil Service Commission report of 2005 showed that Israeli Palestinians only made up 5.5% of government employees, despite constituting 20% of the population. 90% of these were in just 6 ministries and 56% were employed by the Health Ministry, overwhelmingly hospital staff. The majority were in low grade and auxiliary staff positions. A Knesset enquiry into the Employment of Arabs in the Public Sector in 2008 showed that this figure had hardly changed, despite a government target of reaching 8% by 2007.

The Israeli Electricity Corporation is the sole generator and supplier of electricity in the country and is one of the larger public sector employers yet the Knesset enquiry found that 1.6% of its over 12,000 staff were Arabs and 64% of these were from the minority Druze community. Israeli Palestinian employment in this public sector body is negligible.

Israel set up an Equal Employment Opportunities Commission in 2008, twenty years after the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation in relation to employment in 1988. The Commission is being assisted by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland under an EU funding project. However it only has 8 staff and also has to cover discrimination on areas such as age, gender, and sexual orientation as well as religion and ethnic origin.

The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission did however take a successful case against Israel Railways in 2009 which had dismissed 150 Palestinian Israelis employed as crossing guards. Israel Railways changed their employment conditions so that the guards needed a firearms permit to perform their duties. These permits are only available to Israeli citizens who have done military service and Palestinian Israelis do not serve in the army. The Equal Employment Opportunities Commission argued that 'requiring military service as a mandatory condition is discriminatory unless proven that the experience is essential to the specific job' and this argument was supported by the Labour Courts.

However, military service as a mandatory employment condition is increasingly common amongst Israeli employers. Military service is also a condition for access to student grants and accommodation for higher education, another factor for lower rates of participation in higher education amongst Palestinians. It is also often a condition for preferential mortgage rates which leads to discrimination in housing.

This discrimination is a direct result of Israeli government policy and can therefore rightly be termed 'systemic'. A legitimate criticism of the Histadrut is that it has not actively challenged these discriminatory policies, either in the workplace or within Israeli society.

The Histadrut has allowed Palestinian citizens of Israel to become full members since 1966 after military rule was lifted from the Palestinian population. Although exact figures were unavailable it is clear that the Histadrut does have a sizeable Palestinian Israeli membership and that they hold positions throughout the structure of the Histadrut. UCAPSE in particular has a large membership in the municipal sector, mainly in Palestinian municipalities but also in cities with mixed populations such as Haifa and Jerusalem. UCAPSE were keen to stress that they had recently held strike action to secure unpaid salaries to workers in the Palestinian local authorities. However, part of the reason that the local authorities in question had not paid the salaries is because municipalities with a predominantly Palestinian population receive less central government funding and are less able to supplement this with local taxes due to higher unemployment and lower wages for Palestinian workers.

Both Koach laOvdim and WAC/Ma'an actively recruit Palestinian Israeli workers. Koach laOvdim state that they make up 25% of their membership and it is even higher for WAC/Ma'an. Sawt el-Amel primarily recruits Palestinian workers.

Recommendations

The Histadrut

The composites passed by National Delegate Conference have called on UNISON to review its relationship with the Histadrut. The first question then is to look at what UNISON's relationship with the Histadrut has been in recent years. UCAPSE and the Government Employees' Union were invited to attend National Delegate Conference in 2006 following the previous year's UNISON delegation to Palestine and Israel. UNISON has also met Histadrut delegations to the UK in the past. UNISON was invited to attend the congress of the Government Employees Union in 2009 but declined the invitation following the attack on Gaza. UNISON has not supported any project work with the Histadrut, either bilaterally or trilaterally with the PGFTU. In fact the only fora in which UNISON does have contact with the Histadrut are meetings of PSI and European Federation of

Public Service Unions (EPSU)⁶, or at the congresses of other sister unions to which UNISON and the Histadrut have been invited. UNISON has, in the past five years had only a very tenuous relationship with the Histadrut.

In comparison UNISON has financially supported two projects with the PGFTU in the past five years, has invited the PGFTU to UNISON Conference in 2006 and subsequent years, most recently in 2010 although the PGFTU participants have had problems attending due to restrictions on entry visas by the British government. The President of the PGFTU Health Workers Federation addressed Health Conference in 2009 and regional meetings in London and Manchester. UNISON has consistently sent solidarity messages to the PGFTU in support of industrial action and other campaigns.

All the organisations we met during the delegation including the PGFTU, the new Israeli trade unions and Israeli NGOs are or have been critical of the Histadrut in the past for various reasons. However, they all stressed that the Histadrut was a legitimate trade union and with over 700,000 members was clearly the dominant trade union in terms of members and collective bargaining coverage. Even the new Israeli unions accepted that the Histadrut had been responsible for Israel's strong labour and employment protection legislation. They also recognised that the Histadrut remained influential, although less so than in the past, with the Israeli government.

Neither did any of them call on UNISON to sever its relations with the Histadrut, in fact the opposite. The PGFTU in particular said that UNISON should maintain links with the Histadrut so that we could specifically put pressure on them to take a more vocal public stance against the occupation and the settlements. Kav laOved, Koach laOvdim and WAC/Ma'an all felt that international trade union influence on the Histadrut was essential in moving it towards more progressive policies in relation to migrant workers and discrimination against Palestinian Israeli workers. In this context the Mossawa Centre specifically said that UNISON should raise the issue of public sector employment with the Histadrut.

This then raises the second question, what should UNISON's relationship with the Histadrut be? UNISON, along with many other trade unions around the world, criticised the Histadrut's statements on the attack on Gaza and the assault on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. UNISON has clear policy on opposition to the settlements and the Separation Wall, an end to the occupation and the need for a viable Palestinian state. UNISON would like to see the Histadrut become a more vocal advocate for these policies within Israeli society. UNISON should therefore use its influence in the TUC and the international trade union movement to maintain pressure on the Histadrut to this effect.

UNISON should also exert pressure for action on the rights of migrant workers, Palestinian workers from the occupied territories and Palestinian Israeli workers. We should actively raise cases of discrimination and abuse with the Histadrut whilst supporting the work of those organisations who seek proactively to defend these vulnerable workers.

The delegation therefore recommends that UNISON should not sever its relationship with the public sector federations of the Histadrut. That does not mean that we should maintain the same relations with them as we would with other sister unions in PSI. Rather we advocate a policy of **critical engagement** with them on the issues and in the manner described above.

⁶ The Histadrut became a member of EPSU following the merger of EPSU and the PSI European Region in 2009. Israel, although not the occupied Palestinian territories, is now part of the EPSU/PSI Mediterranean Constituency.

PGFTU

The PGFTU has to operate under the particularly difficult circumstances of the occupation and therefore deserves UNISON's active solidarity which requires more than just the normal relationship we would have with a sister union.

The PGFTU is seeking to grow as an independent, democratic trade union. It has set itself five goals: to increase its membership; to strengthen women's participation and representation; to develop Palestinian employment legislation, especially in relation to social and health insurance; to campaign for a minimum wage; and to develop the PGFTU's own resources so that it is a truly independent voice for Palestinian workers.

The delegation therefore recommends that UNISON should intensify its work with the PGFTU and its public service federations and should support, both financially and through exchanges of experience and best practice, projects with the PGFTU to assist it to meet its five objectives.

Israeli labour movement NGOs and new trade unions

Three new trade unions have been formed in Israel in recent years from existing labour movement NGOs that had been set up because of specific criticisms and failures of the Histadrut. However, WAC/Ma'an, Koach laOvdim and Sawt-el Amel remain tiny in comparison to the Histadrut in terms of members, collective bargaining agreements and influence. None of these organisations are affiliated to international trade union organisations. Nevertheless they are organising and representing workers, many of whom have never been organised before, especially migrant and Palestinian Israeli workers. Kav laOved has specifically decided to remain as an NGO.

UNISON should however consider supporting projects from these organisations on a case by case basis which specifically seek to protect the rights of vulnerable workers and to further the objective of an end to the Occupation.

One Voice

"Working in parallel, but autonomously, for an end to the Occupation and for a two-state solution" was the message from both One Voice Palestine and One Voice Israel. One Voice has concentrated on developing a network of civil society advocates for this message, especially amongst students and young people through its young leaders programme. Both groups are currently running campaigns asking for young people to imagine what a Palestinian state and the Israeli state would like in 2018. However, there does not seem to be much cross-over between One Voice and the trade unions and labour movement NGOs that the delegation met.

The delegation was impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of both One Voice Palestine and One Voice Israel and UNISON shares the central objective of ending the occupation and the creation of two states. However, beyond that, it was not obvious to the delegation how UNISON and One Voice could work together. Nevertheless the delegation feels that it would be worthwhile UNISON remaining in contact with One Voice and could consider possible support for One Voice projects if they have significant commonality with UNISON's overall work in this area.

Annex I

Delegation Programme

Saturday 27 November

08.25 – 15.10	Flight to Tel Aviv
Late afternoon	Transfer to and overnight stay in Jerusalem
Evening	Delegation meeting

Sunday 28 November

Morning	Travel to Nablus
11.00	Meeting with PGFTU
	Overnight stay in Nablus

Monday 29 November

9 – 10.30	Meeting with One Voice Nablus
	Travel to Nazareth
14.00 – 16.00	Meeting with Sawt el Amel
Evening	Travel to and overnight stay in Tel Aviv

Tuesday 30 November

10 -12.00	Meeting with One Voice Tel Aviv
13.00	Meeting with UCAPSE and Government Employees Union, Histadrut
	Overnight stay in Tel Aviv

Wednesday 1 December

10 -12.00	Meeting with Kav La'Oved
13.00 – 15.00	Second Meeting with UCAPSE and Government Employees Union
15.00 -17.00	Meeting with Koach LaOvdim
	Overnight stay in Tel Aviv

Thursday 2 December

Morning	Travel to Haifa
10- 12.00	Meeting with the Mossawa Centre
14.30 -17.00	Meeting with Workers Advice Centre WAC/Ma'an
Evening	Return to Tel Aviv
	Overnight stay in Tel Aviv

Friday 3 December

12pm	Depart for airport
16.40 -20.05	Flight to London