

## **STRUGGLE of PALESTINIAN WORKERS FACTS and FIGURES**

- 1) Palestinian workers, like workers in Canada and elsewhere, are struggling hard for better wages, benefits, health and safety protections, rights to association, and collective bargaining.
- 2) The struggle of Palestinian workers is immeasurably more difficult because of the state and impact of apartheid and Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine.
- 3) In its drive toward total control of Palestine and Palestinians, the Israeli government, since its inception in 1948, has imposed a draconian web of apartheid laws and policies that touch every aspect of Palestinian life, including the economy, working conditions and compensation, and labour organizing. Together, they extinguish basic rights and freedoms. Examples include:
  - the ongoing siege of Gaza,
  - the ever-expanding Apartheid Wall,
  - the military occupation,
  - the illegal settlements with their connecting system of "Jewish Only" roads, wanton settler violence, check points, land appropriations, and house demolitions.
- 4) One of the main instruments of control within this system are the plethora of restrictive measures such as identification cards, work permits, permission requirements, and the like. Permits can determine where Palestinians work or study, where they can live, what roads they can drive on, whether they can access urgent

medical assistance and whether they can visit relatives to name a few.

- 5) Permits can be used to prevent labour organizing by denying workers and activists freedom of movement. The exploitation of Palestinian workers may be exacerbated by permit brokers who, often in collusion with Israeli employers, charge fees and exert controls over individual workers.
- 6) The Palestinian labour force numbered almost 1.4 million people in 2017. This includes about 108,600 people who worked in Israel and 22,100 who worked in the illegal settlements in the West Bank. The unemployment rate stood at 27.7%.
- 7) The average daily wage in 2017 was roughly \$40 for those working in the West Bank, and about twice that amount for those working in Israel or the illegal settlements. However, about 36% of private sector wage employees in Palestine received less than the minimum wage. Furthermore, in 2021, more than 25% of Palestinians, numbering about 1.4 million people, lived in poverty.
- 8) Women, youth, and the people of Gaza fare especially badly under this regime. In 2017, women earned about 70% of what men earned while youth unemployment stood at around 56%. Living conditions in Gaza have been horrendous because of the strangulating siege and devastating bombings of the last ten or more years.
- 9) With courage and resolve, Palestinians have persistently contested the oppressive economic conditions, poor working conditions, and the regressive Occupation that mark their lives.

- Their first major strike took place in the early 1920's, when Britain governed Palestine under its colonial style mandate.
- Subsequently, they organized major strikes and mobilizations in 1936, 1976, the late 1980's and 1990's, 2018, and 2021.
- Additional actions, strikes, and mobilizations of various magnitudes have broken out periodically throughout this period.
- All of these contestations have been met, first by the British Administration and after 1948 by the Israeli government, with brutal repression and the suppression of labour and political organizing.

10) Despite these longstanding, extraordinarily difficult conditions, Palestinians have achieved some gains with respect to trade union rights, working conditions, and social programs, even as they have continued to resist the Occupation. Workers struggle and their struggle for national liberation cannot be separated, they are inherently intertwined. So when Palestinians labour makes gains it is a loss for the apartheid regime, and vice versa. It must be said, though, that overall conditions on both the labour and Occupation fronts make life extraordinarily difficult for all Palestinians.

Sources:

1. Democracy & Workers Rights Center – Palestine: Facts Sheet on Palestinian workers in the oPt, August 2018
2. International Labour Organization, The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, Report of the Director – General - Appendix 2021
3. Joel Beinin, “Palestinian Workers Have a Long History of Resistance,” Jacobin Magazine, June 6, 2021