

Original URL: <http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/jun05/335516.asp>

Amjad Ali Aljawhry 'Takes Five'

Labor leader seeks solidarity for Iraqis

Posted: June 21, 2005

The Iraqi labor movement has a long history, dating back at least to the first part of the 20th century, when the British occupied the country. Under Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, unions were for the most part crushed and outlawed. Now, with Iraq's future uncertain, workers are again organizing and demanding their rights. On Monday, two Iraqi labor leaders, Falah Alwan and Amjad Ali Aljawhry, came to Milwaukee to discuss the Iraqi labor movement. Both men are with the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq, and they stopped in several U.S. cities. The group opposes the U.S. and British military occupation of Iraq. It also stands against privatization in the war-torn country. Aljawhry talked with Journal Sentinel reporter Nahal Toosi before speaking to a union crowd Monday night.

Q: Why do you oppose privatization in Iraq?

A: At the present time, the number of unemployment is really high. And in terms of when privatization occurs in Iraq, a lot of layoffs will occur again. Many people will be laid off. This will add extra challenges to the labor movement when they try to bargain for their rights because this will create cheap labor.

Q: What do you think is the single most important challenge facing Iraqi workers?

A: At this present time we don't have a labor code. The labor code that we have existed under Saddam's regime. . . . We have the government that is based on ethnicity and religion that will divide the society into groups and sectors. These are the two major challenges that we have today.

Q: What can American unions do, if anything, to help your cause?

A: We are working in order to gain solidarity for our labor movement and to support our workers. We try to build a movement that is able to end the occupation immediately. The occupation today, which was the other difficulty I was supposed to answer to the previous question . . . the occupation deprives Iraqi people from all kinds of freedom, deprives workers from having their own democratic society. Without free trade unions, because the workers form more than 80% of the society, not having free trade unions will lead to a non-democratic society.

Q: Are you worried about civil war if the occupying forces leave?

A: No. Iraqi people will take over the lead. We keep saying that. We don't need no baby sitters. We can manage our issues. We can go on on our own.

Q: What about unions in Iraq; do you think they will split along ethnic and religious lines?

A: If it keeps continuing this way, if the constitution is drafted according to ethnicity and religious, and the government exists in the same form that we do have, then I believe we are on the verge of ethnic and religious conflict. . . . The government is pro-occupation. Each one wants to have a grip on his group, and this is a problem.

Takes Five



Photo/File

Amjad Ali Aljawhry

Takes Five Archive:

Select a Person...



From the June 22, 2005, editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Have an opinion on this story? [Write a letter to the editor](#) or start an [online forum](#).

Subscribe today and receive 4 weeks free! [Sign up now](#).