

Iraqi Labor Leaders Tour Los Angeles  
The Muslim Observer  
July 1-7, 2005  
by Susan Schwartz

## Iraqi Labor Leaders Tour Los Angeles

By Susan Schwartz

Six labor leaders from Iraq visited the United States in late June. Two of them came to the Los Angeles area and spoke with local activists here, attending public forums and labor events.

Hassan Juma'a Awad Al Asade and Faleh Abboud Umara are from the General Union of Oil Workers (GUOW) which is located in Basra. Various organizations sponsored the tour which was spearheaded by the United

**FROM PAGE 1**

### Labor Leaders

Teachers of Los Angeles and US Labor Against the War.

The labor leaders spoke at LA Valley College in Van Nuys, the UCLA Downtown Labor Center in Los Angeles and Patriotic Hall in Los Angeles. They also spoke on radio on the Pacifica Network.

At Valley College Andy Griggs presided over the event to a packed room. Mr. Griggs is an officer in the UTLA and a leader in US Labor Against the War.

He told the audience that the decision to bring the Iraqis to the United States was made at a conference in Chicago this past December.

He said that the oil workers chased KBR, an affiliate of the Halliburton Corporation, away from the oil fields. In effect, the GUOW chased off Paul Bremer when he suggested that oil workers should accept lower wages. Now that union is the largest in Iraq. Without exception the members of the GUOW want an end to American occupation.

They insist that the workers of Iraq can build a new democracy which will serve the interests of the Iraqi people, not the interests of the United States. Privatization, they believe, is a code word for a new colonialization.

A slide show followed. Then Mr. Al Asada spoke through an interpreter. He claimed that the pictures did not tell the entire story. He said that during his visit to the United States he and his fellow union members did not see political leaders: they saw people like those in the audience, people who were their supporters.

Mr. Al Asade was critical of the United States media

for portraying Iraqis as killers and terrorists. He assailed Paul Bremer and the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) for writing Iraqi laws which show no knowledge of Iraqi culture.

He continued by saying that the war and subsequent occupation has divided Iraq and heightened religious tension. The various factions got along well in Iraq before the United States invaded.

When referring to the spate of kidnappings and murders of internationals, Mr. Al Asade said that Islam forbids this. "In Islam we have the belief that an innocent life cannot be taken."

Lively question and answer sessions followed the presentations by the speakers, Mr. Al Asade, President of the General Union of Oil Workers, was born in Basra. He is married and the father of three daughters and three sons. He is a founding member of the Union and was elected its President in July 2003.

Mr. Umara, General Secretary of the GUOW, is a founding member of the oil workers union and worked for the Southern Oil Company in Basra for 28 years. He is married and the father of two sons and two daughters. Both men are dedicated human rights activists.

The GUOW has its roots in the Southern Oil Company Trade Union. It was established in April 2003. The union sought to reorganize and redefine the relationship between the company's administration and its workers, the better to fight for workers' rights. As it has not been officially recognized by the government, the GUOW is still considered an illegal union.

*US Labor Against the War may be accessed at the following website: [www.uslaboragainstar.org](http://www.uslaboragainstar.org)*