



CONDITIONS OF LABOUR AND UNIONS

JUDY PRICE

Interview with the director of the Stone and Marble Union, a non-governmental association that represents the owners of the quarries and factories.

During my field research in 2011, I visited the Stone and Marble Union in Bethlehem. Established in 2006 the Union is a non-governmental association that represents the owners of the quarries and industrial factories but not the employees. In an interview with the executive director and his colleagues, I was informed that the quarries and associated industries, including the stone-cutting factories, are the main industrial sector in Palestine, representing approximately 4.5% of GDP. The last survey in 2003 estimated that there were about 20,000 workers in the industry and over 350 quarries in different areas of the West Bank. However from 2000 until 2005, with the second Intifada and the restrictions imposed on Palestinians by the Israeli Occupation, many of the quarries and stone-cutting factories closed due to mobility in the West Bank being severely reduced by the closure of roads and checkpoints. However since then the industry has increased and there are now estimated to be over 800 stone-cutting factories of varying size.(1)

The Stone and Marble Union claim that they work together with the administrative labour as a public sector and the a syndicate of association of the employees to improve working conditions for the workers. However there appears to be little impact of these working relations. The conditions of labour for employees in the quarries and stone cutting factories is poor with long working hours and very low wages. The majority of the stone cutting factories have insurance for the workers however very few of the quarries have insurance for their workers. There has been an attempt by the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions/PGFTU to set up a union for the quarries but so far this has proved difficult to implement.

The quarries in Area C, under Israeli administration and security are completely unregulated. The result is that work conditions in the quarries are not monitored also giving rise to long working hours, a lack of protective clothing and masks, low salaries and no insurance. For Palestinians working in Israel quarries many of them are members of a Union in Israel called the Workers Advice Center (WAC Ma'an), which has been partially successful in improving conditions for the workers and has orchestrated a number of strikes. (2) In addition the quarries operating in Area C have become economically unviable due to Israeli-imposed restrictions on work. This

includes: having to apply for permits from Israel; being able only to excavate part of the land; land being confiscated for military training; proximity to a settlements; explosives not being permitted for breaking up the stones; and the use of ineffective machinery which is time consuming.

In 2011 the Stone and Marble Union informed me they have plans to update research on the stone industry as soon as possible.

(1) In 2011 they produced a document, Stone & Marble in Palestine Developing a Strategy for the Future. <blair.3cdn.net/328bd530dca6a02f4c_kum6b6dhi.pdf>

(2) See two articles in the online Challenge Magazine by Assaf Adiv, 'Palestinian Quarry Workers Organize?', *Challenge* (2007) <

http://www.challenge-mag.com/en/article__121/palestinian_quarry_workers_organize

> and, 'When you've sold the camel, don't fret about the reins' (WAC-MAAN, the Workers Advice Center, 2011). <

<http://www.wac->

[maan.org.il/en/article__214/?when_youve_sold_the_camel_dont_fret_about_the_reins](http://www.wac-maan.org.il/en/article__214/?when_youve_sold_the_camel_dont_fret_about_the_reins)

>

Cluster: White Oil

Source URL: <https://www.worldofmatter.net/conditions-labour-and-unions>