

UNREST IN ABADAN

REPORT ON THE CONDITIONS OF WORKERS' UNIONS
IN KHUZISTAN FOR THE YEAR 1946

IRISHMAN-1-AZADI 6.1.47 (IN PLACE OF ZAFAR)

After the famous Abadan strike of 1929 when the dictatorial police suppressed the workers and imprisoned and exiled their leaders, the living conditions of the workers deteriorated and oppression against them were intensified. They were prevented from forming unions.

The AIOC, which is among the biggest employers in this country, took maximum advantage of the situation and of the lack of workers' unions and labour and insurance laws. It reduced wages and deprived the workers of houses, sanitary facilities and other privileges. The wage of an AIOC worker, at that time, did not exceed 5 to 7 Rials per day. In spite of the lack of freedom and democracy, the AIOC workers, numbering tens of thousands, continued their activities secretly to improve their lot, to form unions and to demand the passing of labour and insurance laws.

After the fall of the dictatorial regime, when a better situation was created, the AIOC took advantage of the presence of British forces in the operation areas of the company and of the fact that the Iranian government were among the main employers in this country. Supported by the Military Government, which was announced during the war, any attempt of the workers to form unions was, in contrast with the principles of democracy, prevented. For instance, in 1943, when a small group of workers gathered together to form a union and to open a club, their leaders were imprisoned and exiled. The workers, realising that their open activities would be suppressed, continued their secret activities and endeavoured to bring together all the workers. Consequently in April 1946 the Abadan workers and those of other parts of Khuzistan realised that the time had come to make public their organization. They held a conference and elected a Managing Board and asked the C.U.C. to appoint a person to act as a liaison official between the Khuzistan Unions and the C.U.C. and to participate in the opening of workers' clubs in that province. Agha Hefazi was appointed to this post and went to Abadan on 25th April 1946. On 1st May 1946 a demonstration consisting of 80,000 workers, traders and farmers was held in Abadan. Three days later, the AIOC, in the presence of the representatives of the government and the C.U.C., signed a process verbal recognising the workers' Council of Abadan as the real representative of the workers.

The Workers' Council of Abadan formed committees and sub-committees, in the presence of the representatives of the AIOC, to remove differences between workers and employers, and to provide for the welfare of the workers who were living under most wretched conditions.

As a result of the measures taken by the C.U.C., the AIOC was forced to raise the wages of the workers from 14 to Rials 35 per day. During the war, when the cost of living was high, a worker could only purchase one and half kilos of bread with his total daily wage of Rials 14.

Low-paid workers who were deprived of houses were forced to live in date orchards, in shelters made of empty tins or in ditches. The AIOC, which exports about 18 million tons of oil, declined to supply these deprived workers with a little kerosene to light their lamps at night.