

PRESENTED TO THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY, SIMLA

BY





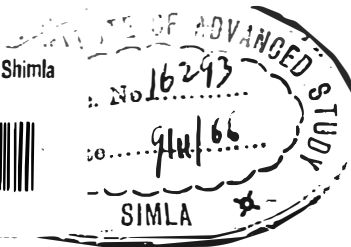
Library

IAS, Shimla

THP 331 J 671 P



00016293



7/16/83

~~THP~~ P1
331
J 671 P

PROBLEMS OF LABOUR ORGANIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

By J. H. JONES, Esq., M.P.

Report of a lecture given on March 12, 1947, General Sir John Shea, G.C.B., K.C.M.G., D.S.O., in the Chair.

The CHAIRMAN, introducing the lecturer, said: This is the second time we have had the privilege of having Mr. Jones to address us. He was to have spoken to us about a month ago, but unfortunately he was ill at the time and could not come. I am glad to say he is now fit again, and is going this time to speak on Some Problems of Labour Organization in the Middle East. I have been hoping that he would, possibly, have also something to say on matters a little nearer home, because so many of us who have passed our lives in official or unofficial service in the Empire, and to whom often a twelve-hour day was the rule rather than the exception, are dismayed and confused by the state of affairs which we find in this country on our retirement here. There seems to be little dignity left in labour. The objective apparently is a maximum of pay for a minimum of work. So many of the strikes seem selfish and senseless. There must surely be some other side to it all. I hope Mr. Jones will enlighten us, and so we welcome you, sir, on this occasion.

I WOULD have preferred it had my subject to-day been the problems of our own country rather than those of the Middle East. Labour problems are difficult enough all over the world, but we are nearer to our own, and in regard to our problems here I see and know them as an ordinary fellow who has been, at the behest of democracy, sent to Parliament right from the heart of industry. There are, as the Chairman has rightly said, two points of view, and, fortunately, or unfortunately, many get their views from the daily press or some other source which may not be altogether accurate. There are always two sides to every question.

To-day, however, I am to speak on "Problems of Labour Organization in the Middle East," a very delicate subject and by no means an easy one to deal with. One can easily speak of the things one can see on the spot; it is difficult to give first-hand information as to the position generally in the Middle East so far as the organization of labour problems there may be concerned. Those problems are so varied and so complex that it is difficult to see them in their entirety. I doubt whether it would be possible to get an Arab, an Iraqi, a Palestinian Arab or Jew, or a Persian or anyone else who might be living in the heart of the area concerned to come before this audience and give a really authoritative outline of the whole field of their problems which would be accepted by everyone as true. Labour problems in the Middle East are, of course, serious problems so far as Great Britain is concerned. We have to face up to that. I wish we could persuade other nations themselves to face their own problems as we seem to have to face those of other nations on their behalf. It would make the world a happier place and we should achieve satisfaction much more quickly. It appears to me that so far as Great Britain is concerned it has always been a matter of one-way traffic: we

have passed out wealth, information and help without seeming to get anything passed back to us in time of need.

This difficult subject of labour organization in the Middle East is one which affects our national and our international position, and I want to make quite clear that what I am about to say is not what our Government may be thinking. I do not know what the Government point of view is in regard to the Middle East; in fact, I do not believe the Government know exactly what they would like to say officially as to Middle East problems until we get clarity in regard to the discussions now proceeding in Moscow and satisfaction in regard to the position in Palestine, Persia, India and so on. Therefore, I am expressing my own personal point of view. You may not agree with me; if so, we shall have to disagree, but, I hope, leave this meeting as good friends. I shall try to put the position as I personally see it as a result of a study of the problems as and when I have had the opportunity to do so.

The information for talks such as this is obtainable from various sources. For instance, I recently had the privilege of speaking at length with the leaders of the Arab Palestine trade union movement. I have had the opportunity of talking with the leaders of the Jewish Palestine trade union movement; also I have had the opportunity of speaking with the leaders of the Persian trade union movement. The labour problems seem to me to be looked at from different points of view even by the leaders of the various trade unions in the Middle East, with their various political lines of thought. I have been looking carefully into a political and industrial report on the Middle East during the war, and thirteen different organizations are concerned. It is not my job to take sides. I am neither anti-Jew and pro-Arab nor anti-Arab and pro-Jew. There is something to be said for both sides. I am, first and foremost, a Britisher with an outlook based on the desire to give help and to bring peace and prosperity to those very disquieted parts of the world. When gleaning and gaining information you do often get the advanced or over-weighted point of view in each case. Indeed, when you are thinking of Persia, Turkey, Morocco and the other countries comprising the Middle East, it seems almost impossible to obtain a middle-line point of view of what is best for a nation as such. It is most difficult to assess the true values from the point of view of what we want to achieve; and when I say "true values" I mean the real sensible values and outlook of the fair-minded person, of whatever nationality, who wishes to put first the interests of his nation as against the interests of some section inside that particular nation. I repeat that it is most difficult to get really authoritative information in order to be able to ascertain the definite point of view of a nation as such. For instance, with all our advanced thinking in this country after centuries of education and political thought, and the fights that have been necessary to achieve our objects, he would be a bold man who attempted to say to-day what is the national point of view in regard to our own troubles in these islands; he would be a bold man who would care to say what he thought might happen to-morrow, or even to-night.

As to the Middle East I would say, whether looking at it as a group of countries or as individual countries, the problems can be divided into two

parts—political and economic. The question is which of the two is to receive priority consideration in the Middle East itself. Is the Persian, for instance, going to concern himself first with politics as such and then train himself up to a degree of citizenship as a result of which he will demand a higher standard of life, having put something into the common pool of his nation, or is he going first to demand that higher standard of life not caring from whence the wherewithal comes so long as he gets it, or is he going to try to co-ordinate the two and move in harmony with them? Because, whichever way we look at the problem, a country can only give to its people according to its economic capacity. It is no use demanding a wage from any industry unless the output of that industry provides the wage. I am speaking now as one who was always paid not by the hour or week but on output in the steel industry. If I made no steel I starved. That is not a bad system. There would be many in this country who would have starved many years ago if it had been a question of payment according to what they produced. But in regard to the Middle East my personal view is that because of the war, and because of the knowledge these people now have as to what is taking place in Great Britain, America, Russia and elsewhere, they get to a point at which they demand a high standard of life without having created the wherewithal from which their demand can be met. That sounds peculiar. In other words, they have not yet through their citizenship, their industry or their industrial organization put into the common pool of their respective nations what they are demanding out of that common pool. That creates a clash and trouble. It is necessary to consider how those difficulties and troubles can be overcome.

The question is which should come first. Let us think for a moment of the United States, where there is a high standard of living. There, politics are diametrically opposed to those who earn what forms the standard of life in the United States at the moment. There you have a capitalistic government in control of a highly industrialized population, a population highly organized and skilled in the art of knowing when and how to strike. In the United States wage rates keep on rising ever upwards, and the politicians keep on increasing the cost of living just slightly in advance of the wage rates, so that the wages are chasing the cost of living all the time, and sooner or later there will be a clash. Then there will be the desire on the part of the members of the various trade unions to have a form of government which will look after them; in the same way as we believe the clash came in this country, and we now have a form of government which, by law, safeguards what the workers and the unions have achieved as a result of trade union activity. In the Middle East there is not that industrialization; the people have not achieved, as yet, what we have in this country, a high technical skill, high business acumen and so on, out of which they can expect to get their due reward, but they are asking for that reward at the moment. Most of the people in the Middle East, as I see it, are demanding a standard of life as near as possible equivalent to that about which they have heard rumours, and indeed have seen at close quarters owing to the occupation by the American, British, Russian and other forces.

That raises the question as to what they are going to do, which of the actions is to come first. My own impression is that political action generally follows industrial action. Therefore, we have to concentrate for a minute on what the peoples of the Middle East are doing industrially. Many in this country have the idea that the Middle East is just one great arid desert; that there is nothing in the Middle East except flies, disease and ignorant people. We need to rid our minds of such ideas. When you have seen, as probably most of you here have done, what has been done in Palestine alone by the immigrants, the Zionist Jews if you like; when you have seen what has been achieved in certain parts of Palestine in regard to the cultivation of the soil and the production from it; when you go down to the shores of the Dead Sea and see what is taking place there in regard to the reclamation of salts, sodium, bromides and so on, and then go to see what is happening in regard to phosphates and the developments taking place in Palestine itself, you have the lie direct to the idea that the Middle East is full of screaming people who wear loin cloths and spend half their time killing flies. On the other hand, if you expect to find everywhere a highly industrialized, efficient set-up, wherever you care to go, then you will be disappointed. The Middle East is on the move; it is beginning to find out that it has its geological wealth; that it has wealth which can be exploited. Immediately you get industrial exploitation in any part of the world you get a movement on the part of the people to get their fair share of the wealth they are working to produce. In other words, wherever there is industrial exploitation or activity, call it what you will, there will always be a desire on the part of the people engaged in the particular industry to get their fair share as a result of the labour they put into obtaining the various products. You can go into the orange groves in Palestine and find Arab or Jewish labour which believes it is not getting a fair and square deal. You can go down to the Nile Delta, into the Sudan, into the cotton-fields, on the Egyptian State Railway, to Persia, to Morocco or other parts of North Africa, wherever you go you will find, as a result of the advance in industrial knowledge, that the desire of the people is to get, more speedily than those who own and control the various industries are prepared to give it, the standard of life which the people think they should have. Wherever anybody, even the members of a family, demand something sooner than they are entitled to receive it, somebody will have something to say about it. Wherever there is a desire for something which those in possession or control think should not be given so quickly, then there is industrial unrest.

One could speak at great length as to the methods that are being adopted. The Arab tribesman, the Persian tribesman, the educated Persian comes to England and is educated at Oxford or Cambridge. He comes to this country full of zeal and enthusiasm to learn our way of life, so that he shall take it back to be beneficial to the rest of his brothers and sisters in the nation in which he lives. Does it work out in that way? It has been proved time and time again that the fellow who gains knowledge in our country often uses it to exploit the lack of knowledge in his own country. Nobody can refute that statement. On the other hand, we have had many young people from this country—and indeed we should pay

tribute to them—who have gone out to other lands and freely given of their knowledge and service, to the great advantage of those countries.

The question is how to avoid these industrial clashes and put matters right. We have Persia with her oil, her weaving and other crafts; Egypt with cotton and other potentialities. Last week I attended the meeting of the executive committee of my own trade union, and there I read in detail exactly what amount of steel and iron is being produced in other countries where iron and steel production is taking place. I was amazed to learn that in Egypt of all places they are going to put down an iron and steel works. Deposits of pyrites have been found that can now be exploited and used for making steel there. Once they start making steel in Egypt it will not be long before they commence to make their own textile machinery; it will not be long, following that, before there will be less cotton available for Great Britain's textile machinery. Whatever happens as a result of industrial development in other countries has its effect, either adversely, or conversely to our benefit, in this country. Up to date I have seen very few things happen in other nations which have proved of real benefit to this country of ours, following upon the immediate request to this country for machinery and so on. Then there is the question of the phosphates, the bromides and other chemicals which Palestine is producing. There are also the agricultural potentialities, and one reads with interest of the introduction of better quality cattle and poultry with a view to raising the standard of life in that area, and of course that has its effect upon us because so soon as other people are in a position to export pedigree cattle there will not be so great a demand for the export of the pedigree cattle produced in Great Britain. That gives you some idea of how advancement in other countries affects our economy here.

You might ask what has Africa got? It has a tremendous amount of geological wealth: ore deposits, coal and other geological wealth. In addition, Africa has an enormous reserve of cheap labour. Do not forget that. Cheap labour is exploited all over the world—in Japan, China, India, and also in our own country not so very many years ago. Those are some of the problems which we have to face.

Turkey I know a little about, because I managed in a world-wide competition to obtain the offer of position of works manager of the new steel works owned by the State, run under nationalization and quite an efficient organization, which to-day is producing an enormous amount of good steel. There is immense geological wealth in Turkey. I had the privilege of studying the surveyor's report, because I did not want to go to manage those works and find I would not be able to obtain the raw material with which to run the works. I was satisfied that there was sufficient geological wealth in Turkey of all types such as we have in Great Britain—coal, limestone, ore, clays and so on—enough to last probably for the next twenty, thirty or forty thousand years. Those who made the survey stopped bothering about it after they had satisfied themselves that for the next two thousand years there was plenty available.

As you probably will have realized, in order to meet this industrial development in other countries you get the institution of trade unions. I am not going to say that they are good trade unions. You also get men

banding themselves together to formulate ideas as to what rates of pay they should receive in the industries in which they are now becoming engaged. I spoke at length when last I addressed the Society as to the position of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, where it was found that rates of pay were higher than the average wages paid by private enterprise elsewhere in Persia, and that was one reason why the Persian Government clamped down on the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company having anything more to do with the settlement of rates of pay, because, naturally, if all Persian labourers decided to go where the best wage rates were paid, other enterprises would be without a labour supply. That is happening in other parts of the Middle East. In Palestine, for instance, there are two types of trade union. There is the Arab trade union movement, which is confined to Arabs only, and in some cases will take in a Jew as a member but not a Zionist Jew; he must not be a Nationalist or Zionist, but he must be an ordinary fellow politically, satisfied with non-partition and so on. Then there is the Jewish trade union movement, dealing with exactly the same type of industries, working side by side in the same factories, who will take an Arab, provided he is not anti-Zionist, into their ranks. There you have a clash of political thought operating inside trade union movements. A confusion in Palestine itself, and I add this in passing: it may be a good thing, looking at it from the anti-labour point of view—I do not know—that they have their private clash. I know American financiers and big bosses realize that it is a good thing to have the set-up they have in America, the C.I.O. against the F.L.O., and the Miners' Union; once those three great organizations come together with a common purpose the political bosses will have to look out, because numerical strength when it goes to the ballot-box can do remarkable things, but there must be numerical strength backed by individual knowledge. That is another matter entirely. You have in Palestine trade unions set up which are antagonistic towards each other. That may allow of a breathing space whilst they sort out their internal differences and until they get down to a knowledgeable state of affairs as to how a trade union should function and what its functions are. It is not true, by the way, that a trade union concerns itself only with getting a lot of pay for its members; that is one of its major objectives but not the only one.

You may ask who are the North African Arabs and what do they do. The North African Arabs held their first conference in Cairo on February 15, last month. They had there quite a galaxy of talent. They came to certain conclusions. For instance, they decided to set up a Joint Information Bureau for the three North African countries, to be established in Cairo; an office from which they are going to send out any information affecting the mutual interests of Arabs in the whole of North Africa. They are going to send delegates to the Preparatory Conference at Geneva and the Arab Conference. The whole of the Arab world is having its first big international conference and bringing Arabs from all the different countries to Cairo for the purpose in March, 1948. They are going to ask the Arab League to declare the protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco to be invalid and also to apply that to the colony of Algeria. These are

all important matters. The Arabs are beginning to move in the colonies controlled by the French; they are going to send out a special political policy and to submit it to the members of the Arab League and it is also to be communicated to U.N.O. In other words, the once illiterate Arab now considers himself a fit and proper person to be represented at U.N.O. Once you have the whole of the Middle East formulating a policy for the Arabs there, then you have to begin to take notice. It is no use saying that it does not matter; it is no use burying our heads in the sand and saying it will die out and not be effective, because the Arabs are in a special position. They are somewhat like the Russians: they can start where we have left off; they can at least gain all the advantages that accrue from the knowledge of our trade union movement; they can decide to pattern themselves upon it or not pattern themselves upon it. In Morocco the Arabs are banding themselves into a strong trade union movement. Tunisia also has its trade union. It is a little place we think about only when we open a box of dates. The average Britisher (not this audience, because it is deeply interested in these problems) feels no concern about it; he has his own domestic problems; he is wondering what his own Government is going to do next. He does not worry about Tunis except to wonder whether or not he will get from there his box of dates at Christmas; he thinks that is the end-all and be-all of Tunis. But the Arabs there held their first annual conference on January 21, 1947. A conference of trade union leaders in Tunis is rather remarkable. They are going to start discussing a forty-hour week for civil servants. I wish them luck, because if there is anybody I would like to see doing a real full week of forty hours it is a civil servant. (Laughter.) The Arabic language is the official language in all the administrative offices just as there is the use of Arabic language in primary education. Colonel Newcombe could tell you what should happen in regard to education in the Middle East. The tribesmen and their children are a big problem.

As to the political set-up you, of course, have little to learn in regard to what is happening in Palestine. As you know, they have there no autonomy of their own; there is no Government of Palestine by the Palestinians comprising both Jew and Arab or by Zionist Jews, or Jews as such, or Arabs as such. That is a very vexed problem which we will not go into now. You have the promises made by past Governments to both the Arabs and the Jews, and neither side seems to be willing to give way. There are tens of thousands of good British lads out there trying to preserve law and order among folk who are not trying to preserve it for themselves. That is another problem arising from a lack of any conception of real citizenship irrespective of what one may be. We do not say to a man in this country, "If you are a Jew or an Arab you shall not vote," or "If you are a banker you shall not vote." All here have a right to express themselves. That is why we have the finest democracy in the world.

Then there is the great Arab League, the Arab League which only two years ago came into being to formulate the policy for the whole of the political Arab thinking world, a League which has decided that it shall take care collectively of all the Arabs irrespective of where they may

be, but shall at the same time stand by and support any individual Arab community to the full, and that League has decided to give its full and complete support to the Arabs in connection with the Jewish problem in Palestine. That is another headache.

I meet people in England so misguided as to say that if we came out of Palestine, and the Jew and Arab went to war, there would only be one person in it, and that would be the Jew. Do not get such ideas into your minds. I am not taking sides, but I happen to know sufficient of the Arab world to realize that, spread out as they are, with their own peculiar ways of conducting warfare, and their ability to cut lines of communication and to live where you and I would certainly die—all these things have to be taken into account, especially when it comes to guerrilla warfare. I hope it may never be necessary to use force on either side and that sanity will prevail, so that they get a form of government which will satisfy the Jews and the Arabs; if so, it will satisfy you and me.

Then there is the Great Syria movement, with a view to bringing in the whole area covered in ancient times by the Assyrian Empire, and all the conflicting elements and individuals who for the moment have power in a big way, but not so big as if they were the heads of the Great Syria movement, and you have also Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East. There is the ideology of one section as against the other even inside their own movement, even within the Arab League itself. That again is a problem.

One thing which the Arab League have decided, if I understand them aright, is that they are against domination by any of the big Powers. There again difficulties arise. In yesterday's Press you saw a statement that the United States is lending quite a serious amount of money to Turkey. If a settlement could be reached about Palestine, America is prepared to lend an enormous amount of money to Saudi Arabia and Palestine for the development of oil, new pipe-lines, railways and so on. You cannot expect money to be lent without guarantees; I have never known enormous sums of money borrowed without the person lending the money having some say as to how that money is to be spent and where the results of the spending of it are to go. Therefore you get the political ideology of nationalism: people who want their country for themselves, but who are without the wealth to exploit it to the utmost, having to borrow money from outside, and other nations bringing their influence to bear because of the fact that they are putting finance into that particular country. That is the American outlook on the loan of money. We want to preserve our identity in the Middle East, to be assured of cotton and oil supplies, and of friendship with the Middle East.

Then there is that other great nation away up to the north of Teheran whose ideology is spreading throughout the trade union movement. Some of the younger members of this audience may ask, How can a Persian get communistic ideas? How can Palestine trade unionists get into Russia? They do not go via the Black Sea or through the Caucasus into Russia; they get a visa into France and spend a little time studying a few of the so-called problems there. From France the Palestinian trade unionist finds a way into Russia. That is the route through which many

hundreds of Palestinian Arabs and Jews, Persians and others have found their way to Russia and got hold of the communistic ideology which is spreading to-day throughout the whole of the Middle East. Again there is a clash. Are they prepared to develop constitutionally with the help of British or American money, or are they prepared to accept help by the aid of the Big Stick, Russia? There you get a clash again, and then you ask a humble back-bencher like me to come and explain to you the problems of the Middle East!

You may wonder what the Sudanese is thinking about Egyptian domination. The Sudanese is a good type of fellow. I look upon him as a good soldier, and I had the privilege of serving with some of them. If I were asked to select a bodyguard I should choose a battalion of Sudanese. But, again, the Sudanese at points nearest to Egypt have a different outlook from that of the Sudanese living near to Kenya. There again you have a big and interesting problem.

I want to close on the question as to which of the two methods I have mentioned is going to prove the more successful, and what line Great Britain should take. It is a question of whether to proceed on lines of democracy or by means of force, or, as some would say, whether by means of the ballot or the bullet. It is a question as to who the people of the Middle East are eventually going to look to and who they themselves come to regard as their best friends. You may think that at the moment the United States are in that position because they are lending money. Later it may be Russia because she may be able, if need be, to lend some armed force. My own opinion is that the best friend the people of the Middle East can turn to in the long run is Great Britain, because, in spite of what some may think, I still believe in my heart of hearts that it will be realized that the way of life in this country, so far as constitutional and democratic opportunity of expressing ourselves is concerned, is the best in the world. Throughout the centuries, industrial activity in this country has been allowed to develop and at the same time, within reason (not always to the point that the trade unions would expect, but within reason), the labourer has been given a fair return for the labour he has put into the common effort. I think the labour problems in the Middle East can be solved by ordinary means, and especially through training and education. Education is a long-term policy. As those who have had the opportunity of serving and mixing with the tribesmen of the Middle East know, it is not possible to make them into sound and good citizens overnight. Many people in this country thought that when we changed our Government everything would come right overnight. It did not and could not. Such things take time. Your job and mine is to take every available opportunity of passing on, through every possible channel, a knowledge of British constitutional methods. If you happen to be of a political persuasion supporting the Conservatives, then pass on your knowledge of their activities and their way of life. It is far better (and I say this in spite of the fact that I happen to be opposed to the Conservative policy, though not to Conservatives as such) that you should do that than pass on no information at all. If you are a trade union leader, pass on knowledge of your trade union. If you happen to be a

owner and the landowner's opinion of the fellahin. The system of land tenure in the Middle East constitutes a serious problem, but it is only one phase of the problems that beset the whole of the Middle East. The clash is coming between those who own the land and those who till it.

The CHAIRMAN: At the beginning of his lecture Mr. Jones said that he did not know whether after he had finished we would wish him to come back again. Of that there is no question, sir; and we hope that when you do come again you will give us your own views on British labour. I am sure you all join me in thanking Mr. Jones sincerely for what has been not only most deeply interesting but very instructive.



