

The work of the Histadrut – Celebrating 100 years of Israeli Trade Unionism

BITUD Pamphlet



BRINGING TOGETHER ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN & BRITISH TRADE UNIONISTS

Britain Israel Trade Union Dialogue

**Bringing together British, Israeli, and Palestinian
trade unionists**

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FOREWARD

This pamphlet is a comprehensive tour of the work of the Histadrut (Israeli TUC) over the last two years. In what has been the most difficult period for workers worldwide, they have worked hard to support workers through the Covid-19 Pandemic to keep people in jobs and support those who are the most vulnerable during lockdowns and closure of parts of the economy.

As you can read, they still have worked hard in organising new workplaces and companies, especially in the new economy as well as signing collective agreements for care workers and others in the lowest paid of the occupations.

Their work continues in supporting Palestinian workers in Israel and their relationship with the Palestine General Federation of Trade Union (PGFTU) continues to function.

Please take time to read about their work and accomplishments as they lead the way in the international community of trade unions in supporting workers, taking action and recruiting members.



Michael Leahy OBE

Chair

Britain Israel Trade Union Dialogue

The Histadrut- Celebrating 100 years of trade unionism in Israel

The Histadrut is an Israeli federation of 25 trade unions including the Government Workers' Union, Nurses Union, Transport Workers' Union, Labour Union for Youth, and Pensioners' Union. They have approximately 700,000 members, 51% female and 49% male, and around 10% belong to minority groups.

Full members get access to legal consultation and representation for a nominal fee or free if they have been members for over 2 years, a strike fund reimbursing 85% of their wages, access to a study allowance and consumer rights authority, and discounts at Histadrut institutions including a College of Management and Elderly Persons Care Home.

1). Collective agreements and right to strike

Israeli labour law allows for collective agreements to be extended to cover the whole industry of workers if an application is made to the relevant government minister. Recently the action by security guards who threaten to strike over government failure to raise wages was successful in doing so.

The economy minister Orna Barbivai promised to sign an extension order on a collective agreement for a significant increase in wages in the security industry, then reneged.

The Union of Security Workers in the Histadrut announced early in 2022 that they will go on strike, unless the government granted an extension order on a collective agreement that would raise their wages by February 3rd. There are close to 100,000 security guards in Israel, and a strike would impact almost every part of the Israeli economy, including schools, hospitals and offices.

Yossi Barbie, chair of the Union of Security Workers and Nurses, shed light on the difficulties of working as a security guard.

“The last extension order signed in the security industry was in 2013,” Schiff explained. Since then, “nearly eight years have passed, during which security workers’ wages only rose because the minimum wage was raised.”

According to Schiff, this is not the first time that the union and the Histadrut have approached the government together with a joint collective agreement, requesting that it be extended to the entire industry.

Israel’s Caregivers’ Union reaches first collective bargaining agreement

The agreement includes the addition of seniority pay and compensation for time spent traveling between patients.

The Histadrut successfully negotiated on behalf of Israel’s National Union of Nursing Caregivers, reaching its first collective bargaining agreement with the Association of Nursing Service Providers in Israel, an employers’ organisation representing nursing companies. “We made history,” union leader Ella Smilansky said. “We have fought for this agreement for three years. We still have work to do, but thankfully, for the first time ever, caregivers have a collective bargaining agreement.”

The agreement, signed between Yossi Barbie, chair of the Union of Security Workers, Cleaners and Nurses, and Doron Raz, chair of the Association of Nursing Service Providers in Israel, stipulates for the first-time additional pay beyond the minimum wage, which will increase according to the employee's seniority. According to Barbie, this is a significant victory, since the industry is mostly made up of older female workers, and the average seniority is seven to eight years.

The agreement will also take into account the unique nature of the caregiving profession. “As part of the agreement, we made a very significant correction to the distortion in the caregivers’ employment structure,” said Barbie.

The agreement also includes stipulations for increasing the workers’ pension provisions, professional training, bonuses, and the establishment of funds for staff activities. Additionally, the agreement includes a mechanism for preventing arbitrary dismissals of workers. This mechanism includes establishing a committee with representation for the employer and the Histadrut, as well as a monitoring committee that will include a Histadrut representative and a representative of the employer’s organisation.

According to Barbie, the Trade Union Division of the Histadrut helped to establish the union’s central committee and action committee, which subsequently, and successfully, led the fight against the changed time clock system. But the workers were not satisfied with just this victory. “The workers said they wanted more, they wanted rights — protection from arbitrary dismissal, professional training and improved economic conditions. The different companies employing the nurses were not enthusiastic at first, but over time they realized that, by cooperating with us, they can grow the industry, which has been suffering from an image problem and a lack of personnel — problems that emerged due to unsatisfactory working conditions,” Barbie said.

New collective agreement raises minimum wage by 16% in catering industry

The agreement, signed by the Histadrut and the Chamber of Commerce, stipulates an improved minimum wage, a study fund and more. Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar David said: “The agreement strengthens workers and improves their wages and terms of employment”

The agreement, signed under the oversight of the Histadrut, will last for a period of four years, starting with an extension order by the Minister of Economy.

The agreement will apply to all employees of catering companies who work for service clients, in full-time and part-time central kitchens. Among other things, it will apply to web managers, shift managers, head chefs, assistant chefs, waiters, dishwashers, administration staff at major sites and kitchens.

Along with this agreement, Minister of Economy and Industry Orna Barbivai has a series of industry agreements that depend on her signing expansion orders that will make them binding, in the security, cleaning, and nursing fields.

Collective agreement to raise wages for 15,000 administrative workers in public hospitals

The agreement will include an immediate wage increase, and a further instalment in January 2023. Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar David: "This gives workers a feeling of being seen, workers who have been leading the fight against COVID-19".

The Ministry of Finance, the Histadrut and the Histadrut of Civil Workers signed a special collective agreement in January 2022 for administrative and facility employees in government-run hospitals, in Ministry of Health headquarters.

The agreement will be valid until January 1, 2025, and will apply to more than 15,000 workers. It includes a salary increase of 320-720 shekels per full-time worker, in two instalments, the first being paid immediately and the second in January 2023. In addition, a special increase for workers in psychiatric centres following changes in their working methods, and the elimination of lower ranks in some of the positions of administrative and pharm workers in government hospitals.

The funding for the additions for 2022 will come from the budget agreed upon in the recent package deal of the Histadrut, the Ministry of Finance and the employers, which is intended to raise wages and improve conditions for weakened sectors in the public sector.

2). Cost of Living Crisis

Histadrut established a watchdog committee to investigate Israel's cost of living

The committee consists of professionals and experts in economics and will create an alternative index to the consumer price index, in order to reflect the lower deciles.

Following his demands to the Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman to take steps to mitigate rising prices for fuel, electricity and consumer goods, Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar-David announced the establishment of a monitoring committee to examine the cost of living in Israel. The committee is set to include experts and professionals with economics and sociology backgrounds.

The committee will be headed by Histadrut Director General Ofir Alcalay and will work to monitor changes in the price indices in the economy and compare Israel's situation with other developed countries. The rate of price increase will be regularly examined against the changes in real wages, in order to prevent wage erosion, and to balance the gap between household incomes and expenditures.

The return of the tripartite roundtable in 2022

In a reversal from his predecessor's policy, the new Finance Minister invites Histadrut Chairman, business leaders, and head of the Bank of Israel to collectively shape Israel's post-coronavirus economy.

Newly appointed Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman has declared his intention to rebuild the post-coronavirus Israeli economy through partnership and dialogue with the unions, business leaders, and the Bank of Israel. Israeli economic history, as well as recent policies adopted around the world, suggest this might be a good idea.

One of the first actions Lieberman took after taking office earlier this week was to convene a roundtable to discuss strategies towards economic recovery. Three main players were involved in the roundtable: the Histadrut, as represented by Chairman Arnon Bar-David; the business world, as represented by Ron Tomer, President of the Manufacturers Association, and Dovi Amitai, chairman of the Business Sector Presidents organization; and the Bank of Israel, as represented by its governor, Amir Yaron. A roundtable of this sort was first convened when the parties took part in shaping the Israeli response to the 2008 financial crisis.

By returning to a tripartite roundtable, Lieberman is acting in accordance with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's recommendations for shaping post-coronavirus economic strategy through dialogue between the government, workers, and employers. A report released by the organisation at the end of 2020 claimed that tripartite dialogue was a key factor in bringing about economic recovery.

The OECD report mentions several countries where such dialogue helped shaped government's reactions to the coronavirus crisis in the early stages of the pandemic. The report mentions as an example the Austrian government's adoption of a flexible furlough scheme in cooperation with both unions and business leaders in the country. Meetings between the parties continued for months into the crisis, which allowed the government to adapt its policies to changing economic conditions with minimal conflict.

The idea of a tripartite roundtable has precedent in Israeli economic history. In 2008, following the global financial crisis, there were efforts to establish a

permanent forum which would include representatives of all three parties, and in 2009, a long-term economic plan was negotiated between the three sides. However, the forum met again only in 2016, and former Finance Minister Israel Katz refused to consult unions and business leaders during his tenure.

3.) COVID-19 Pandemic

At Peak of the Omicron Wave in early 2022 the Histadrut called to “Allow Work from Home Where Possible”

Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar-David and the Minister of Industry and Trade, Orna Barbivai, called on employers in early 2022 to allow work from home in workplaces where it is possible to do so.

“We call on all employers in the economy to allow those who can to move to work at home,” they said in a joint statement.

The call comes against the backdrop of the accelerated spread of the current wave of COVID-19. Barbivai and Bar-David called on employers to allow all of their workers who can work from home to do so, while adhering to the rules and guidelines.

“I welcome the government’s intention to build compensation plans, and the sooner they are implemented, the better. The plan should examine all the industries affected by the situation, and not let any citizen be in the same place of uncertainty as they were in previous waves.”

At their yearly conference, the Histadrut celebrates accomplishments and looked to the future

Following a minimum wage increase and new agreement for preschool aides, next on the Histadrut’s agenda is to “raise municipal workers’ wages in 2023,”

according to Chairman Arnon Bar-David. “We gave the workers organised under the Histadrut a safety net to get through the pandemic”

At a recent conference held in Eilat for hundreds of Israeli municipal council chairs, Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar-David laid out the Histadrut’s recent successes, including an increase in the minimum wage and a new collective agreement supporting educational aides in preschools and kindergartens.

“In the next collective agreement, we’re going to raise the salary of municipal workers. I promise,” he declared.

The three-day training conference was attended by a wide representation of Israeli society, from Jews to Arabs, religious to secular, and was organized by UCAPSE (the Union of Clerical and Public Service Employees), with 250 thousand workers organized under it. Gil Bar Tal, the chairman of UCAPSE, worked with Bar-David to finalize the collective bargaining agreement with employers and the Finance Ministry.

4.) Training and lifelong learning

Histadrut to subsidise vocational training to help workers reenter market

In the wake of the pandemic and its mass unemployment, the Histadrut’s subsidised academic programs help workers reenter the workforce.

The Histadrut has introduced a new educational project aimed at subsidizing educational and vocational training programs to members. The project will allow workers who are Histadrut members to access academic and non-academic courses at a discount, in an attempt to help those whose return to the labor market has been affected by the pandemic.

“In all my years as a worker and union leader, I have always believed in the possibilities offered by education, both in terms of personal and professional

development,” said Arnon Bar David, chairman of the Histadrut. “As the head of Israel’s largest union, I am proud to launch this project, which will offer easy and accessible courses, and help workers improve and develop their skills.”

Thousands enrolled in new Histadrut subsidised academic courses

More than 2,000 workers studied this year as part of the “Learning and Advancing” program launched by the Histadrut, guaranteeing highly subsidized programs of study to working people. Hundreds of these went on to pursue an academic degree with a significant price subsidy. An additional 15,000 participants took part in the lectures and digital courses that were offered for free as part of the program.

Miri Shetach, director of the Learning and Advancing Program: “A more educated person is also more successful in their workplace”. The program includes scholarships of up to 3,000 shekels per participant.

“The goal [of the program] is to allow any employee who wants to do so to study in academia,” said Miri Shetach, director of Learning and Advancing. The reasoning behind this initiative, she explains, “comes from the belief that a more educated person is also more successful in their workplace and can advance to higher positions.”

5.) Organising

The Histadrut setup a new division for organising workers in February 2010. They successfully organised at the mobile-phone company Pelephone, overcoming severe union-busting tactics and winning a landmark legal case on the freedom to organise. Since then, they have gone on from strength the strength.

Tel Aviv University charged for obstructing research workers from organising

The ruling requires compensation of 150,000 shekels to the union.

In a court ruling handed down this past Sunday, the Regional Labor Court ordered Tel Aviv University to pay 150,000 shekels (£35,000) to the research lab workers union in compensation for obstructing their efforts to unionize.

Tel Aviv University caused injury to the members of the union and will pay 150,000 shekels (£35,000) in compensation. The Regional Labor Court of Tel Aviv ruled against the university, stating that they obstructed the organizing efforts of research and lab workers, after it tried to fire the chair of the union and dock the salary of another union member.

A Histadrut spokesperson said: “Tel Aviv University, as a respected academic institution that has engraved on its banner the study of labor relations, has greatly erred precisely in this issue of basic rights of workers”

Organising in the new economy

In decisive ruling, 10Bis (owned by Just Eat) ordered to compensate employees for violating right to unionise.

After a yearlong struggle between the workers and management, the food delivery service was instructed to compensate its employees 80,000 shekels after preventing them from unionising. The Union chair said: “This is an important and historic victory to realizing our democratic right to unionise”

The popular food delivery service 10Bis – an Israeli branch of the Dutch company Just Eat Takeaway.com – will pay 80,000 shekels (£19,000.00) in compensation to their employees after the Tel Aviv Regional Labor Court ruled two to one that the company had harmed the unionisation of its workers under the Histadrut. In addition to compensation, the company was

also ordered to pay the costs of the legal expenses in the amount of 15,000 shekels (£3,500.00). Notably, the court recognised the Histadrut as the representative body of the company's employees and ruled that 10Bis must negotiate with them with the goal of signing a collective bargaining agreement.

The majority ruling written by the head judge, the Honourable Hadas Yahalom, determined that the 10Bis management sought to fire the chair of the worker's union and resorted to disproportionate disciplinary measures that violated their own terms.

It was also determined that management took harmful actions against the organising workers and the leaders of the union, encouraging employees who acted to thwart the unionization. Judge Yahalom noted that "this conduct constitutes a violation of unionizing in terms of the message it conveys to employees who wish to organize, with regard to the attitude of the management towards them, in various aspects of working life."

The ruling noted that management acted illegally when it established its own internal workers' union to compete with workers' efforts to organize under the Histadrut – but noted that it decided to stop its convening before the ruling was made.

6.) Female members and Na'amat

A range of services for female trade unionists are provided through Na'amat, the "Movement of Working Women and Volunteers." This includes legal consultation and representation regarding workplace discrimination, sexual harassment and rights relating to pregnancy and being a parent, and legal consultations are available on issues covering marriage, divorce and child custody, and access to centers for victims of domestic abuse.

Na'amat also run daycare centres, technological and residential high schools, agricultural schools, education programs and offers a series of university scholarships.

The Histadrut and Na'amat coordinate projects, seminars and conferences on gender equality and empowerment. Projects include empowerment and development courses for Jewish and Arab women at the Jewish-Arab Institute, courses for female migrant workers (particularly domestic workers) to ensure they understand their rights and access to representation from the trade union movement, and workshops on violence against women throughout the country.

The Histadrut have supported an expansion of shelters for victims of domestic abuse and provided training for youth counselors on gender-based violence. The Histadrut and Na'amat organised a day of action in 2022 on International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. In response to a series of sexual harassment cases and a brutal murder of a women by her partner.

All Histadrut employment committees are required to have female representation, and within the union women have been represented in senior positions including trade union general secretaries, national secretaries, director general of the trade union division, and directors of the organising division, human resources, and international division.

Israeli Unions Join solidarity action against spike in domestic violence

Tens of thousands of workers halted work in February 2022 at noon for a 10-minute moment of silence to express solidarity with the fight to end violence against women in Israel. Histadrut chairman Arnon Bar-David called for the unions to join the action, originally initiated by the Israel Electric Corporation (IEC). Dozens of them responded to this call.

Histadrut Chair, Bar-David said: "We will fight until the unbearable violence against women is uprooted"

The action followed the brutal murder of Diana Raz by her husband, a police officer, earlier this month. Raz, age 35 at the time of her death, worked as a mentor and advisor for women trying to leave abusive relationships. The killing has sparked outrage in Israel, as it comes on the heels of skyrocketing reports of domestic abuse and a string of murders since the start of the pandemic. A 2017 plan to deal with domestic abuse has stalled in Knesset, with its budget of NIS 250 million yet to be distributed to relevant organisations.

A wide range of companies stopped work and held internal educational activities for their workers on the pressing subject. These included: Israeli Aerospace Industry (IAI), Mekorot National Water Company, El Al, Teva Pharmaceuticals, the Jewish National Fund (JNF), Osem-Nestle, Strauss Water, Israel Railways and the Ashdod and Haifa port workers, Pelephone, Cellcom, Pri Galil (food canning and shipping) and many more.

Bar-David called on the heads and members of the unions to take part in the action in a letter sent out to them.

"A wave of criminal and murderous violence against women must be put on the agenda," Bar-David wrote. "As early as June last year, when we saw a dramatic increase in the number of reports of violence, I made a firm decision to leverage the power of the Histadrut to change this sad reality."

"We will continue to fight until the unbearable violence against women is uprooted," Bar-David said during a solidarity event held by the Histadrut yesterday.

The initiative was started by Israel Electric Corporation (IEC). Throughout the day, anyone who called customer service number by dialing 103 would hear the names of women who were murdered by their family members.

"The pandemic has led to an increase in the number of women who have been attacked by their spouses. Every once in a while we are very shocked by a case of murder or violence within the family, and a moment later, we continue with the routine of our lives," Miko Tzarfati, chairman of the IEC, said.

"It is our duty as a society to stop this shocking phenomenon and raise our voices in order to prevent the next case. We are sending a clear message that women are not anyone's punching bag and we must stop the phenomenon of domestic violence in general and against women in particular," Tzarfati continued.

Histadrut and Na'amat demand support for women affected by raising retirement age

The Arrangements Law includes a provision raising the retirement age for women to 65, the same age as men.

A provision in the Arrangements Law proposes to raise the retirement age of women from 62 to 65, in an attempt to correct one of the world's lowest retirement ages for women. This measure aims to achieve gender equality and promote employment for older women, but some claim that the measure will hurt women in lower-income jobs, forcing them to work for more years in difficult conditions.

In a joint letter, Histadrut Chairman Arnon Bar-David and Hagit Pe'er, chairwoman of the Israeli women's organization Na'amat, called on Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman to accompany the provision "with appropriate, complementary, adequately-funded tools that will support women who will be harmed by this change, remove obstacles, and advance gender equality in the job market."

Bar-David and Pe'er emphasized that the Histadrut and Na'amat do not fundamentally oppose raising the women's retirement age, which has been

planned as part of the upcoming Arrangements Law, but demand protections for women who may be harmed by the process.

7.) The Histadrut & PGFTU

The Histadrut and Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) signed a landmark agreement in 2008 with the help of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), ensuring relations between their trade union movements would be based on dialogue and negotiations. As part of this and past deals, the Histadrut transfers 50% of union membership fees from Palestinians working in Israel to the PGFTU every year.

To ensure adequate representation, legal support and information on workers' rights is provided in Arabic for Palestinians working in Israel. The Histadrut have setup a system whereby Palestinians legally working in Israel can file complaints about working conditions with the PGFTU, who directly contact the Histadrut legal department that will manage the case and any representation before the Israeli Labor Court.

In response to a request by the PGFTU, the Histadrut are developing a project to help Palestinians in the construction sector find work in Israel. With the majority of Palestinians employed in Israel working in the construction sector, the Histadrut have employed a specialist Arab legal attorney, and setup a grievance committee to settle disputes between workers and employers, and are requesting participation of representatives from the PGFTU.

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ABOUT BITUD

Britain Israel Trade Union Dialogue (BITUD) was established to strengthen and support the links between the Histadrut (the Israeli TUC), the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) and the British Trade Union Movement.

- BITUD supports a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine that delivers peace, economic progress, security and justice for both nations.
- BITUD works to encourage the British Trade Union Movement to play a positive role in improving the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis.
- BITUD engages with progressive forces advocating peace, social justice and human rights. It seeks to emphasise the diversity of Israeli society, striving for full equality regardless of ethnicity, religion or gender.
- BITUD believes that support and assistance should be provided to the Palestinian people but support for the Palestinians should not include tactics like boycotts that are counterproductive to the situation on the ground and the ongoing peace process.
- BITUD believes that investment of time, energy and material aid is essential towards achieving a lasting settlement and that divestment from Israel does not help the peace process.
- BITUD believes that calling for boycotts of Israel is not the right approach for a trade union. Calls for a boycott of Israel would have a detrimental effect on the Palestinian economy, the peace process, and fundamentally, the Palestinian people, as well as on ordinary Israeli workers and trade unionists who are not responsible for the conflict.

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