

## Petroleum, Labor, and Legislative Politics in Hashemite Iraq, 1953.

**Elizabeth Bishop,**  
Department of History,  
Texas State University,  
United States.

Labor relations in Hashemite Iraq cannot be separated from domestic and regional politics, nor from the rise in global consumption of petroleum. As Albert Badre pointed out, in the Arab world management came “overwhelmingly from a society with traditions and ideals that differed considerably from those which animate the society providing the labor force” (Badre, 1957: 19). In Iraq, most industrial managers were British, with smaller numbers of Americans, French, and German citizens. The petroleum market had expanded in an unprecedented way during the first decade after World War II. While in 1945, 7.8 million barrels were consumed every day; by 1957, the market absorbed 18.3 million barrels on a quotidian basis (Badre 1957: 5). The United Kingdom and France were the most significant consumers of Iraqi petroleum, purchasing together a little less than half of all the country’s exports (*Statistical Abstract* 1955: 236).

As a result, in petroleum and supporting industries pulled Iraqis away from their small communities. At the time, the World Bank claimed 20,000 migrated from rural areas to Basra’s outskirts (*Economic Development*, 1952: 448). Around Iraq’s only port city, such labor migrants were the very fringes of the working class. An ethnographer reported that single men were more likely to leave the rural date groves in the southeast, traveling in the spring for a season of construction work; in the port city, they could pocket wages if they were able to live cheaply (Fernea, 1989: 189). In its outskirts, women and men took up residence in huts they had built out of reed mats and mud, like those in rural areas (*Politique étrangère* 17, 1952: 297). With a small, narrow door in front, the average workers’ home measured 2 or 3 meters in width, by 6 or 7 meters in length (Karpat 1968: 137). An American missionary described “one-, two-, or three-room units grouped around a large central yard, which was enclosed with a mat fence or mud walls” (Van

Ess, 1961: 84). International consultants reported triumphantly that, rather, “a closer look at the *sarifa* in some areas disclosed that some of the houses were comparatively large, with 2 to 5 rooms,” housing an extended family group (Penrose, Penrose, 1978: 183).

Iraq’s government profited from the neighboring state’s policies regarding petroleum. While many-year public figure Nuri as-Said “might be a good friend of the British, he knew when he was on a good wicket” (Kimche, 1950, pp. 322). As historian Lorenzo Kimball pointed out, Iran’s prime minister Mohammed Musaddiq’s “nationalization of oil in Iran in 1951 and the agreement concluded between Saudi Arabia and the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in 1950 precipitated serious difficulties” for end-users, given their increasing appetites for fossil fuels (Kimball, 1972: 67; also NSC 97/3, 1953); Elizabeth Monroe added, “far from closing ranks round Musaddiq, [some] Arabs were delighted with the extra earnings that they gained from his plight” (Monroe, 1963: 114). These circumstances strengthened Nuri as-Said’s bargaining position. “At the last moment, with the frightening example of Persia before its eyes, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) decided that it was probably wiser to settle and to pay. In the late autumn of 1951 the new oil agreement was signed [with British Petroleum’s local representative, James McClean]. Instead of the old rate of four shillings (gold) per ton, Iraq would be receiving in future 35s in 1951, rising to 39s in 1953” (Kimche, 1950, pp. 322-323).

Any story of the Hashemite monarchy would be incomplete without acknowledging the workers’ actions which characterized its last five years. As historian Samira Haj has pointed out, a wave of strikes erupted when the government revoked martial law shortly after King Feisal II’s coronation (Haj, 1997: 106). For colleague Charles Tripp, these strikes were only one aspect of oil workers’ struggle for better pay and conditions (Tripp, 2002: 135); and, in the eyes of Elie Podeh, the oil workers’ strike marked the beginning of the Ba’ath party’s long struggle to prominence (Podeh, 2011: 133). While George Lenczowski stated that both the petroleum company and the government attributed the work stoppage to “communist inspiration” (1960: 274), Moscow archives fell mute in 1947 regarding labor relations in Iraq (State Archive of the Russian Federation, *fond* r-5451, *delo* 118, pp. 2ff).

Iraqis' labor activism is frequently understood solely as a response to economic conditions; consequently, strikes' political goals are neglected. George Lenczowski bluntly asserted that these were materially-motivated disturbances (Lenczowski, 1960: 272). For historian Charles Tripp, it was "long-term structural inequalities of Iraqi society and many out of the immediate concerns of people who had seen the cost of living outstrip their wages" which led to the April 1946 strikes (Tripp, 2000: 113). According to historian Edith Penrose, workers may have decided to strike on the basis of bread-and-butter issues; it was the political leaders of the country who dictated the eventual settlement; "there was very little collective bargaining in Iraq and there was often political intervention in the settlement of disputes" (Penrose, 1978: 251).

Nurios-Said's smooth negotiation of a petroleum settlement concealed widespread political passions of those who lived at different levels of income. Rich Iraqis in the national legislature were willing to turn a blind eye to day laborers' violence in defense of the nation's interests. This became evident when James McKean was found dead outside his rented home in Iraq's capital. A watchman heard two shots near the foreigner's newly-stuccoed residence in the al-Alwiyah neighborhood. Hurrying to the scene and discovering a body, the guard remained to protect evidence until police arrived at the crime scene. Brothers Askar Amhan and Ajmi Amhan were apprehended not far from the victim's home, with streaks of white gypsum on their clothing.

When the Amhaan brother's case was tried, the lower house of Parliament used its constitutional powers to route it to the Baghdad Higher Penal Court. As Harris explained, "unlike the Supreme Court of the United States... this court is an *ad hoc* body called into being by the government," According to Iraq's constitution's article 82, for a case to be included in the High Court's docket, it would have to be directly referred by a Royal *Irada* (the cabinet of ministers was similarly empowered, but only if the legislature was not in session). A 1943 amendment, however, permitted the Chamber of Deputies to pass a resolution of accusation by a two-thirds majority. As a consequence, the High Court's caseload was modest: 303 files in 1952, 174 in 1953, 159 in 1954, and 253 in 1955 (*Statistical Abstract*: 196).

As George Harris described, “the High Court is composed of eight members, in addition to the president (who is also the president of the legislature’s upper house or his deputy)” (Harris, 1958). The Senate elected each of these, and the Regent confirmed their service: of them, half were from the legislature’s upper house, and half came from the judicial bench. “The function of the High Court, as defined in the Constitution, is to try ministers, deputies, and senators for political offenses related to their conduct of public office; to try judges of the Court of Cassation; to render interpretations of the law, and to pass on the constitutionality of laws” (Harris, 1958, pp. 125-126.).

An accused person or persons could only be declared guilty by a two-thirds majority of the justices; once reached, the decisions of the high court were not subject to appeal. Such was the case during 1953, when the Chamber of Deputies referred the case of James McKean’s death to the High Court. Convened under extraordinary circumstances, the court handed down an extraordinary verdict. The assembled justices were swayed by a medical report stating the impossibility that the white blotches on garments worn by brothers Askar and Ajmi Amhan matched the fresh plaster on the murdered man’s walls.

Turning the case of the two Amhan brothers to the high court, the Iraqi Chamber of Deputies (in effect) granted its retroactive sanction to the assassination of British Petroleum’s local representative. Constrained by the fact that a two-thirds majority was needed for a “guilty” verdict, presiding Judge Burhan al-Din al-Galiani and co-judges Khalil Zaki Mardan and Anwar al-Wiswasi acquitted the two men “for lack of evidence.” (“Baghdad Diary,” *Iraq Times*, 8 April 1953).

The case of McKean’s death was only one of a series of encounters between Iraq’s state, local labor, and foreign managers. Already, work was in progress laying railway lines to the country’s first petroleum refinery at ad-Daura, and a 135-mile 12-inch pipeline to supply crude was already in place (“King Addresses,” 1954). Named after the village in which it was located on the left bank of the Tigris, downstream and 20 kilometers southwest of Bagdad, the facility was scheduled to begin operations within two years. A production capacity of quarter of a million tons a year would make it the largest single industrial plant in the country.

Developments over the eastern boarder affected Iraqis from a variety of political positions most locally-available petroleum had been refined at the huge Abadan complex over the border in Iran (Harris, 1958: 218). At Abadan, foreign investors had built the world's largest refinery in a modern town that provided company housing, with transport and medical care available to all workers' dependents—a labor activists' dream. Nothing comparable was available on the Iraqi side of the border (Abadi, 1982: 82). In Baghdad, the Shah informed members of the Chamber of Deputies that "he hoped to return to his throne and that Dr. Mosadegh had violated the law;" Iran's Foreign Minister Fatemi replied in an official note to Iraq that hosting the shah would raise difficulties between the two nations ("Mossadegh Rounds," 18 August 1953). Baghdad Radio monitored the situation closely, noting "Army and police forces in Teheran succeeded in arresting all Dr. Mossadeq's ministers" ("Situation in Iran," 1953-08-20). On his return from Italy to his throne, the Shah dined with Iraq's King Feisal at the Rihab Palace in Baghdad ("Shah Assails Mossadegh" 22 August 1953).

In Iraq, members of the opposition political parties looked to the ad-Daura refinery as a promise for Iraq's new economy. The previous year, members of the ruling Constitutional Union party blocked all attempts to update the land law dating back to the 1930s, a law which had transformed agricultural workers into serfs. The Constitutional Union Party's members had proven equally successful in blocking any attempts to tax their personal estates. Given the nature of factionalism in both the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies, opposition parties seized on 9-to-5 industrial jobs with full benefits at the refinery as a means around the CUP's hold on the legislature.

At this time, Dr. Fadhil al-Jamali, "in fez and horn-rimmed glasses" (*Reader's Digest*, 67, 1955: 76) was appointed Iraq's prime minister. With a B.A. from the University of Chicago (*University of Chicago Magazine*, 1944: 27) and a Ph.D. from Columbia University, he married an American woman (*Commonweal*, 68, 1958: 451), and many Americans felt that he was on the "right side" of the cold war. Dr. Jamali's political base was in the Ministry of Education (Almond, 1993). His monograph *The New Iraq* had noted the extralegal powers of tribal leaders (Jamali, 1934: 83), remarking this "large and

powerful body of landholding interests” was overrepresented in the Parliament (Elliot, 1996: 29). Even still, Dr. al-Jamali had surged to the premier ship with the support of the ruling Constitutional Union party’s majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

Largest of the legally-registered opposition political parties, Kamil Jadarji’s National Democratic Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati*, NDP) supported a daily newspaper, the *National Voice* (*Saut al-Ahali*). The NDP served as political home to many from the urban bourgeoisie, including a number of left-to-center intellectuals, students, and professionals. With so many political positions represented among its members, the NDP’s politics were inclusive, and occasionally, contradictory: “simply because the National Democrats spoke the language of reform did not mean that they could therefore be taken at face value as a reforming party” (Elliot, 1996: 27).

The second member of the political opposition was the Independence (*Istiqlal*) political party, led by Kamil Samarraï (*Records of Iraq*, 2001, vol. 1: 117). The *Istiqlal* membership included many military officers, and the party as a whole tended to identify with their interests (Ghareeb, 2004: 104). Formed after the Second World War as a nationalist group, this became a rightist party supporting a non-communist neutralism in the cold war (Eppel, 2004: 106). With its real strengths in Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, the *Istiqlal* enjoyed little influence in tribal areas (Harris, 1958: 92); rather, it was credited with mobilizing groundswells of demonstrations and riot, transforming vague socio-political unrest among students and lower civil servants (Eppel, 1998: 194). Beyond the legally-registered opposition of the NDP and the *Istiqlal* while, dues-paying communists were concentrated in the capital and the south, only 48 resided in Basra (Alexander, 2008:262).

Iraqis of all political opinions enjoyed front-row seats to the political events over the border: “Last Sunday Baghdad was surprised by an event which has aroused public interest. An Iranian plane suddenly landed at Baghdad airport and out came the Shah of Iran” (“Strong Leader Needed,” 1953-08-21).

So, too, were Iraqis suddenly sensitive to political developments to their west, in the Arab world. Listeners in Basra could hear “Voice of the Arabs” programs broadcast from Egypt quite clearly. On the other side of the Arab world, Jamal Abdul Nasir had recently become Egypt’s leader (Sayyid-

Marsot, 1985: 106). According to UK diplomat Sam Falle in Iraq, Cairo Radio: “screamed night and day from every little transistor radio in every field, *sarifa*, and urban apartment, and from the cafes in the town.” Its rhetoric blamed Basra’s local evils on global causes; “the poverty, the misery, the hunger, the exploitation of the peasants by the *sheikhs*, everything that was wrong..was the fault of the imperialists and their lackeys, the Zionist criminal, [Minister of Defense] Nuries Said, and [the King’s uncle, Crown Prince] Abdul Illah, who was even more foully abused, especially for his obsequiousness to the British” (Falle, 1996: 119).

In 1953, the Basra Petroleum Company (BPC) employed 313 foreigners, and 3048 Iraqis (*Statistical Abstract* 1955: 236). As Badre pointed out, the oil companies in Iraq had always provided accommodations for foreign staff; this housing was kept separate from adjacent towns, with high wire fences and guards separating it from places where national monthly-rate and daily-rate employees lived (Badre, 1959: 79). The BPC had chosen an ‘integration’ policy (increasing its dependence on local business’ services) as opposed to developing a facility such as the AIOC had just over the border at Abadan, where the petroleum company provided for workers’ housing, transport, and medical needs directly (United States National Archives and Records Administration, records group 84, box 45, folder 560.2). British intelligence officer Wilfred Thesiger regretted the commute that drained workers’ budgets; “if [informal residents] settled on the outskirts, they had to spend money they could ill-afford on bus fares to and from work” (Thesiger, 1964, pp. 205-206).

In Basra during 1953, municipal bus drivers walked off their jobs first. Dockworkers, dredgers, and radio operators followed them (the radio operators’ strike, however, was broken within a few hours). Widney recounted: “In every instance the pattern has been the same. Rumors are heard in the local market (*suk*) that a strike is going to take place in such and such a place, and on such and such a day; nothing happens on that day but several days later, the strike occurs.” Said to have been heartened by the “Voice of the Arabs” over the radio, BPC employees eventually followed the example of bus drivers, dockworkers, dredgers, and radio operators (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

During 1953, the BPC transferred a number of workers and their immediate dependents from *sarifas* to new worker homes in Zubair City, while a small proportion of all the workers were housed on the field (Lenczowski, 1960: 187). "About twelve of these families complained about this move. They wished to continue to live in Basra [among their extended families] and to be transported at the company's expense to the oil field daily." Charles L. Widney Jr., US Vice Consul, defended his objectivity: "I have mingled among demonstrators and heard part of the speeches and recognized some of the speakers. I have discussed the personalities involved discreetly but at length with lawyers and others not associated either with the government or the company." The housing development had been tied to the decision to expand BPC operations in the Rumaila sector, two hours out of town by car. Once they moved to the housing development, Zubair City's workers would lose their transportation allowances; "about forty of these workers wanted the company to let them keep the allowances and provide transportation on its -owned and -operated buses" (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

In Basra, workers lived among extended families. These kin groups supported newlyweds, the ill, and parents of young children (both emotionally and financially) by means of networks of shared labor. As one example, more than one household would consume one woman's cooking; similarly, marketing, child-minding tasks, and eldercare could be allocated across multiple households. These kin groups were also activated during labor actions, and the success of a strike could hang on the networks' ability to sustain striking workers' households. The petroleum company's housing development, however, was designed with units that could only accommodate nuclear families. Any families who moved to the new apartments, would be separated from the extended family networks on which they depended.

Shop owners in the bazaar and neighborhood stores had extended credit to strikers' families, and contractors even advanced wages to their employees who had decided to participate in the walk-out, so picketers took breaks for lunch. They even permitted foreign employees to cross their lines unmolested throughout the first day. According to the US consul, his "speech making was strictly communist with the usual key phrases of 'Anglo-American imperialist,' 'Anglo-

American criminals and warmongers,' 'colonizing and exploiting imperialists'" (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

Local authorities were under the opinion that strikers received help from the Iranian leftist party Tudeh over the border, since their leaflets had been printed in Abadan (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2). Widney was confident that (without any assistance from Iran) members of Iraq's own NDP made the Basra strikes possible. "The strike was directed from the headquarters of this party in Basra with its official newspaper *Wida' al-Ahali* appealing daily for public support of the movement." Mohammed Rashid, a Basra attorney in his late twenties, was editor of its local paper. A second contributor was Mohammad Amin al-Aradi, also member of the NDP, and another young Basra attorney (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

Strike committee chair Jamil Mirjan Rehani was a secondary school graduate. In his early twenties, he had worked as laboratory assistant in the Petrology and Engineering Department; it was he who, "did most of the talking to the assembled crowds." A driver, Jabbar Hamudi Sabir, was also on the committee. While Sabir had no particular affiliation with any registered political party, "in his speeches and talks as a negotiator with the company officials and local authorities reflected the communist line." Other organizers included clerk Abdul Amir al-Shawi, engine attendant Jabbar Hadi, and mechanic Abdul Kadhim Mustafa (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder 560.2).

While they worked together to plan the petroleum workers' strike, Rashid and al-Aradi differed in their ideological orientation: "al-Rashid's articles unequivocally echoed the communist line faithfully while al-Aradi's was strictly ultra-nationalistic and anti-British." Allegedly, the NDP's purpose to provoke the collapse of Fadhil al-Jamali's government, with the chance that they could seat cabinet ministers in a new coalition government (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2). Seeking to correct the greatest flaw in Iraq's constitutional design, activists also sought some formula to increase the power of the legislature (Harari, 1962, pp. 95-97).

The first day of the strike, workers held a large meeting outside the company's Makina depot along the Ashar-Margil highway. Most of the strikers were former Amara tribesman. Even though many carried *hunjars* (six to ten-inch multipurpose

curved knives common in Southern Iraq), they remained in their sheathes and it seemed the strike would be resolved peacefully since “an atmosphere of good humor prevailed throughout the city and among the strikers.” The BPC had already agreed to apply the labor law to those employed in messes and kitchens, granting these workers one day of paid vacation for each completed calendar month worked, and an additional seven days of unpaid leave each year. The strikers also demanded that the category of “temporary employees” (skill grade “0”) be eliminated, so that all workers (including watchmen) should have permanent jobs and should be entitled to all rights guaranteed by the Amended Workers’ law no. 72 of 1936.

Convening early in the morning, and lasting until just before sundown, Rehani voiced the strikers’ demands in his declamations. Also, strikers’ rhyming chants (in which high school students joined) included ‘down with Juamali,’ referring to the Prime Minister; ‘down with Said Qazzaz, British clerk,’ referred to the Minister of the Interior, and (more generally) ‘down with the cabinet.’ More generally, other chants were themed: ‘down with Anglo-American imperialism,’ ‘down with the colonizers,’ and ‘long live workers’ unity.’ The US consul specifically noted, “no cries against the king or the local civil governor.” With such public statements, company officials were negotiating with the Government Labor Officer did not know what the workers’ strike was about (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

Eventually an anonymous list of demands reached the Labor Officer through the mail, and a list of strikers’ demands were eventually published in the Basra NDP daily, *Nada’ al-Ahali* on 6 December. All employees should receive transport, quality meals, and free-of-charge medical care for themselves and their dependents, be paid for their annual leave in cash, and free to live where they want. Strikers sought payment of wages forfeited during the 1951 strike. All workers fired for organizing should be hired back (Iraq had not yet signed the International Labor Organization’s “freedom of association” convention from 1948), and the Ministry of the Interior should register the ‘Union of the Oil Workers of Basra.’ (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

The second day, the mood among strikers changed. An encounter between one of the BPC’s foreign employee and a group of workers precipitated this shift. The same day as

strikers' demands were published in the daily newspaper, a British employee encountered a group of strikers in the oil field. He claimed they attempted to disrupt the activities of some non-striking contract workers; they claimed he made threatening gestures with a shotgun. One shot was fired. Provoked, the strikers seized his weapon. Distorted and magnified by the strike leaders and those supporting them, accounts of the incident inspired hitherto apathetic workers with greater anti-company and anti-British enthusiasm (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

Since the Ministry of Interior had not authorized the local governor (*mutasarraf*) and police of Basra to take forceful action, when faced by large numbers of hostile strikers, police dropped their weapons and ran. Meanwhile, the Minister of Social Affairs arrived in Basra to try and wring concessions without putting any corresponding pressure to bear on the strikers. BPC management was under the impression that not more than fifty or sixty workers were disgruntled and that without wide popular support the two issues could be settled easily and quickly. On the third day of the strike, four workers (Sabir, al-Shawi, Hadi, and Mustafa) agreed to negotiate with the Minister of Social Affairs and the Civil Governor; company officials, however, did not join them immediately. It was only in the evening of the strike's third day that Angus Perks, John Pullman and Hector Thompson turned up to represent the BPC. Perks was Acting Director; the other two men were personnel managers, and these talks lasted another five hours (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2). Accounts of the shooting also facilitated the communists' entry into the NDP-dominated strike. After the shooting, Abbas Abdul Mutalib al-Mudhaffar was caught with a flyer entitled, 'Announcement by the Local Committee of the Communist Party of Iraq in Basra,' as well as a copy of *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Fiftieth Anniversary* ("Basra Court Martial Convicts," 1954-01-11).

Strike leaders, however, failed to return to a scheduled resumption of talks on the 8<sup>th</sup>, thereby breaking off negotiations carried out under the Ministry of Social Affairs' good offices. The company subsequently published its position in daily newspapers (*The Constitution*, *Dustour* and *The Frontier*; *al-Tagher* on December 9<sup>th</sup>; *al-Barid* the next day). In response, the NDP's party newspaper, *Nida' al-Ahali*, published a second "declaration of the committee of striking workers" on 13

December. The strike organizers again demanded legal registration of their trade union, as well as punishment for the “bloody Britisher who did the shooting,” withdrawal of the police, and release of all those who had been taken into custody. The editorial culminated with the assertion that the shooting incident and the authorities’ opposition to their demands only increased the strikers’ resolve. In conclusion, the editorial stated that the workers derived their strength from the support of the entire nation (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

Up to that point, there had been no casualties among blacklegs, strikers, or police. The Minister of the Interior (whom the chanting strikers had described as ‘a British clerk’) arrived in Basra in order to initiate his own round of talks. Claiming that a delegation of workers had, “disclosed the real situation in the strike and the motives for it,” Said Qazzaz was satisfied that the majority of workers wanted to return to their jobs but was afraid to do so on account of fear of strikers’ violence. Qazzaz guaranteed adequate police protection to any who wanted to return to their jobs, personally warning “elements from among the active demonstrators that he intended to maintain law and order by force if necessary.” That night, the Minister ordered the additional arrest of sixteen known ‘ringleaders’ (“Basra Strike,” 1953-12-17).

Early in the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>, traffic on the Ashar-Margil road was heavy. Foreign contractor H. J. Estes was engaged in his normal duties which he continued to carry out during the strike. The US citizen (like all the other foreign hires) had made several trips in and out of the depot on company business, crossing the picket line; even still, strikers made no attempt to molest him. The arrests the Interior Minister ordered on his arrival, however, threatened Estes’ security. Angered by news that their leaders had been arrested, a group of demonstrators attacked police outside the Makina depot. The police opened fire with live rounds (later claiming an “attempt to disperse the crowd”). While one striker was killed, police succeeded only in splitting the group of demonstrators into two groups. Half the crowd proceeded along the depot’s perimeter until it reached the main road and proceeded in the direction of Ashar. Estes found himself caught in traffic behind a large truck loaded with sugar, alone in a lightweight Austin ‘Champ’ with its right-hand drive. Before reaching the railroad crossing, he saw the crowd (on which the police had fired only a few

minutes earlier) headed toward him (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

The American consular official noted, "Seeing that the mob was disorderly, he wished to avoid it; and being unable to turn because of traffic, he decided to attempt to reach the main entrance to the depot by turning left on to a dirt road running along the southeast side of the depot parallel to the railroad track." Canvas curtains enclosed the vehicle, and the dirt road onto which Mr. Estes turned was muddy due to recent rains. Under the impression that the vehicle's driver was British, a group of about twenty men emerged from behind a dilapidated building and surrounded the car. Half were dressed in western-type pants and shirt, half were in Arab *dishdasha*; eight men in the crowd were armed with clubs, two with *hunjars* and one with a Spanish 'Astra' pistol. Because of the vehicle's lightweight and the road's muddy condition, the crowd was able to pick it up, immobilizing Estes (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

Men on the vehicle's left began to cut through the canvas with their *hunjars*; Estes decided to try to break out on the right, where blows from clubs brought him to the ground. Prostrate, Estes received one stab wound from a *hunjar*, more blows on the head from building stones and rocks, and was kicked in the side and chest until someone in the crowd shouted, 'that's an American!' (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

Then, the whole crowd pulled back to the Ashar-Margil road. Mr. Estes picked himself up and stumbled across the railroad track to the depot fence, proceeding on his hands and knees. When a switch engine and three or four cars coming up the main track alongside the road provided a temporary shield from the a rain of rocks, he scaled the gate. Once inside the depot he dragged himself to assistance; the American narrowly escaped becoming the strike's second casualty (USNA, RG 84, box 45, folder: 560.2).

In Baghdad, the Minister of the Interior ('British clerk') justified violence against the Basra strikers. While the Cabinet's first action had done when it came to power was to lift martial law, he said, it had been found necessary to reinforce it to preserve lives and property when 'evil men attacked citizens, endangering peace and order' ("Deputies Discuss," 1 January 1954). Also in the capital, opposition statesman Salih Jabr complained to his fellows about all the restrictions martial law

following the oil workers' strike imposed on civil liberty for citizens. He demanded that the Senate lift this extraordinary measure as possible, and urged the cabinet to dissolve the lower house of the legislature as soon as possible in order to pave the way for a general election and enable the people to have real representatives in the Chamber of Notables ("Upper House," 7 January 1954).

It is a convention for historians of Hashemite Iraq to neglect the political aspects of workers' actions in favor of their economic impulses; I'm not of the same opinion. Publications of Bob Vitalis' *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* during 2006, and Toby Jones' *Desert Kingdom: How Oil and Water Forged Modern Saudi Arabia* in 2010, open the field for a wider discussion of labor and legislative politics in Hashemite Iraq. The death of James McKean in Baghdad demonstrated that the elected members of the Chamber of Deputies were capable of mobilizing on behalf of two men who stood accused of assaulting a British petroleum executive, in order to secure their legal release. The BPC employees' strike points up the political side to the expansion of the petroleum industry, as laborers' presented their demands for dignity and corporate citizenship, while enjoying the support both of their local community in Basra, that of the opposition political parties in Baghdad, as well as support from over the border in Abadan.

### **Bibliography:**

- "Basra Court Martial Convicts Communist," Bagdad, *Bagdad, Iraqi Home Service - 1954-01-11*; DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-54-007 on 1954-01-12.
- "Basra Strike Instigated by Communists; Press Conference by the Interior Minister," Bagdad, *Iraqi Home Service*, 16 December 1953, DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-53-245 on 1953-12-17.
- "Deputies Discuss Army Affairs Behind Closed Doors," *Iraq Times*, 1 January 1954.
- "King Addresses Opening of Parliament," *Bagdad, Iraqi Home Service - 1954-12-01*, DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-54-233 on 1954-12-02

- “KING'S SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT REPORTED,” DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-55-234 on 1955-12-02.
- “Mossadegh Rounds Up Coup-Attempt Suspects,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 August 1953.
- “Shah Assails Mossadegh as an ‘Evil Man,’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 22 August 1953.
- “Situation in Iran Reported Obscure,” Baghdad, Iraqi Home Services, 20 August 1953, 0430 GMT). [DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-53-163 on 1953-08-20.
- “Strong Leader Needed to End Iran Chaos,” Baghdad, Iraqi Home Service, in Arabic, 20 August 1953, 1615 GMT. [DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-53-164 on 1953-08-21].
- “Upper House Passes its Draft Address in reply,” *Iraq Times*, 7 January 1954.
- Abadi, Jacob (1982). *Britain's Withdrawal from the Middle East, 1947-1971*. Princeton NJ: Kingston Press.
- Alexander, Anne (2008). “Political Opportunities and Collective Action in the Iraqi Revolution. 1958-1959,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 2, no. 2.
- Almond, Harry J. (1993). *Iraqi statesman: a portrait of Mohammad Fadhel Jamali*. Salem OR: Grosvenor Books.
- Badre, Albert Y and Simon G. Sisek (1959). *Manpower and Oil in Arab Countries*. Beirut, Lebanon: Economic Research Institute, American University of Beirut.
- Cohen, Michael Joseph (2005). *Strategy and Politics in the Middle East, 1954-1960: Defending the Northern Tier*. London UK: Frank Cass.
- Elliot, Matthew (1996). *'Independent Iraq': the monarchy and British influence, 1941-58*. London UK: Tauris Academic Studies.
- Eppel, Michael (2004). *Iraq From Monarchy to Tyranny: From the Hashemites to the Rise of Saddam*. Miami FL: University Press of Florida.
- Eppel, Michael. “The Decline of British Influence and the Ruling Elite in Iraq,” in Michael Joseph Cohen, Martin Kolinsky, eds, (1998). *Demise of the British empire in the Middle East: Britain's Responses to Nationalist Movements, 1943-55*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.

- Falle, Sam (1996). *My Lucky Life; In War, Revolution, Peace, and Diplomacy*. Sussex UK :Book Guild.
- Ferne, Elizabeth Warnock (1989). *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village*. New YorkNY: Anchor Books.
- Ghareeb, Edmund, and Beth Dougherty (2004), *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*. ChicagoIL: Scarecrow Books.
- Government of Iraq. *Statistical Abstract* (1955). Baghdad, Iraq.
- Haj, Samira (1997). *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Harari, Maurice (1962). *Government and Politics of the Middle East*. Englewood Cliffs NJ, Prentice-Hall.
- Harris, George Lawrence (1958). *Iraq: its people, its society, its culture*. New Haven CT: HRAF Press.
- International Bank for Reconstruction and Development at the Request of the Government of Iraq. *The Economic Development of Iraq: Report of a Mission Organized by the World Bank* (1952). Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Jamali, Fadhil (1934). *The New Iraq: Its Problems of Bedouin Education*. New York NY: Columbia University.
- Karpat, Kemal (1968). *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East*. New Yor, NY: Praeger.
- Kimball, Lorenzo Kent (1972). *The Changing Pattern of Political Power in Iraq, 1958-1971*. New York NY: Robert Speller and Sons.
- Kimche, Jon. *Seven Fallen Pillars: The Middle East, 1915-1950* (1950). London UK: Secker and Warburg.
- Kingston, Paul W. T. (2002). *Britain and the Politics of Modernization in the Middle East, 1945-1958*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenczowski, George (1960). *Oil and State in the Middle East*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Love, Kenneth (1969). *Suez: The Twice-Fought History*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Macris, Jeffrey (2009). *The Politics and Security of the Gulf; Anglo-American Hegemony and the Shaping of a Region*. London UK: Routledge.
- Monroe, Elizabeth (1963). *Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- NSC 97/3, "A Report to the National Security Council by the NSC Planning Board on A National Petroleum Program," Washington DC (20 May 1953).

- Ochsenschlager, Edward L (2004). *Iraq's Marsh Arabs in Garden of Eden*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.
- Penrose, Edith Tilton and Ernest Francis Penrose (1978). *Iraq: international relations and national development*. London: Ernest Benn, Ltd.
- Podeh, Elie (2011). *The Politics of National Celebrations in the Arab Middle East*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Rush, Alan de Lacy, and Jane Priestland (2001). *Records of Iraq, 1914-1966*, volume 1. Cambridge, UK: Archive Editions.
- Sayyid-Marsot, Afaf Lutfi (1985). *A Short History of Modern Egypt*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Stromquist, Shelton (2008). *Labor's Cold War: Local Politics in a Global Context*. Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Thesiger, Wilfred, Jon Lee Anderson (1964). *The Marsh Arabs*. London UK: Longmans.
- Tripp, Charles (2002). *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Ess, Dorothy (1961). *Fatima and Her Sisters*. New York NY: John Day.
- Vitalis, Robert (2006). *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.