

## **Workers' rights in Lebanon are compromised, say AUB experts**

Wednesday May 12, 2010

Neo-liberal economic policies have stripped workers of basic rights and denied them a dignified existence, labor rights experts told an AUB audience.

In the seminar “Workers’ Rights and Entitlements,” held at AUB on May 4, 2010, three panelists shared their experiences of fighting for workers’ rights in Lebanon.

The country had experienced a gradual decline in the recognition of human rights, said Professor Jad Chaaban, assistant professor of economics at the Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. He added that more than 70 percent of workers in Lebanon had no health insurance.



In addition, 35 percent work for less than the legal minimum wage and 60 percent had no retirement plan, he said.

Chaaban noted that neither the capitalist nor the communist labor theories had succeeded in completely protecting workers’ rights. “Reality is different from dreams,” he said.

He added that indirect taxes, such as VAT, as well as gasoline and tobacco taxes also adversely affected worker’s economic conditions.

The seminar was organized by AUB’s Human Rights and Peace Club and marked May 1, the day on which Lebanese workers first demanded basic labor rights.

Adib Abou Habib, former president of the Lebanese Union of Labor Syndicates, outlined the significance of May 1 before arguing that it was Lebanon’s precarious political situation which had contributed to a deterioration in working conditions.

He advised that workers join up with labor unions in order to better protect their rights.

Hanna Gharib, president of the Secondary Teachers’ Syndicate (LPESPL), highlighted the effects of Lebanon’s brain-drain, blaming pressure from banking and real-estate for many young people's decision to emigrate.

He also rounded on fast profit and privatization policies, claiming these were the principal factors behind economic decline in Lebanon. Policy-makers also needed to shoulder some blame, Gharib added, as the state had monopoly on economic decisions.

The issue of non-Lebanese workers in Lebanon was raised, with panelists calling on young people to increase their awareness about migrant workers in their country.

Habib urged Lebanese youth, including AUB students, to learn more about labor law in order to protect and defend their rights.

He added that students who went on to become ministers or policy-makers were best placed to reform the current law which continues to deny workers their inalienable rights.