

A solidarity briefing

Iranian workers: the struggle to organise

The basic situation for Iranian workers

Independent trade unions are banned in Iran.
Workers are allowed to form Islamic Labour Councils (ILCs) but these cannot defend the terms and conditions of their members. Labour Councils are controlled by the government and the employers. They are not independent and free. There is *nothing* Iranian workers can legally do to defend their conditions. When Iranian workers defend themselves, they put their lives at risk.

Workers are not allowed to meet to discuss their conditions.

Anyone organising a general assembly of workers is sacked. Leading members of trade unions are sacked, arrested, imprisoned and beaten up for their trade union activities.

The authorities repress gatherings by workers, for instance on May Day. Alireza Saghafy, a member of the Centre for Workers' Rights in Iran, was detained for five hours on 28 April 2009. He was told to try to prevent a May Day rally planned for Tehran.

Mansour Osanloo of the Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sherkat-e Vahed) is still in prison.

In Iran millions of workers suffer sweatshop conditions. There is no unemployment benefit.

Repressive conditions in Iran have got considerably worse since the June 2009 protests.

Last year and this year the regime has arrested thousands of people. Many people simply disappeared. Leftists are being targeted. Many people have been killed. Thousands of people are still detained.

Economic conditions are rapidly getting worse.

The minimum wage in Iran has recently been increased to US\$303 per month for the next year. This will not even cover rent in e.g. Tehran. On top of poverty wages, inflation, cuts in subsidies and the fact that wage payments are often postponed for several months Iran workers face desperate economic conditions.

The Islamic Republic and the International Labour Organisation

Why are Iranian government appointees recognised by the International Labour Organisation as genuine worker representatives? The ILO is a body which claims to safeguard and uphold basic workers' rights around the world. Iran is signed up to an ILO convention on gender equality, yet

women workers suffer blatant sexual discrimination, are even deprived of the right to work. Why does the ILO pretend the government of Iran will treat its workers in accordance with ILO conventions? Which ILO convention calls for the banning of free trade unions?

An international campaign needed

The international labour movement needs to step up its campaign against the Iranian government's repression of trade unions, to demand the Iranian government allows free trade unions and workers' rights. Until Iran does that, we demand ILO should not, at its meetings and conferences, "do business" with Iranian government stooges.

Model motion for union branches

This branch notes:

1. Last year's protests for democracy and human rights in Iran which ended in repression, arrests and imprisonment of thousands of protesters.
2. The ongoing Iranian workers' struggles to defend their pay, conditions and to assert their right to organise in trade unions.

This branch further notes:

1. Fully independent trade unions are banned in Iran.
2. Workers' gatherings and protests (e.g. on May Day) are repressed in Iran.
3. Leading members of trade unions are sacked, arrested, imprisoned and beaten up for their trade union activities in Iran.
5. Despite such severe restrictions Iran is recognised by the International Labour Organisation as a member state.
6. It is the view of Iran's independent trade unionists that the ILO should not recognise Iranian government appointees as the representatives of the workers.

This branch believes:

1. A campaign of solidarity with Iranian workers and political prisoners is an urgent necessity.
2. While opposing Iranian government repression we are also against military attacks and economic sanctions on Iran.

This branch resolves:

1. To write to and to ask our national union to write to the ILO calling on them not to recognise Iran's government appointed so-called workers' representatives.

News

- Bus worker's leader Mansour Osanloo has been removed from solitary confinement and returned to the general section of Iran's Rajai Shahr prison. Osanloo suffers from psoriasis and has been very unwell.

In October 2007 Osanloo was sentenced to five years imprisonment on charges of "acting against national security" and "propaganda against the state". But his only "crime" has been to help found a genuinely democratic trade union for his fellow bus drivers.

<http://www.itfglobal.org/campaigns/freeosanloo.cfm>

- The International Federation of Journalists is calling on the Iranian authorities to release up to 30 journalists, who are still detained following a massive media clampdown. They include the General Secretary of the Iranian journalist union (AoIJ), Mofidi Badrossadat, who was arrested at the end of 2009. The authorities closed the AOIJ office in early August 2009.

The majority of detained journalists have not been charged since their arrests — the Government is acting to suppress independent reporting of the political crisis. A number of newspapers have also been shut down and internet sites blocked. It is now illegal for Iranians to talk to outside media without permission.

- Workers at Isfahan steel company (a nationalised company) went on strike for about two hours on 8 March against the low level of wages received for the Persian year ending in March. Workers have recently set up a workers' council (an independent body). Since becoming "direct contract" workers (i.e. not sub-contracted) at Isfahan Steel, workers have seen their wages decline. There government-worker bonuses have also not been forthcoming. <http://iranlaborreport.com/?p=148>

- While four convicted leaders of the independent Haft Tapeh sugarworkers union in Iran have now been freed, President Ali Nejati remains in prison, where he could spend two years or more on charges of "endangering national security". Union Communications Officer Reza Rakhshan is still awaiting final sentencing for his conviction last year on similar charges. <http://www.workers-iran.org>

- Until earlier this year Iranian teacher unionist Farzad Kamangar was facing the imminent danger of being executed. Kamangar has been repeatedly tortured in custody. Online support for his appeal and the work of his lawyers has staved off an execution, for now. Education International is continuing a campaign to commute the death sentence against Farzad Kamangar www.ei-ie.org/savefarzad

- Majid Hamidi a member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, has been incarcerated since Thursday 14 January. Majid Hamidi, who is a well-known labour activist in City of Sanandaj, received seven bullets into his body on 18 October 2007. Witnesses and Hamidi himself reported that the assassins fired about 14 shots towards him. Doctors were later unable to remove one of the bullets that hit him in his neck, because by removing that bullet there would have been a great risk of damaging his nervous system around his eyes and mouth. He still has this bullet in his body.

- On 31 December 2009, a number of armed men entered the home of Jamal Karimpour and fired a number of shots at him, as the result of which he got injured in his left arm. Jamal Karimpour is a member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organisations.

From <http://iranlaborreport.com>

The following recent reports show the character of Iranian workers' action — lots of limited actions against privatisation and for back pay.

14 April 2010

Workers and representatives from 23 loading and unloading companies active at Shalamcheh docks gathered in front of the main building of Arvand Free Trade Zone in the city of Abadan and at the Friday prayers in Khoramshahr, in southern Khuzestan province. 4000 workers' lives who depend on the docks are demanding that the authorities intervene on their behalf and on their families behalf. The workers protests have been catalyzed by the recent privatization of the docks.

Meanwhile, workers and drivers at Zagros bus terminals in Ahwaz Pasdaran boulevard went on strike demanding several months back-wages. The protests gained the support of many travellers and people at the terminal who joined the strikers' chants. The workers were confronted with the security forces after several hours.

On April 9, 88 fishermen in Minab on the Persian Gulf went on strike on low wages. Increase in the prices of fish has caused many to not be able to afford it, which in turn has caused a slow down in that market.

For more copies of the briefing email: iranworkerssolidarity@yahoo.co.uk