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e-mail: codir_info@btinternet.com

FOR PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Foreign Intervention Kills Democracy

EDITORIAL: Talk, talk, talk or war, war, war?

“War or peace? Today there is no more important question in world politics. Having more or less confined the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan within the borders of those two states, the United States and its allies, Israel and the UK, have now turned their attention to Iran”

In 2008 the above appeared in this journal. Four years later with the US and its allies attempting to convince the world their mission in Iraq and Afghanistan has been successful, they have now turned their attention to Iran and Syria. Having manipulated genuine and popular democratic demands raised in Syria, the US and its allies are now stoking and arming sectarian violence to deeply and bloodily divide the country. A Lebanon style civil war and a Lebanon style solution is the aim.

With this in place Syria would effectively be neutralized in any US/UK/Israeli conflict with Iran. The so-called “Arab Spring” would be transformed into an Arab paralysis, with Israel given a clear run in its aggression against Iran.

Now as the US presidential circus gathers momentum, it has been reported in the Montreal Gazette, July 29th and elsewhere, that Obama’s National Security Advisor, Tom Donilon, has briefed Israeli Prime minister Netanyahu, on the type of military assistance the US could give in any strike on Iran.

The Whitehouse and US embassies around the world are refusing to comment, but clearly as Republican candidate Mitt Romney rattles his would-be presidential sabre, the Whitehouse is keen not fall behind. Or perhaps it’s actually, Romney who’s struggling to keep up in the race to war?



This is not new. In News International’s, son of The News of the World (NOTW), the Sun on Sunday (SOS), February 26th 2012, screamed the headline “BRITAIN’S PLAN FOR IRAN WAR”.

The SOS went on “It is a matter of when not if war breaks out”.

The SOS, like its predecessor, the NOTW, maybe stained with News International venom, but it is desperate to prove itself the nation’s cheerleader for NATO warmongering. With its millions of readers its pronouncements cannot lightly be dismissed. But Iran is not Iraq or Afghanistan. It cannot be easily characterised as an underdeveloped distant land populated solely by Islamic-style terrorists where “our boys” could light up the skies with shock and awe. Of course all this presents the US with a dilemma.

It is one thing destabilizing countries and governments it dislikes, but it has found to its cost, military intervention and exodus in the Middle East or Asia is another matter. The US knows while the government of Ahmadinejad is unpopular, as recent mass demonstrations against food price rises in Nishapur and elsewhere illustrates, Iran is not a weak backward country. Furthermore the Iranian people have experience of US/British intervention. Iran is a complex society. Militarily well organised and bigger than any force the US or Britain has faced since World War 2. And the majority of Iran’s 75 million population is of fighting age.

These factors together with destructive campaigns in Iraq

Editorial Continued.../

and Afghanistan have divided US ruling circles. Following Israel into Iran or defending Israel against an Iranian counter-attack may be easy in the early stages, but Iran and its undemocratic leadership is unlikely to roll over. Mitt Romney may want to follow in the footsteps of his hero George Bush, but others are more cautious. They should be encouraged.

However it is not because war with Iran would be costly in lives and money, here or in Iran that it is wrong. As foreign policy it is criminally insane, worse it is entirely unnecessary, posing a serious threat to all working people everywhere.

The Iranian government is a theocratic dictatorship facing widespread opposition and crisis with its president, Mr Ahmadinejad, increasingly desperate to protect his own position and interests. Growing numbers of Iranians, including trade unions, youth, women and student organisations are calling for democratic change, while Ahmadinejad pursues his wreckless anti-people social and economic policies.

Furthermore, having made president through a rigged and widely disputed ballot in 2009 followed by suppressed popular protest demonstrations, the regime itself is deeply divided.

However, Iran has massive military capability but it does not have nuclear weapons or the means to deliver them. The International Atomic Energy Authority, the IAEA has found no evidence of weapons of mass destruction and in spite of US attempts to interfere in the IAEA's terms of reference, inspections continue with Iranian consent and there are firm grounds to reach a negotiated settlement on key points.

There is therefore not a WMD pretext for intervention. Unfortunately this has not been a barrier to NATO aggression in the past. Creating the myth of a foreign threat and having it internationally exposed, has become an essential first step in preparations for war and NATO propaganda. Throughout the 20th century, Britain and the US established shabby track records of military interference and economic exploitation in Iran. It is a history the Iranian people well understand.

The Islamic Republic leadership also has a history and practice of anti-democratic and fundamentalist attacks on Iranian working people and families. So



war for them, just like NATO and the leaders of the West would be a useful short-term distraction from their own failings and the crises gripping their societies.

This correlation of history and experience is likely to galvanize the Iranian people to oppose foreign military aggression. Worse still it risks letting Ahmadinejad and his criminal and corrupt clique off the hook. Meantime, they will pull out all the stops to ensure the tragedies and destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan fade from popular memory, providing fertile ground for a new war: a 21st century catastrophe of unprecedented inhumanity.

There is one further significant factor in this unfolding and fragile situation.

The only country in the region which actually has WMD's is Israel. With many Arab countries in disarray, the Israeli's are becoming more bellicose at home, in Gaza and towards Iran. We should not allow our so called Israeli allies to drag us into World War 3.

With solidarity and respect the Iranian people will continue their struggle for democracy and end the theocratic dictatorship to forge a new secular society. With negotiation and talk, talk, war is not inevitable!

(This article was first published by Morning Star on 4 August 2012)

Jamshid Ahmadi, Assistant General Secretary, CODIR

RMT CALL FOR SOLIDARITY WITH IRANIAN TRADE UNIONISTS

Following RMT's affiliation to CODIR in March, Alex Gordon, National President of RMT, accepted nomination to serve as President of CODIR. CODIR's new president has campaigned to win the support of trade unions in the UK for CODIR's campaigns. In the following article Alex emphasises the importance of international solidarity with the Iranian trade unionists and working class activists for their human and democratic rights and peace.

Iranian trade unionists thanked RMT recently for demanding the release of imprisoned comrades, a call which led to a number of them winning their freedom. Writing to the union, one of their wives Zohre Asadpoor thanked RMT for its strong support of imprisoned labour activists in Iran. "As you may know, most of them have been released including my husband. "He believes without your support they would be in the prison for a long time and I pass on his thanks to you," she wrote. Last March RMT affiliated to the Committee for Defence of the Iranian People's Rights (CODIR), which campaigns for peace, human rights and democracy in Iran.

CODIR was established in 1981 by a group of British labour and trade union activists along with Iranian democrats living in exile.

The main aim of the organisation since its inception has been to provide information and analysis about the reality of life in Iran. CODIR campaigned against the eight-year fratricidal Iran-Iraq war. It has also worked hard against the brutal suppression of human rights and other abuses committed by the regime in Iran. CODIR campaigns have won the support of many progressive MPs, MEPs, trade unions and trades councils. Addressing this year's annual general meeting, RMT president Alex Gordon said: "Last year we issued a clear call from our AGM for freedom for trade unionists who are prisoners of conscience in Iran.

"Freedom for Reza Shehabi!

"Freedom for Ebrahim Medadi!

"And that call was heard in Iran. Comrade Shehabi, the Treasurer of the Tehran Bus Drivers' Union had been on dry hunger strike to highlight his case since last year. He is still languishing in Tehran's notorious Evin prison and it is our responsibility to maintain and increase the international pressure on the Iranian regime to release our imprisoned trade union brother. In the words of the old 'Wobbly' slogan: "He's in there for us. We're out here for him.



Alex Gordon, National President of RMT

The Iranian regime continues to attack workers' rights and on June 15 brutally attacked members of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organisations in the city of Karaj while they were holding their annual general meeting.

"All 60 arrested were delegates from different provinces, especially from Kurdistan, Tehran and Gilan.

"The Coordinating Committee is a well-known independent labour organisation in Iran, formed in 2005 with the open support and signature of thousands of workers; it is not a clandestine group, many of its members are nationally and internationally well-known, like veteran labour activist Mahmoud Salehi who was beaten viciously during the raid as well as Mohammad Abdipour, Jalal Hosseini.

"The repression by the Islamic Republic of Iran is part of their overall strategy of repression of workers' struggles in Iran against ever-increasing poverty, mass unemployment, discrimination, repression and the government's austerity and neo-liberal policies.

"We stand with the working class of Iran and against imperialist forces in Britain and the West calling for war in Iran and the Middle East," he said.

World Trade Unions in Solidarity with Iranian Workers

As the people of Iran marked 1st May, International Workers' Day, the celebration of which is banned in their country, trade union organisations across the world expressed their solidarity with Iranian workers and trade unionists.

On the occasion of May Day, world trade union leaders expressed their solidarity with the struggle of the Iranian workers and trade unionists by endorsing a May Day statement. The trade union leaders from Britain, Canada and Cyprus who supported the statement include:

- Brendan Barber, General Secretary, Trade Union Congress, TUC, Britain
- Dave Prentice, General Secretary, UNISON, Britain
- Christine Blower, General Secretary, National Union of Teachers, NUT, Britain
- Sally Hunt, General Secretary, University and Colleges Union, UCU, Britain
- Alex Gordon, National President, Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), Britain
- Daniel Blackburn, Executive Director, International Centre for Trade Union Rights (ICTUR)
- Pambis Kyritsis, General Secretary, PEO, Pancyprian Federation of Labour, Cyprus
- Paul Taillefer, President of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, Canada.

The statement highlighted how workers in Iran are now confronting the unprecedented collapse of the economy and the brutal repression of a regime targeting organised labour. With inflation officially running at more than 20% and rising, with official unemployment at almost 15%, in a country with no welfare system, there is mass hardship. Any attempt by workers' to protest is met with suppression and punitive measures.

According to media reports, the Iranian economy is also severely affected by current economic sanctions. Many factories are being forced to close; lack of imported spare parts and raw materials has either closed workplaces or forced them to operate under-capacity. Tens of thousands of workers have already been laid off. The health and well being of ordinary people is being put at risk due to the inadequate supply of medical equipment and medicines. The prices of daily basic necessities and housing have soared due to the devaluation of the national currency and uncontrollable inflation. Economic sanctions are only affecting ordinary people and must be lifted.



**Brendan Barber,
General Secretary of TUC**

Those who in any way attempt to resist suffer greatly. Teacher trade unionist, Abdulreza Ghanbari, is on death row and a number other teachers are being held. Reza Shahabi, the leader of the transport workers in Tehran, was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment purely for engaging in trade union activities. Zabihullah Bagheri, a trade union activist from Isfahan, was recently arrested. Ali Nejati, the leader of the sugarcane workers in Hafttappeh, is being held in custody.

There are scores of other trade union leaders and activists serving harsh prison sentences for the sole 'offence' of being trade unionists and campaigning for workers' rights, improved wages and conditions of service.

The trades unions supporting the May Day call to action were united in calling upon the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to:-

- Lift the death sentence on Abdulreza Ghanabari.
- Release immediately Reza Shahabi, Ali Nejati and Zabihullah Bagheri and all other trade unionists imprisoned for their trade union activities.
- Halt the sacking of trade unionists and workers' activists because of their trade union activities.
- Remove all obstacles preventing Iranian workers from setting up independent trade unions and joining trade unions in accordance with ILO Conventions 87 and 98 concerning Freedom of Association.

Lift the ban on the right of workers to celebrate May Day and organise May Day events – with immediate effect.

Iranian workers – caught between a rock and a hard place

With an oil rich economy, diverse manufacturing base and strong agricultural sector, workers in the Islamic Republic of Iran should expect a high standard of living, sharing in the profits of society's wealth.

Jane Green looks into the conditions for workers in Iran and finds them caught between the rock of sanctions and the hard place of economic mismanagement.



The continual stepping up of sanctions against Iran by the West is, to all intents and purposes, a sustained attack upon the living conditions of the Iranian people. Unlike apartheid South Africa in the 1980's, when people's organisations called for sanctions as part of an international strategy to isolate the racist regime, the Iranian people are making no such call.

Yet sanctions continue to be a primary tool of Western foreign policy towards Iran. Consequently sanctions exacerbate the economic mismanagement which is a feature of the Iranian government. The twin evils of economic monetarism and Western sanctions conspire to keep Iranian workers in an impoverished state.

The reality for workers in Iran is that the minimum wage cannot even sustain a minimum level of subsistence, being merely one third of the officially designated poverty line. A report published in Iran in June 2012 indicated that the minimum wage, as determined by the government, can at best provide for only ten days of the monthly needs of the average Iranian family. However due to the reality of increasing unemployment, officially running at 12.3%, many workers, desperate to make ends meet, are prepared to work at levels below the minimum wage.

In order to comply with the solutions imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO) Iran has embarked upon a policy of 'price liberalisation' in recent years. The policy in effect targets the subsidies which once made basic goods for Iranian workers affordable. A recent Central Bank report indicated in May 2012 that the prices of 33 staple goods had increased between 18% and 146% over the previous year. The policy now puts these goods even beyond the reach of those earning a reasonable wage.

As well as raising inflation, officially at 21.5%, and pushing up prices, the fall in demand has resulted in factory closures and further fed the crisis of unemployment. In May 2012 even the official INLA news agency in Iran was forced to acknowledge that "this year, the crisis of unemployment and closure of manufacturing centres will be worse than previous years."

To make matters worse for many Iranian workers employers often fail to pay wages on time, in the most extreme example hemp workers in Rasht have not been paid for 5 years! It is hardly surprising that, even according to official statistics, over half of the population in Iran are living below the poverty line. It is also no surprise that sanctions imposed by the West are not welcomed by



the people of Iran who are the major victims of this policy.

In the face of such oppressive circumstances resistance is inevitable but Iranian Labour laws are such that standing up for basic rights in the workplace can be a matter of life or death. Leaders of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Union, Mansour Osanloo and Ebrahim Madadi, released after spending four years in prison, are currently undergoing medical treatment as a result of their imprisonment and torture.

Many other trades unionists currently languish in Iran's jails or have served heavy sentences for the basic activity of attempting to organise in the workplace. Nevertheless the efforts of such workers do not go unrecognised and new ways of raising the concerns of Iran's working people are being found.

A recent letter, signed by 10,000 workers, was sent to the Minister of Labour opposing the government's economic programme and its impact upon the lives of the Iranian people. The letter points out that while the prices of staple goods have increased several times over, the value of wages has fallen. In addition a hike in value added tax first of 4% then a further 5% on all consumer goods has further eroded the purchasing power of Iranian workers. The letter stresses that the issues of "job insecurity, lay-offs and the closure of factories are much worse than in previous years."

Even the General Secretary of the government friendly House of Labour has had to admit that "according to official figures, during the last year, 100,000 workers have been laid off from more than 1,000 manufacturing centres."

If things were not bad enough for Iran's workers the government is also looking to reform the existing Labour law to give employers greater 'rights' to employ workers on short term contracts and make the termination of

contracts easier. In such circumstances the effective organisation of workers will become an even greater challenge as the workforce becomes more transient and workers are played off against each other for the diminishing number of jobs to go round.

It is against this background that Iranian workers call upon their trades union colleagues in the West to support their demands for the right to organise, the right to assembly and freedom from persecution for engaging in basic trades union activity.

CODIR's work with the trades' union movement in the UK is a vital part of getting the message of Iranian workers out to their British counterparts and ensuring actions are taken in solidarity with the Iranian people. If the aspirations of the Iranian people for peace, justice and democracy are to have any hope of being realised that solidarity is now more vital than ever.



Out of sight, out of mind Iran's invisible workforce

The conditions for workers in Iran are increasingly difficult but for some sections of the workforce their marginalisation makes them almost invisible. Jane Green considers the plight of female, migrant and child labour in Iran.

The efforts by the Iranian government to undermine the potential to organise workers in Iran is exacerbated by the use of child and migrant labour as well as the treatment of women in the workforce.

Hard data is difficult to come by for some of these more marginalised sections of the workforce. Statistics in relation to working women are especially difficult to find but it is estimated that they will receive half of the pay of men in most cases. Women are often employed without signing a contract and are also made invisible by the changes to the Labour Law, which excludes workshops with less than ten employees, often mainly women.

There are also anecdotal reports that sexual harassment and physical violence is prevalent in some workplaces for women. Such intimidation is once again a deterrent to collective action and makes the task of organising workers in vulnerable situations more difficult.

Although the Labour Law in Iran prohibits the employment of children under the age of fifteen years old, a recent report by the Statistical Centre for Iran suggests that up to 4 million Iranian children are living on the streets, of whom 80% may be employed in small workshops of under ten employees not covered by the Labour Law.

The working and health conditions for such children were reported in recent research on the lives of street children. This survey, of over 4,000 children, indicated that 73% suffered from ophthalmology diseases; 61% suffered with breathing problems; 69% had hearing difficulties; 82% suffered skin diseases and 56% had not received any primary education. In addition it is estimated that the rate of AIDS amongst street children in Iran is 4.5% compared to the estimated

rate in society overall of 0.1%.

The situation of Iran's street children is a social time bomb which will impact upon Iranian society for many years to come, if not urgently addressed.

The use of migrant workers has increasingly been used as a tool by employers to keep labour costs down and the workforce marginalised. Afghan workers in particular are used in the construction industry and are housed in crowded camps with poor sanitation and living conditions.

Official statistics suggest that over 200,000 Afghan workers are employed in Iran with 94,000 not officially registered. These workers have no unemployment insurance, health care or education rights. They are even deprived of the 'minimum subsidy assistance' which the Iranian state can grant to some employees to mitigate pressures arising from the 'price liberalisation' policy.

The treatment of minorities in Iran in general and Afghans in particular, underlines once again that the whip hand in Iranian employment legislation and practice is very much with the employers. Addressing the issues faced by Iran's invisible workforce will also contribute to the wider objective of workers being able to tackle issues in the bigger workplaces which have a significant impact upon the Iranian economy.



Solidarity must extend across the board and address the plight of women, children and migrants workers in the struggle for human rights in Iran today.

Economy crumbles as sanctions bite!

As Western pressure upon the Iranian economy continues, **Liz Payne** of Iran Today Editorial Board assesses the impact of sanctions upon the ordinary people of Iran.

The adverse impact of the sanctions imposed by the United States and the EU upon the lives of the Iranian people is clearly evident. According to official reports, the inflation rate in Iran is now above 22%, although in reality it may well be double that. In recent weeks, the prices of basic foods have risen astronomically; chicken by 30%, grain by 55%, fruit by 70% and vegetables by 100%.

Such is the impact that TV channels have been told to refrain from showing scenes of families eating chicken. Congregations at mosques are being told to eat onion soup in place of meat. Another consequence of the sanctions is the severe shortage of imported goods. These include, for example, medical equipment and medicines, as well as spare parts for aircraft maintenance. The Iranian authorities have been trying hard to play down the dire consequences, calling the sanctions 'a blessing in disguise' or saying that Iran is immune to them. However, even the regime has been unable to ignore the fall-out and is asking people to put on a brave face and "not to make the enemy happy".

The sanctions have hit domestic production. The manufacturing sector is operating at half capacity, not only due to competition with imported goods, but because foreign currency, raw materials, and component parts cannot be sourced. The situation has been made much worse by the policies of the Iranian regime itself, removing government subsidies from oil, gas and electricity and so drastically raising the cost of energy to industry. This 'double-hit' has bankrupted many domestic manufacturers creating soaring unemployment. The younger generation is particularly badly hit by job losses. The Central Bank of Iran puts youth unemployment at 25% and rising. Many more young people have only a few hours poorly-paid, casual work.

According to the International Energy Agency,



Iran's oil exports have fallen by 40% in the last six months, a drop of \$32 billion. The ban on the purchase of Iran's oil by all 27 EU members can only have a detrimental effect on an already deteriorating situation. This will be exacerbated by the West's veto on the sale of insurance to Iranian companies, meaning that insurance for oil tankers cannot be purchased. Iran will therefore either have to cut oil transport or pay a premium to buy insurance from companies not included in the ban. Whatever its oil industry chooses to do, it looks set to cost Iran billions of dollars.

Sanctions are also hitting financial and monetary transactions, costing Iran billions of dollars and leading to the devaluation of its currency. Any financial institution dealing with Iran banks will be 'punished' by the sanctioning countries, a major obstacle and disincentive to the development of international trade.

The hostility between Iran and the West, without even a shot being fired, has already blighted the lives of ordinary people. What is at stake is the life and future of the people of Iran. Their voice, for a peaceful, just and democratic future, has been harshly suppressed by the Iranian regime. The more the sanctions bite, the greater will be the excuse to clamp down on all progressive movements.

The ostensible aim of sanctions is to force Iran to abandon its nuclear programme. For many, the nuclear programme is only an excuse for interference, as the West pursues political domination of the region and control over its rich resources. However, the sanctions are already having devastating effects on the people of Iran and it is they who will bear the brunt of suffering, both now and in the future.

Campaign for Women rights

In September 2011 Narges Mohammadi was sentenced to 11 years' imprisonment for spreading propaganda against the ruling system, acting against national security and membership of Iran's Defenders of Human Rights Centre (DHRC). Her sentence was reduced on appeal to 6 years and in April she was arrested in the northern city of Zanzan and taken to Tehran to begin serving her sentence. She has since been transferred back to Zanzan but the prison there does not have a separate section for political prisoners. Following her arrest in 2010 and confinement in Evin prison Narges Mohammadi, a mother of two, developed an epilepsy-like illness which makes her lose control of her muscles. In June, she wrote to Tehran's prosecutor :

"After my latest imprisonment, even the number of pills I am taking cannot control my illness, and it has worsened. I am now in the middle of more than 50 women who have been convicted of murder, drug traffickers who are on death row, and inmates who have committed violent crimes, some of whom suffer from dangerous diseases, and some do not have psychological balance. Since I arrived on this ward, I have seen nothing but stress, anxiety, and fear, all of which have contributed to the worsening of my illness. Exposure to such levels of stress is like feeding me poison, killing me by the moment."

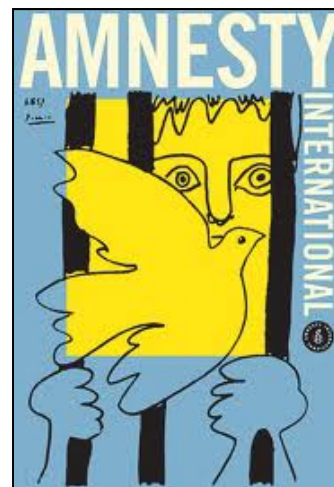
After being injured in a fight between other prisoners she was transferred to hospital in Zanzan but even her family were not allowed to visit her. She was kept there closely guarded but has now been returned to prison. Narges Mohammadi was the deputy head of the DHRC, and a close colleague of Nobel peace laureate Shirin Ebadi. She is best known for her campaign against juvenile executions. Her husband, political activist Taghi Rahmani, has been forced to flee Iran for fear of persecution and now lives in France.

It seems that as well as imprisoning human rights activists, the regime is deliberately putting psychological pressure on their families.

Yet according to Mohammad Jarvad Larijani, head of Iran's High Council for human rights:

"Iran as a founding member of the United Nations, and party to the major international human rights instruments, while upholding the

promotion of principles enshrined in its constitution, and while ensuring its full compliance with the relevant international commitments, has taken a genuine and long-term approach to safeguard human rights." (2010)



This is hard to believe in the light of Amnesty International's report (August 2012) to the UN Commission on the status of women. The report highlights the repressive measures taken by the regime to impose Islamic law on Iranian women. Of particular concern are forced marriages of girls as young as 13.

Amongst its recommendations, Amnesty International calls on the Iranian authorities to:

- release immediately and unconditionally any woman who has not used or advocated violence or hatred who is detained, imprisoned or placed under other physical restriction (for example, house arrest) solely because of her political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour, language, national or social origin, economic status, birth, sexual orientation or other status;
- investigate promptly and impartially all reports of torture and other ill-treatment of women and bring to justice anyone found responsible for such abuses;
- ensure that detainees and prisoners are granted access to relatives, lawyers of their own
- choosing and adequate medical care;

Unfortunately it is unlikely the Iranian authorities will act on these or other Amnesty recommendations. We can only therefore support the courageous actions of those who find themselves in prison for defending those human rights and continue to campaign for them in the hope that the government will see reason and release them soon.

Linda Sherwood

IWA speaks out for gagged writers

In Iran no area of social, civil or cultural activity is beyond the suspicion of the authorities. The Iranian Writers Association has been a recent target of the government as even the mildest criticism of economic policy is deemed at best controversial, at worst a crime against the state.

Dr Naser Zarafshan, the President of the Iranian Writers' Association, has issued the following comment for CODIR, on the recent arrest of Dr Fariborz RaisDana, a prominent left leaning economist and member of IWA, and Manijeh Najm Araghi, the secretary of IWA. CODIR is pleased to publish Dr. Zarafshan's comments and restates its previous call for the immediate release of RaisDana and Mrs Najm Araghi and all political detainees.

In the past months, two more members of the Iranian Writers' Association, Fariborz Raisdana and Manijeh Najm Araghi have been imprisoned. Raisdana is a member of the board and Najm Araghi is the secretary for the board. The cases against some other board members of the Association are under investigation in the revolutionary prosecutor's office.

Raisdana was arrested following a TV interview on the "Economic Transformation and Targeted Subsidies Plan", essentially criticizing the structural adjustment plan currently underway in Iran. A few hours after that interview, his prosecution and arrest had been ordered by the security and judicial forces. According to the Tehran prosecutor the interview only hastened his arrest and apprehension. After his arrest and interrogation, prosecutors stated that just being a member of the Iranian Writers' Association was considered propaganda against the system and this charge was presented as evidence of his guilt. In Iran membership of a trade association, such as the Writers' Association, or criticism of a current policy and theoretical and scientific

Free all Political Prisoners in Iran Free Manijeh Najm Araghi



Solidarity with
the Struggle
of Women
in Iran!

disagreement with that, are not criminal offences or prosecutable under the law.

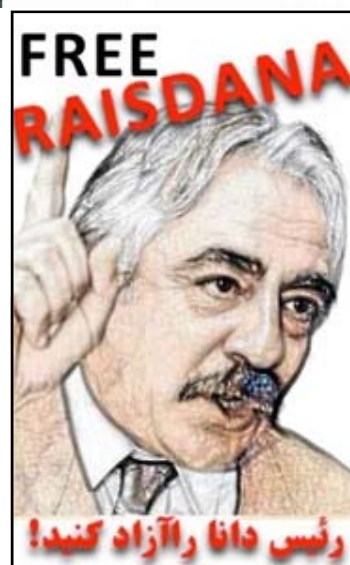
Manijeh Najm Araghi, the elected secretary of the board has been under litigation and sentenced under the same pretext of propaganda against the system. In her indictment also the mere membership in the Writers'

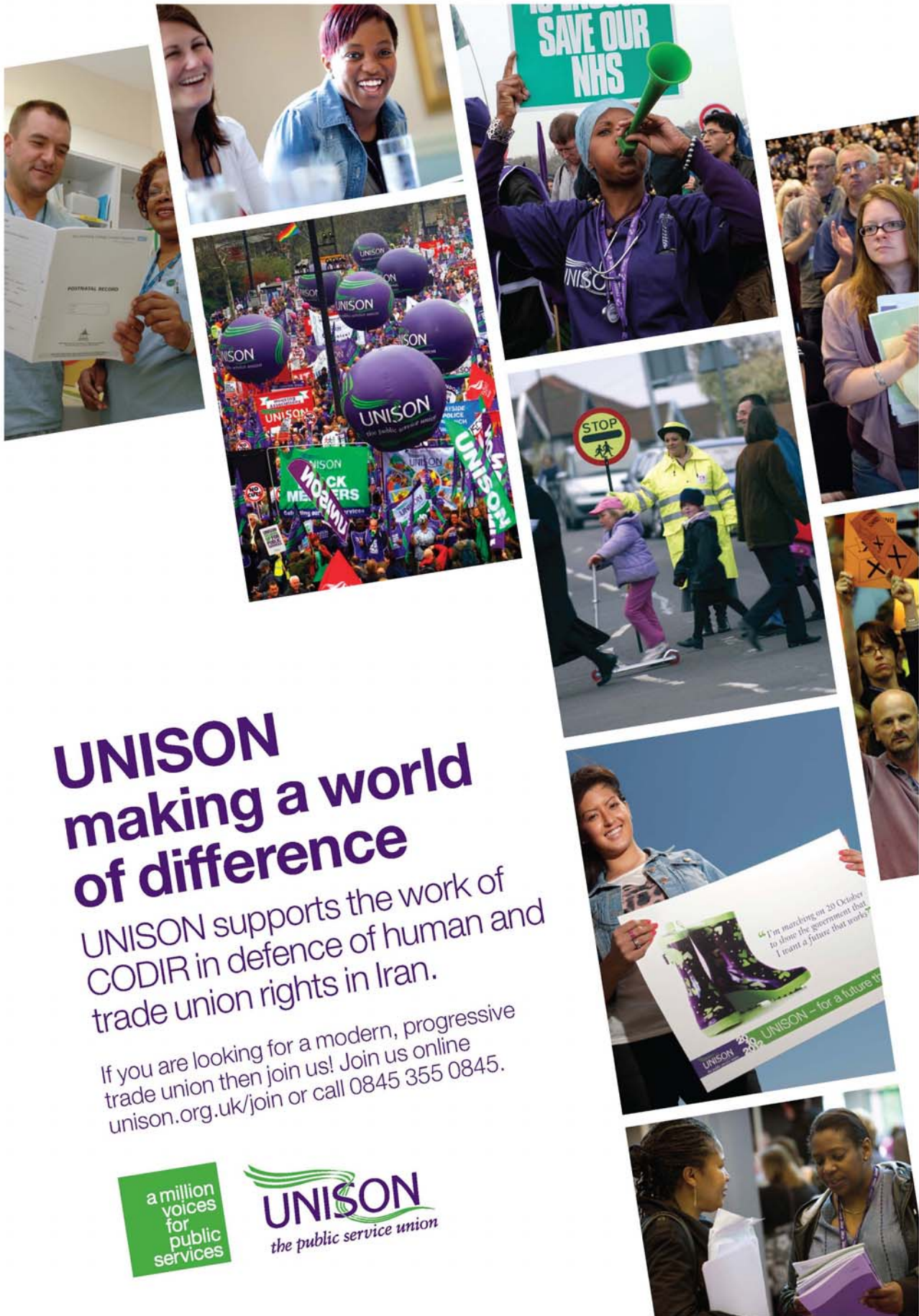
Association has been considered propaganda against the system resulting in sentencing on that basis. This is in spite of the fact that the secretary of the board has no role and involvement in the discussions, decisions, positions and communiques issued by the board as she is not a voting member. Her task is to just record those discussions and decisions without interfering in their content. For this very reason she has no responsibility for them logically or legally. This has been emphasised numerous times for different authorities.

In any case, given the number of cases against the members of the Association and other forms of coercion, it is clear that what is not tolerated is the Writers' Association as an organisation. The aim is to indirectly frustrate its activities in practice namely through coercion of its members.

This is exactly what we both protest and resist against.

Currently, Fariborz Raisdana and Manijeh Najm-Araghi are serving their "sentences" in ward 350 and women's ward in Evin prison respectively.





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