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International Solidarity with the Struggle for Peace, Human and Democratic Rights, and Social Justice in Iran!



Defend the rights of teachers in Iran

The National Education Union (NEU) champions everyone who works in education, and together we empower professionals to inspire generations of children and learners. We believe that the teaching profession must have: remuneration that is commensurate with the importance of the profession; good conditions of work; and professional autonomy. Attracting and retaining teachers, who in turn are accountable to their pupils, can only be achieved in a world that values the profession.

Today in Iran teachers are faced with threats against their pay and pay progression. They are faced with difficult working conditions, job insecurity and privatisation in education. Furthermore, there is little room for dissent and trade unions' voices are silenced. Nonetheless we stand in solidarity with the teachers of Iran. We continue to campaign for the release of Esmail Abdi, the imprisoned General Secretary of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association.

Only when operating in safe circumstances, with the freedom to question and explore, do our children grow. The same is true for teachers. Join us in our work to create this space for all, nationally and internationally.

In solidarity

Kevin Courtney *Mary W. Bousted*

Kevin Courtney and Mary Bousted
Joint General Secretaries, National Education Union

Editorial: Iran – Illusion and Reality

“Iran, promoter of democracy”, “Iran, the reasonable”, “Iran, the inclusive”...or so Iran’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Javad Zarif would have the world believe. In a recent interview during a visit to the US, Zarif bent over backwards attempting to portray the Iranian regime as a victim of US aggression and Arab inspired Islamist terrorism.

It is certainly true that Iran and the Iranian people have suffered and paid the price many times from US inspired aggression and destabilisation and are also undermined by US allies in the terrorist states of Saudi Arabia and Israel.

But this has nothing to do with Iran being some kind of anti-imperialist hub, or as the Iranian leadership seeks to claim, Iran being a beacon of democracy and progress. It is also true that many Islamist inspired terrorist groups, such as ISIS, see Iran as a threat. However, this too is not because of Iran’s alleged commitment to democracy and is principally based on theosophical and religious antagonisms.

For the Iranian leadership these myths are vital as it seeks to portray itself as a victim in the promotion of progressive values. They must not be allowed to get away with this falsehood!

As Iran Today has pointed out many times, the US does threaten Iran; moreover, the current US president continues the approach of his predecessor in banging the war drum. But this has much more to do with US strategic ambitions in the greater Middle East than any other factor. That is securing US interests through threats to Iran and the utilisation of its Israeli and Saudi allies.



The threat to Iran and the dangers it represents to world peace are not because of Iran’s’ commitment to democracy.

On the contrary, Iran’s recent presidential election was a fraud on a mass scale. There was no freedom of choice in selecting opposition candidates. Any secular or progressive candidates were banned. Turn out in the so called election was low in working class areas and in others polling was manipulated. Many who did participate were seeking to register a protest.

The “winner”, Hassan Rouhani is simultaneously a puppet of government/state hardliners and has also for many years been intimately involved in the execution and jailing of political opponents and activists. He dresses in liberal clothes but plays a crucial role in upholding the dictatorship. Another illusion!

This sham election was used as a diversion from the realities of life on a daily basis for the Iranian people. Trade unions continue to be oppressed and trade unionists imprisoned. Women, cultural and student activists are also attacked. The economy is collapsing, impoverishment is widespread and dissent growing. The national identity of minorities and the rights of ethnic groups are denied.

The Iranian leadership trades in illusions backed by repression, as does the US. The Iranian leadership seeks sympathy. It deserves none. However, neither should the US be allowed to threaten war on Iran masking its own wider economic and strategic aims and its political uncertainty at home.

The Iranian theocratic dictatorship in Tehran should be opposed by all progressives. Solidarity with the Iranian people and opposition to war must be maintained. These are no illusions they are imperatives in the struggle for world peace, progress in the Middle East and the end of dictatorship in Iran.

Only free and independent trade unions can fight for workers' rights in Iran

Interview with Kemal Özkan, Assistant General Secretary of IndustriALL Global Union



Kemal Özkan is known in the international trade union movement for his keen interest and leadership qualities when it comes to defending trade union rights in some very difficult situations. In recent years he has shown quite an interest in the development of independent trade unions in Iran. Earlier in August, Iran Today interviewed Kemal to find out how best to mobilise all relevant movers in the campaign for securing the effective operation of independent trade unions in Iran.

Iran Today (IT): How familiar is IndustriALL with the situation regarding the struggle of workers and employees in Iran for their basic rights and their daily livelihood?

KO: IndustriALL Global Union has been supporting the struggle of the working class and the free and democratic unions in Iran for many years. Our global organisation has stood in solidarity with jailed union leaders, sacked workers and workers attempting to organise and bargain collectively. We have met with representatives of international organisations to lobby on behalf of workers, and we push the multinational companies with whom we have relationships to ensure that their activities and supply chains in Iran do not include worker abuses.

IT: How do you keep informed about the situation of Iranian workers? Do you have contacts with the Iranian trade unions and workers' organisations?

KO: In October 2016 IndustriALL Global Union was immensely proud to welcome the Union of Metalworkers and Mechanics of Iran (UMMI) as our first affiliate from Iran. IndustriALL has trade union affiliates in over 140 countries and unions around the world follow UMMI action on our communications tools online and in print. UMMI representatives join IndustriALL meetings and activities, through which they present the situation in Iran for workers, and learn from other unions facing persecution around the world.

The UMMI regularly reports to IndustriALL and we stand in strong solidarity with our UMMI sisters and brothers, as well as workers' struggle elsewhere in Iran.

IT: Successive governments in Iran have demonstrated their complete animosity towards independent trade unions. This reflects their anti-democratic nature and also the fact that they are intent on operating an entirely free market economy. Their neoliberal economic outlook

supports a type of labour law that guarantees the creation of a cheap and flexible labour market. What is your experience of similar situations where grass root trade unions are trying to assert themselves in an atmosphere of intimidation?

KO: Independent, free and democratic trade unions throughout the world were established and built through struggle. Often unions needed to take illegal action before they could build power and change the laws. This is true of the iconic union movements in South Africa and Brazil for example. Strikes and struggle against persecution and complicit governments built our movement and IndustriALL stands shoulder to shoulder with workers everywhere in facing this ongoing challenge.

Iran has yet to ratify the core International Labour Organisation Conventions 87 and 98 on freedom of association and collective bargaining. UMMI was forced to operate underground for more than two decades, but since the negotiations between Khatami's government and the ILO in early 2000s, the trade unions have been able to work more openly. Although not officially recognized by the state or employers, UMMI represents the interests of a considerable number of workers in vehicle assembly, components factories, steel plants and detergent companies, despite dismissals and arrests.

Iran's is not the only government attempting to implement neoliberal policies in the world today. Our resistance will always fight back and fight forward in the defense of workers' interests.

IT: What leverage does IndustriALL have to exert pressure on the Iranian government to ensure implementation of the ILO fundamental conventions related to the rights of workers' organisations?

KO: IndustriALL is a campaigning organisation. We have many tools available. Our greatest resource is our members. Strong national unions regularly use their influence with their respective governments to take up issues abroad. We invest resources into making best use out of our positions in international organisations such as the ILO. We will support the Iranian workers for as long as it takes to establish the workplace freedoms needed in Iran.

IT: *Considering the track record of Iran's government in systematically violating the rights of working people, what do you think about the Islamic Republic of Iran's membership of the executive committee of the ILO?*

KO: The ILO is the only Agency of the United Nations that is charged with upholding global labour standards. It is therefore utterly contradictory to have a member of its Governing Body from the Iranian government. The ILO must remain true to its tripartite constitution, and its fundamental principles. We are sure that the ILO is pressuring the Iranian government in this regard. Of course the Iranian government cannot be a guardian of workers' freedoms around the world while the abuses continue at home.

IT: *The government of Hassan Rouhani is a strong advocate of neoliberal economics. Its key economic policies are focused on attracting foreign investment. The EU will be a major beneficiary of this policy. Is IndustriALL able to influence EU corporations, urging them to adhere to ILO conventions, when engaging in industrial activities in Iran?*

KO: It is the mission of IndustriALL to fight for another world. Clearly the Iranian government is joining the race to the bottom that sees governments around the world competing for foreign investment by making their workforce as vulnerable as possible. It is our job to use our industrial strength at other points of the global supply chain to support workers under attack. IndustriALL strategies on networking in multinational companies and across entire sectors are central to this. Much as mining companies extract minerals from the ground for export, IndustriALL exports worker solidarity and influence across borders. This is our daily job, and a large part of our affiliates' industrial strength lies in the EU countries.

IT: *Has IndustriALL Global Union organised any campaigns in solidarity with Iranian workers and trade unionists? If so, what is your evaluation of their progress or outcome?*

KO: Iran is not a major mining country, so we are even more outraged to see our sister and brother mineworkers killed at work again and again in Iranian mines.

One area of IndustriALL campaigning in support of workers in Iran has been our lobbying efforts calling on the Iranian government to ratify ILO Convention 176 on safety and health in mines. Repeated mining accidents have killed scores of miners. It is our firm conviction that every occupational accident is avoidable and no worker should be seriously hurt at work. Ratification and full implementation of ILO 176 would make mining safe for Iranian workers.

In 2013, 11 miners lost their lives in two separate mining accidents, and in 2009, 20 workers were killed in various



Dave Prentis, UNISON General secretary, and international guests at UNISON national conference in June, Brighton,

incidents. And at least 43 miners were killed and scores injured in a coalmine explosion on 3 May this year. The deadly blast took place as workers were changing shifts at the Zemestanyurt mine in Golestan, a province in northeastern Iran.

Again, we will not give up for as long as it takes with this campaign.

IT: *What could Iranian labour activists and global activists, such as CODIR, do to assist IndustriALL with solidarity campaigning in defence of the rights of the working people, workers, and trade unionists of Iran?*

KO: Get involved, organise, campaign. Labour activists everywhere can always do more at their workplace, in their community, and in their national and international trade union structures. Get active online as well so that workers elsewhere know about your activities and your members know what's happening abroad. Almost every day there is a new case of worker repression reported on the IndustriALL website. Your organisation can write to the company and authorities involved, as well as to the workers. Communication is vital and the IndustriALL website, social media and print magazines are a good vehicle with a wide reach in numerous languages.

IT: *For more than three decades, CODIR has been campaigning for the release of imprisoned trade union leaders and activists in Iran. It is important to widen this campaign globally. How can we work and cooperate more effectively with IndustriALL in order to extend our campaign for the release of these prisoners?*

KO: We are always ready to join forces with CODIR in these campaigns. There is no barrier to this and you are welcome any time at the IndustriALL headquarters to discuss and strategise. We look forward to increased cooperation.

IT: *Thank you for your time in giving us this interview.*

Theocracy Rules Over Poverty Stricken Nation

As part of the presidential election campaign, in May this year, the issue of poverty was central to the debate in Iran. Jane Green looks at the issues and the prospects for the Iranian people.

The opposition to President Hassan Rouhani were vocal during the campaign in criticising the performance of the government in addressing poverty, denouncing Rouhani's term of office (2013-2017) as the period when the rich became richer and poor poorer. Rouhani was equally adamant that the policy of following free market forces will have the necessary effect eventually, by attracting foreign investment, expanding the economy and creating jobs.

The facts certainly suggest that levels of poverty in the country are resulting in unprecedented levels of hardship, crime and anti-social behaviour. Drug addiction, prostitution, homicide, theft, embezzlement are at record levels. While the official rate of unemployment is quoted at 12.4%, unofficial estimates suggest that the real unemployment rate is in fact between 35 to 40% of those able to work. According to reliable estimates, at least 50% of university graduates are unemployed.

From 1962 to 1976, Iran's average economic growth was 10.5%. From the years 2005 to 2012, the average growth rate was 3%. The unemployment rate prior to the 1979 revolution was always quoted in single digits and after the revolution has always been double-digit.

In 1997 Mohammad Khatami was elected as President on a limited reform programme. Khatami promised better governance and an end to corruption. While Khatami's reforms did have some impact by June 2005, at the end of his 2nd term of office, the poverty level in the country was still at 10.5%, though this



was the lowest level in the period since 1979 revolution.

The hard line Ahmadinejad governments of 2005- 2013, declared themselves to be in favour of social justice. However, the implementation of a wide ranging programme of austerity measures led to such a catastrophic situation that, at the end of Ahmadinejad's second term of office in June 2013, the number of the households below the poverty line in urban areas stood at 33.4% and in rural areas at 40.1%.

According to the Ministry of Labour, over the past four years, more than 60 billion dollars have been spent on poor Iranian households but there remains a dramatic gap. In this period, the urban poverty line was 31% and in the rural areas stood at 30.8%. The Rouhani government has followed economic policies which have not departed significantly from his predecessor. As a result, poverty remains a key problem in a resource rich nation.

As a country with massive oil and gas reserves Iran should not be a nation in which poverty is an issue. However due to the mismanagement of the economy and unbelievable levels of corruption in the country, high indexes of deprivation have been the order of the day.

Even influential figures within the theocratic regime have described the spread of poverty in the country as "catastrophic". Officially the regime admits to 12 million people living under the absolute poverty line and 25 to 39 million are under the relative poverty threshold. This is in a country with the fourth largest oil reserves in the world, accounting for 9.3% of existing oil reserves, while the largest part of the world's gas reserves at 18.2% are located in Iran.

The pitch of Rouhani in the election campaign was to appeal for four more years in which to see through reforms, which would result in significant economic improvements. The basis of this appeal was the lifting of international sanctions as a result of the nuclear deal with Western nations.

There is no doubt that sanctions have had a crippling impact upon the economic life of the nation and, in particular, Iranian workers. The international nuclear deal was just concluded towards the end of Barack Obama's term as President. Four years under Rouhani with Barack Obama in the White House did not have a positive impact upon the lives of ordinary Iranians. There is no reason to think, that with Donald Trump as US President, that situation is likely to improve.

Kurdistan, Iran - the Clouds of Conflict are Gathering!

Following years of relative calm, not to be confused with any sense of harmony or stability, in Iranian Kurdistan, storm clouds appear once more on the horizon, as news of renewed clashes between the Tehran regime's forces and followers of Kurdish political factions has emerged from the area over recent months.

In June, fierce clashes took place between the Sepah-e Pasdaran (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps) and Komala peshmergas in and around the city of Sanandaj in Kurdistan, in which several people were killed. There are also reports that the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI), arguably the foremost political faction representing the Kurds of Iran, has been seriously contemplating a return to armed struggle, which would effectively mark the resumption of a conflict halted over twenty years ago.

Clashes appear to have intensified against the backdrop of hostilities and unrest in the wider Middle East, which have drawn in the Kurds and the various political organisations that represent them. Most notably the implosion of Syria with the onset of the civil war there; Iraq in the decade beforehand; and in response to the rapid emergence and expansion of Daesh and the existential threat this posed to the Kurdish population. The emboldening of several of the Kurdish factions during this time and the role Iran has played as a principal party to these conflicts have thrown the issues in relation to Iranian Kurdistan into stark relief, bringing the accompanying simmering tensions to a crescendo.

More recently, other highly combustible factors that need to be considered include the fallout from the unilateral step taken by Masoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, in calling a referendum on the independence and secession of Iraqi Kurdistan, scheduled to take place on 25th September. Meanwhile, in Syria, there remains the spectre of the dubious proxy role played by YPG units, the US' only 'boots on the ground'. Their increasingly vocal calls for their US backers to remain, as their guarantors, upon cessation of the conflict poses very real issues for the longer term territorial integrity of the country.



The legitimate grievances of the Kurds of Iran, and the conflict that has arisen as a result, stem from their appalling treatment at the hands of the state throughout Iran's contemporary history, both prior and subsequent to the 1979 Revolution.

Over the last seventy years, ever since the bright but short-lived Mahabad Republic, the leaders of the Kurds in Iran have consistently declared their struggle as the achieving of the "national rights of the Kurdish people within a federal and democratic Iran", a slogan that is clearly printed on the forefront of "Kurdistan", the central organ of the KDPI.

The apparent aim of the theocratic regime throughout its near four-decade-long reign has been to smash and violently repress the manifold peoples of Iran in their legitimate pursuit of their national and democratic rights. Nearly forty years of neglect of and indifference to the plight and real concerns of many of Iran's national minorities is reflected in ever-worsening living conditions, marginalisation and a tangible sense of alienation to the diktats of Tehran. This is starkly illustrated in the Kurdish areas of Iran, comparatively poorer and less developed than other areas of the country, with an economy and infrastructure still heavily reliant on agriculture, and with significantly higher rates of poverty, illiteracy, ill-health and early mortality.

Iran is a rich mosaic of peoples, languages and customs, as intricately interwoven as the patterns on the carpets and kilims for which it is famous. It has a long history of cultural diversity, its various peoples living alongside one another and finding common purpose for century upon century.

Indeed, an Iran which truly embodied the aspirations of its many constituent peoples, forging ahead together, united in common purpose within the framework of a democratic and federal model, would represent a shining beacon to a region beset with the tragedy of ethnic and sectarian strife.

However, for as long as the clerical regime remains impervious to this rationale and the wholly legitimate concerns and grievances of the Kurds, along with other national minorities, then the potential instead remains, heartbreakingly, for Iran to follow its neighbours into the abyss.

By Rouzhin Edalatkhah

Rouhani – A safe pair of hands?

The presidential elections in Iran on 19th May saw the re-election of President Hassan Rouhani for a second term in office. As was widely expected by most Iranian observers, this was the most convenient outcome for the theocratic regime in Tehran. Jane Green considers the implications of the election outcome for the Iranian people.

The inauguration of President Hassan Rouhani, for a second term of office on 5th August, was presented to the world as a victory for democracy in Iran. Official figures suggested that 92 nations were represented at the ceremony. The Iranian regime has been quick to latch onto this as proving its legitimacy, though those delegates attending were relatively minor officials in most cases.

Under the Iranian presidential system, only the powerful Guardian Council, in the firm grip of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, can approve candidates for any political office. This ensures that the ruling theocracy have total control over the 'democratic' process.

Heralded as a reformer by certain sections of the Western press, Rouhani has spent four years in office without doing a thing to improve the human rights record of the Iranian regime. He has done nothing to support the development of trade unions or advance the position of women in Iranian society. His neo-liberal economic policies have seen astronomic inflation and soaring unemployment.

Rouhani secured a further four years in office, standing as the man who had delivered an end to international sanctions through the deal with the United States and European Union. The deal, whereby international sanctions will be softened in exchange for Iran accepting strict controls on its nuclear energy programme, was barely bedded in when the US electorate returned Donald Trump as president.

Trump has been a vociferous opponent of the deal with Iran. In spite of his 'put America first' policy, Trump has actively engaged in major foreign policy controversies, with airstrikes on Syria, bombing Afghanistan and the ramping up of tensions with North Korea.

On 21st May Donald Trump delivered what was billed as a "speech to the Muslim world" from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on his first international trip as president. In a speech that pitched the fight against terrorism as a



struggle between good and evil, Trump played to the Saudi gallery and cast Iran as the regional bad guy.

Trump accused Tehran of giving terrorists "safe harbour, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment" before going on to suggest that the Iranian people "have endured hardship and despair under their leaders' reckless pursuit of conflict and terror."

Trump however is clearly shedding crocodile tears over the fate of the Iranian people. Trump is on record as saying that the nuclear deal, negotiated before he came to office, is too soft on Iran. Any change he initiates is unlikely to be in the direction of improving the lot of the ordinary people of Iran.

Only three weeks after Trump's Riyadh speech, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, threw more fuel on the fire by explicitly calling for regime change in Iran, stating that the US would "work toward support of those elements inside of Iran that would lead to a peaceful transition of that government. Those elements are there, certainly as we know."

There is no doubt that the Iranian regime is deeply unpopular. President Hassan Rouhani is clinging to the hope that the nuclear deal can be salvaged and a less onerous sanctions regime can help reboot the economy. His recent re-election campaign was largely based around needing another four years to finish what he had started. In the eyes of many Iranian people, this simply means four more years of poverty and lack of democratic rights, hardly a prospect to be welcomed.

In order to create the illusion of a contest in the presidential election, the Guardian Council fielded a rival candidate in the shape of Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, well known for his part in the mass execution of around 5000 political prisoners during the autumn of 1988. Raisi is regarded by many as a likely successor to Khamenei, though he lacks political experience at executive level. The regime was aware however that Raisi's election could weaken Iran's position as far as the foreign policy challenges confronting the regime are concerned. There are a number of court cases, lodged internationally relating to the massacre in 1988, outstanding against Raisi, potentially limiting his ability to travel abroad.

Rouhani was, in effect, the only candidate worthy of consideration by the regime, based on the fact that the Iranian leadership would wish to continue the normalisation of

diplomatic relations and cooperation with the EU and US. The main concern of the regime has been to see the lifting of financial and economic sanctions and thus the removal of the immediate threat to its survival. A Rouhani administration was seen as a grouping of mainly able technocrats, many educated in the UK and US, who are best placed to oversee this process of detente.

In the absence of any opposition political parties or trade unions, which are prohibited by the Islamist regime, Rouhani's neoliberal programme was neither scrutinised nor exposed. His reformist sounding rhetoric was given sufficient airing to attract voters opposed to the hard-line fundamentalism of Raisi. However, based on a statistical analysis of the election results constituency by constituency, polling stations in working class districts were without exception very quiet on 19th May. Many ordinary Iranians mostly omitted to cast their votes in an election the outcome of which was clearly foreseeable and thus neither of relevance nor interest to them.

There is certainly little hope in prospect for the Iranian people from the election outcome. Negotiations with the government have been ongoing for some time in order to set a national minimum wage, based upon an agreed basket of goods and services. Over the last year the cost of the basket of goods and services that could provide an acceptable living standard for workers has, according to the National Statistical Centre, risen from \$863 to \$924 monthly.

The government committee setting the minimum wage in March determined the rate for the current financial year at \$287, based on the argument that the employers and the government were not prepared to accept an increase of more than 14.5% on the previous year's figure.

In its effort to shackle the rights of workers the government has tried to amend the labour law. The main aim is to make it easier for employers to hire and fire employees. The regime has also been trying to open the labour market to foreign capital. They argue that the Iranian worker is educated, skilled and the cheapest in comparison with similar countries.

Since his election to the presidency in June 2013 Hassan Rouhani's government has attempted to persuade the parliament to agree to change the law. Mass demonstrations outside parliament on 15th

November last year put pressure on it to send back the proposed legislation to the government. However, with the outcome of the recent presidential election, there can be little doubt that the government will once again try to reverse one of the few legal protections afforded to Iranian workers.

International factors no doubt played some part in determining the

outcome of elections in Iran. Rouhani used the threat of external action or sanctions to try and galvanise the support of the population. It may be however, that internal factors are more significant in the coming months, as protests against the ongoing lack of human and democratic rights continue to be a feature of Iranian politics following the election outcome. Whatever the attitude of the West, and the United States in particular, to the regime in Tehran, the fate of Iran should be in the hands of no-one other than the Iranian people themselves, free from external interference.



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Is Iran next on Trump's 'Regime Change' agenda?



The 'putting America first' policy of the Trump administration in the United States does not appear to have limited the desire of the US to intervene when it sees fit. Investigating for *Iran Today*, Jamshid Ahmadi, CODIR's Assistant General Secretary, explains that in relation to Iran, President Trump has been a vociferous opponent of the 5+1 nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), made under the Obama administration. The deal agreed to lift a range of sanctions imposed on Iran in exchange for Iran scaling down its nuclear energy programme.

A vote in Congress at the end of July this year, aimed at re-imposing sanctions upon the Iranian regime, was carried by 419-3 votes. The House bill would block the assets of any individual who works with Iran on its ballistic missile programme or sells it arms. The bill also sanctions anyone associated with Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or anyone whom the United States determines is complicit in Iranian human rights violations.

Robert Malley, a former White House coordinator for the Middle East under Obama, claims that the deal "is counter-productive because it comes in the context of an administration that has made its hostile intentions vis-a-vis Iran and the JCPOA clear while refusing to engage Tehran diplomatically."

US pressure on the regime in Iran is aimed primarily at constraining the influence of the Islamic Republic in the Middle East and bolstering support for the United States' key regional allies, Saudi Arabia and Israel. Recent reports suggest that intense lobbying by the Saudi and Israeli governments has reinforced the Trump administration's anti-Iran tendencies.

Both governments are concerned about Tehran's extensive involvement in Syria and Iraq and its support for Hamas and Hezbollah. As a result, they argue, Iran is gaining ever more influence in the Middle East. To stop Iran, sanctions have to be reinforced, not lifted.

On 21st May 2017 Donald Trump delivered his infamous "speech to the Muslim world" from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in which he played to the host gallery and cast Iran as the regional bad guy.

Only three weeks later, US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, threw more fuel on the fire when he restated US antipathy towards Iran and threatened taking "Action to respond to Iran's hegemony [and that] additional sanctions actions have been put in place against individuals and others."

More alarmingly Tillerson went on to explicitly call for regime change in Iran, stating:

"Our policy towards Iran is to push back on this hegemony, contain their ability to develop obviously nuclear weapons, and to work towards support of those elements inside Iran that would lead to a peaceful transition of that government. Those elements are there, certainly as we know."

Tillerson's stance potentially puts Iran in the position of becoming another Syria, with the West justifying intervention to support 'democratic forces' in order to destabilise the regime.

It is not implausible to anticipate a scenario in which some manufactured 'Free Iranian Army' could become the conduit for Western funding and arms, to attempt to bring down the present regime, while the real opposition inside Iran would find themselves having to fight on two fronts. It may sound far-fetched but the so-called Free Syrian Army could be the template.

Whatever method is finally decided upon, the main objective of US policy is to weaken Iran as a force in the Middle East, effectively bolstering the position of Saudi Arabia in the Muslim world and ensuring that the Saudis, along with Israel, remain the eyes and ears of the US in the region.

As NATO-led Western interventions in Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq and Syria have shown, US policy to date has been nothing more than a recipe for destabilisation and uncertainty in the region. The political vacuum created by US interventions has been the breeding ground for the development of the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Isis and various warring militia.

There is no doubt that the present regime in Iran is impli-

cated in supporting a range of forces including Hezbollah, the Popular Mobilisation Front in Syria and Houthi rebels in Yemen. The proxy battles in the region are being fought between the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the self-styled mainstay of Shi'a Islam, and the dictatorship in Saudi Arabia as the self-styled saviours of Sunni Islam.

The current crisis in the Gulf, centred on sanctions imposed on Qatar by the Saudi government and other Gulf states, is a further extension of the proxy war in the region. At a recent meeting of the foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt, they expressed their readiness for dialogue with Qatar if it "confirmed the cancellation of terrorism support." The phrasing was widely read as code for cutting ties with Iran, with whom Qatar shares a major gas field.

When Islamic State claimed the terrorist attack in Tehran on 7th June, which killed twelve people, Iran's Revolutionary Guards were quick to lay the blame on Saudi Arabia. Coming so close to the Trump speech in Riyadh, it was clearly timed to increase regional tension.

From the point of view of human rights and democracy, however, it is only possible to take a position of a plague on both the Iranian and Saudi houses. Neither the theocratic dictatorship of Iran nor the Saudi regime is acting in the interests of their own people or those of the wider region.

The US State Department has recently released a long-awaited "retrospective" volume of documents on the 1953 coup in Iran, which led to the overthrow of Iran's Prime Minister, Mohammad Mosaddeq. For decades, neither the US nor the British governments would acknowledge their part in Mosaddeq's overthrow. Until now this has been justified on various spurious grounds including pro-

tecting intelligence sources and methods, bowing to British government requests and, more recently, avoiding stirring up Iranian hard-line elements who might seek to undercut the nuclear deal Iran signed with the United States and other P5+1 members in 2015.

The current document release confirms what Iranian

democrats have known for decades - that the US and British intelligence services have form when it comes to interfering in the internal affairs of Iran. The recent statements of both the US president and the secretary of state indicate that history may be in danger of repeating itself.

Those fighting for peace, democracy and human rights inside Iran undoubtedly need our support. Through CODIR and other international bodies we will continue to give that support. However, like the Iranian people, we must remain vigilant against outside interference and be prepared to support the real opposition in Iran, not the opposition of Donald Trump's choosing.



**Greetings to our sister
trade unions:
Campaigning for
trade union,
human and democratic
rights in IRAN**

IRANIAN SPORTSWOMEN CONFRONT THE REGIME IN THEIR DETERMINATION TO SUCCEED

Women's sport is gaining in popularity worldwide and Iran is no exception. But Iranian women have to face a problem that their sisters elsewhere do not have to contend with - a theocratic regime which believes that women should be in the home bringing up a family rather than on the sports field. Yet the regime too has a problem: if it wants to be seen as progressive in the eyes of the world, it has to appear to encourage the women who through their sporting prowess will bring the country the kudos the government desperately seeks. Linda Sherwood reports for *Iran Today* :

The women's national football team has found itself in hot water more than once. Between 2007 and 2012 the team was banned by FIFA because the players were forced to wear the hijab. Then there have been rumours that eight of the squad were awaiting sex change operations. More recently top player, Shiva Amini has been banned for after photographs of an exhibition match in Zurich which included male players were posted on Instagram showing her wearing shorts and playing without a veil.

In February, Dorsa Derakhshani, an 18-year-old chess grandmaster, was dismissed from the Iranian national chess team after competing in an international tournament without a hijab. She was said to have 'harmed Iran's national interest'.

Five billiard players have been banned from playing for the national team for a year for allegedly violating the Islamic code of conduct during a tournament in China. The nature of the 'violations' has not been disclosed but it is understood to be connected to the dress code. Women were not allowed to compete in the first Tehran marathon held in April of this year, although several had registered on the understanding that they would be able to run if suitably clothed. However, the situation became unclear and all female applicants were refused. After being told that they could only take part in a '10 km ladies' fun run', a number of women decided to run their own marathon in a women's park. Despite the rebuff, the women's reaction was very positive. Tara Kenkhuis, originally from the Netherlands said "It was really inspiring for me to see the smiles upon the faces of the Iranian women there who saw all of us foreigners coming (to Tehran) just for this run."

Restrictions on players are not however just a matter of dress: earlier this year after national captain



Niloufar Ardalan's husband refused to give her permission for the passport she needed to fly with the team to Mexico, she was obliged to go as far as the Court of Appeal to seek judicial authorisation which was finally granted. Niloufar said that she wished the authorities would create measures that would allow female athletes to defend their rights in such situations, adding that as a Muslim woman she wanted to work for her country's flag to be raised at the games, rather than simply travelling for leisure and fun. The fact that Iran's reputation on the world sporting scene is so important to the regime may be the reason the judge took the decision. Whatever the reason, perhaps it will set a precedent and lead to the abolition of this discriminatory law .

Government restrictions not only affect players but also spectators. Jafar Panahi's 2006 film 'Offside' told the story of girls trying to get into stadiums to watch men's football matches. Eleven years on and nothing has changed. In February 2017 women were barred as they tried to enter Azadi Stadium. It seems the authorities believe that at football matches men often behave badly - getting into fights and swearing a lot — and some clerics say that boys and girls might even get together and exchange phone numbers ...

Two years ago Ghoncheh Ghavami, a British-Iranian citizen, was sentenced to a year in jail after attempting to watch a men's volleyball match. She had attended the match carrying a banner protesting against the ban on women and was charged with propaganda against the state. She was released only after Amnesty International declared her a prisoner of conscience.

Despite the opposition from the regime, Iranian women are not giving up. Who would have thought that Iran could

produce a world champion kickboxer? Shabnam Shahrokhi was vice world champion in 2015 and 2016.

Until last year women in Iran were prevented from riding motorcycles. They are still not allowed in the street but there are specially constructed tracks not far from Tehran where women can practise and compete and where 27 year-old Behnaz Shafiei, a pioneer of women's motor cycling, recently managed a 15 metre jump. Behnaz has said she hopes the next step will be permission for women to ride on the road.

Iran's population is young (over 50% is under 30) so it is natural that more and more young women are becoming involved in sport. For how long will these young women put up with the petty regulations that restrict Iranian women in their sporting activities?

What is sure is that with support from their sporting sisters throughout the world, their determination will see them through and their persistence will surely lead to a softening of the regime's harsh restrictions as Iran's women become more visible on the global sporting scene.

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Silly Season in the Iranian Parliament



The hypocrisy of the theocratic regime has once again been brought under the spotlight following the behaviour of certain deputies on the occasion of the visit by EU representative Federica Mogherini. Ms Mogherini, who was in Tehran for the second term inauguration of President Hassan Rouhani, looked bewildered when she found herself surrounded by male members of parliament - some in suits, others in clerical dress - looking to take selfies with her.

The official press was not amused: the ultra-right Keyhan newspaper said "Those who are supposed to defend the rights of the nation against the enemy queue up to snap photos in a humiliating way with the violators".

The deputies were subjected to condemnation on social media, one post even comparing the event to the story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

Defending their actions, reformist MP Ahmad Mazani, one of the men who appeared to ask for a photograph with Ms Mogherini, said on Twitter that they had not been allowed to greet her during the parliamentary session hence the reason for their eagerness to approach her afterwards.

However, under the the hashtag "selfie of shame," the Fars news agency tweeted

"Major reactions to weird behaviour unworthy of MPs, members of the Omid faction, upon meeting Mogherini", referring to a reformist group of Iranian MPs.

Islam or no Islam, the opportunity to fraternise with Satan – a white, western woman - seems too good to miss for some parliamentarians!

RELEASE ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS NOW!

***CODIR Calls for the
Immediate Release of Reza
Shahabi!***

Reza Shahabi, a well respected member of the Union of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) executive committee, has been re-arrested by the security forces in Iran. Reza Shahabi was originally arrested in June 2010 and sentenced to five years imprisonment for engaging in legitimate trade union activities.

Reza Shahabi sustained serious injuries to his back and neck as a result of violence meted out by the security forces during his arrest and long intolerable interrogations. On three occasions, he resorted to hunger strike after being refused specialist medical care outside prison. He was finally moved to hospital as a result of his serious medical conditions, compounded by the hunger strikes, and underwent two operations on his back and neck.

Considering his original sentence and the fact that he had spent months on medical leave for treatment, which should have been seen as running concurrently with the sentence, Shahabi's time should have been deemed to be served. He should therefore have been due for release. However, he was recently summoned to report back to the prison authorities. The SWTSBC and Shahabi's family had assumed that this was for him to be officially notified of his release. Instead he was re-arrested.

According to the statement of the prosecutor's office, made out to Reza Shahabi's wife, his imprisonment must continue until 8th January 2019.

Despite the fact that medical leave is considered as part of the prison term, the prosecutor's office has recorded the five months of Shahabi's medical leave as absence without prior authorisation, even though it had previously been approved by the coroner's office, responsible for the granting of such leave in Iran. In addition, while serving his prison sentence, a new case was filed against him and the court sentenced Shahabi to another one year in jail, to run immediately consecutive to the first term. Hence the claim that Shahabi has to remain in prison for



another year and five months until 8th January 2019.

The sequence of events as outlined in a statement by the SWTSBC indicates that the authorities never had any real intention of releasing Shahabi. The Tehran Prosecutor apparently insisted on Shahabi's return, despite the official coroner's approval of his remaining on medical leave for the rest of his prison term. When Shahabi returned to Rajai Shahr Prison on the 8th August, the prison authorities told him that "your release letter is in your files. Come back to the prison tomorrow morning and collect your personal belongings".

On the morning of 9th August, Shahabi, along with his wife and a member of the SWTSBC, went to Rajai Shahr Prison to collect his belongings. Although he himself witnessed the letter of his release, dated 15 September 2015, he was taken into the prison on the premise that he had been on an unapproved absence since 2014.

The re-arrest of Reza Shahabi is the latest in a long line of attempts by the Iranian regime to intimidate trade union activists. Other examples include the ongoing detentions of Ismail Abdi and Mohsen Omrani of the Iranian Teachers Trade Association. Shahpour Ehsanirad, a member of the Iranian Workers' Free Trade Union, was recently sentenced to the medieval punishment of lashing. The intensification of pressure on political prisoners in Gohardasht has led 12 of them to begin a hunger strike. These actions are all testament to the intensified atmosphere of repression and intimidation imposed by the regime.

The SWTSBC has condemned the actions of the Prosecutor in returning Reza Shahabi to prison and demands his unconditional release, together with the revocation of the prison sentences of Ebrahim Madadi and Davoud Razavi, the other two other members of the Executive Committee of the syndicate and other detained worker and teachers.

CODIR calls for an end to all repressive measures taken by the theocratic regime in Iran against independent trade unions in Iran and their members. CODIR further calls on the Iranian authorities to sign and implement ILO Conventions 87 and 98, which concern the freedom of workers to join trade unions of their choice and engage in trade union activities respectively.

UNITE the Union supports the campaign for peace, trade union rights and human and democratic rights in Iran.

UNITE stands in solidarity with the independent trade unions in Iran that are working in difficult conditions to demand that the Iranian authorities implement ILO Conventions 87 and 98 guaranteeing freedom to belong to a trade union and the right to collective bargaining.



FREE Esmail Abdi



Sign the international petition to

FREE ESMAIL ABDI

www.nasuwt.org.uk/iran

July 2014 – Esmail Abdi, a leader of the Iranian Tehran Teacher Trade Association, was arrested for trade union activities and to prevent his participation at the World Congress of Education International (EI) in Canada. The NASUWT secured the adoption by the EI Congress of an Emergency Resolution condemning the arrest.

In October 2016 – Esmail was sentenced to six years in prison on false charges. On 30 April 2017, Esmail began a hunger strike in protest at the continued repression of teachers and human rights defenders. In June 2017 Esmail was released on bail, but he and his family continued to be harassed. One month later, Esmail was arrested again following a further unjustified crackdown against trade unionists by Iranian government forces.

Freedom for imprisoned trade unionists and for those committed to education, human rights, equality, democracy, justice and peace

The NASUWT – The Teachers' Union joins with Education International, Amnesty International and LabourStart in condemning the treatment of Esmail Abdi.

The NASUWT stands with the international community in campaigning for the Iranian government to lift all sanctions against trade unionists and to respect fundamental human and trade union rights and freedoms.



NASUWT
The Teachers' Union



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale