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No War on Iran!



Yes to the struggle for human and democratic rights... No to war!

The threat of a new war in the Persian Gulf can only exacerbate the dire conditions under which most Iranian people live. The NEU supports Iranian trades unionists in their unequivocal rejection of war under any pretext and in their call for an end to all sanctions.

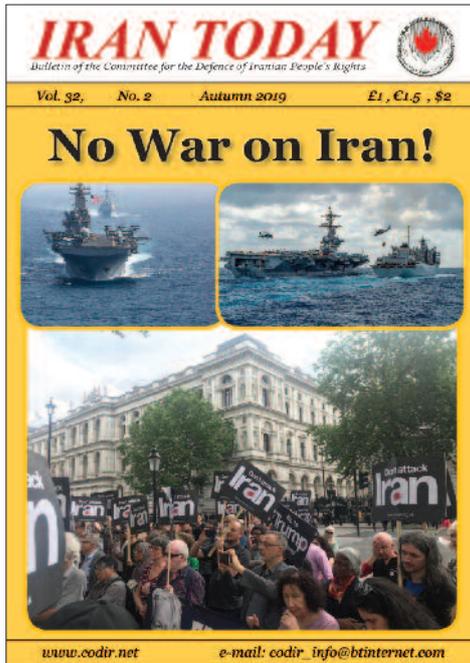
We also demand the immediate release of the Iranian teachers' leader Esmail Abdi and an end to the persecution of Iranian educators and their unions by the Iranian government.

Kevin Courtney Mary W. Boustead.

Kevin Courtney and Dr Mary Boustead
Joint General Secretaries, National Education Union



Opposing the US war is a priority



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Committee for the Defence of
Iranian People's Rights

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WITHIN THE Ruling elite of the Islamic Republic of Iran there are many competing factions and views on how to tackle the economic, social, cultural and political crisis in all levels of society. The elites hold on power is fragile relying on widespread oppression, in addition, there are deep divisions in the leadership on how to stand up to the escalating military and economic threats from the United States and supported by the UK. Currently tit for tat quasi-military manoeuvres impose on the world, what is in effect an economic blockade of Iran. The tensions and dangers of this situation are self-evident.

Currently in British politics the issue of Brexit is paramount, with many shades of opinion on how the issue will be resolved. However, as this matter unfolds the question of peace or war in the Middle East should not be overlooked. Today the overriding issue in world politics is the potential catastrophe of a war on Iran and the probability that such a war would engulf the entire planet.

US President Trump led the way by his unilateral decision to withdraw from the international nuclear deal with Iran known as the JCPOA. He has also threatened to "end Iran", or "obliterate", the country of over 83,000,000 people. In response the theocratic leadership in Iran has increased the nations development of enriched nuclear fuel.

In Britain there has been a mixed response to the growing crisis, with the government and military establishment supporting Trumps military escalation through the deployment in the Persian Gulf of advanced weaponry, including WMD and specialist forces.

On the other hand, the UK along with other West European countries has opposed Trumps decision to end support for the JCPOA. However, the US has extended its economic boycott of Iran to include any Western companies which seek to trade to with Iran in order to aggravate the economic crisis and the further impoverishment of the people.

It is this cocktail of response and counter response which produces a clear and present danger to World peace.

In this dangerous mix it should be made clear however, that Iran's enrichment of uranium does not give it access to nuclear weapons as many in the American administration would have us believe.

The Iranian leadership is desperately seeking the means to broaden its energy resources and under international law, including the nuclear non-proliferation agreements and the JCPOA itself, it is allowed to do so. Furthermore, the international technical consensus has concluded that the Iranian regime is far away from achieving the capacity to build and launch nuclear weapons.

But the Iranian government above all is desperate as it seeks to face down its population as the acute economic crisis brought about by its own mismanagement of the economy and its reliance on the suppression of workers' rights and liberties, is reinforced by decades of US enforced economic sanctions.

The government in Tehran has also been desperate to preserve the nuclear deal in the hope that it could provide an economic lifeline as the pressures from below and the resistance of its population continues to rise.

In this crisis, as much as the US would like to see regime change in Iran, it realises that despite Iran's internal tensions, the country would not be a military pushover. Military action, either by design or accident would make recent US led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq seem quiet by comparison. Moreover, a war against Iran in the Persian Gulf could escalate very quickly into an economic and military conflict of global proportions.

The US leadership and the Iranian dictatorship are in their own ways complicit in creating this threat of World war. A danger which would threaten to overshadow all domestic political concerns.

CODIR opposes any US attempt to manipulate the situation for regime change in Iran, which contravene the UN Charter and will be disastrous for the people in Iran and the region. It believes that it is solely the right of the Iranian people to determine the future of their country.

The US should end its aggression against Iran. In Britain we should demand and give full support to the Iranian people in their struggle for democracy and human rights. An end to warmongering and an increase in solidarity with Iran's workers, women's organisations and students would provide a firm basis for peace in the Gulf and reverse the threat of World war.



Hawks head the drive to war

HAWKS IN the United States administration have stepped up their pressure upon Iran by imposing sanctions on Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, recently. Jane Green assesses the latest developments in the growing stand-off between the US and Iran.

The detention of an Iranian oil tanker off the coast of Gibraltar, by the UK military in July, was part of a pattern of provocation by the West aimed at preparing the ground for military action against Iran. A contingent of 30 Royal Marines were deployed to impound the oil tanker *Grace 1* which contained 2m barrels of Iranian oil, bound for the Banyas refinery in Syria.

British sources have said the tanker is likely to remain impounded for several weeks. In response, Mohsen Rezaei, a former leader of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, said that the Islamic Republic should consider seizing a British oil tanker, an action which happened later in the month.

The actions follow a period when US President, Donald Trump, has continued to ramp up rhetoric against Iran, stoking further the threat of another Middle East war. Trump claims that in June he called off air strikes against Iran at the last minute, after being told of the potential death toll of

up 150 innocent Iranians. The threatened strikes were in response to Iran shooting down an unmanned US spy drone, which had 'strayed' into Iranian air space.

The reality is that Trump is responding to a crisis largely of his own making. In pulling the US out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) last year, the Iran nuclear deal signed in 2015, Trump triggered increased tensions with Iran. The renewed sanctions as a result have upped the pressure upon the Iranian economy, given the hardliners in the Islamic Republic greater prominence and squeezed the living standards of ordinary Iranians to breaking point.

Recent reports indicate that US retaliation has taken the form of cyber-attacks upon Iranian weapons systems. US officials claim that the cyber-attacks, part of a contingency plan developed over weeks amid escalating tensions, have disabled the Iranian computer systems that control its rocket and missile launchers.

White House hawks including National Security Adviser, John Bolton, and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, have argued for military strikes against Iran. The attacks upon oil tankers in the Persian Gulf in May, for which Iran was blamed, appear to be the first steps in a pattern of provocation in which Iran is accused of actions which the US has to then address, in order to protect its 'vital interests'.

In response to the UK intervention to impound the Iranian oil tanker for example, Bolton tweeted,

"Excellent news: UK has detained the supertanker *Grace 1* laden with oil bound for Syria in violation of EU sanctions. America and our allies will continue to

prevent regimes in Tehran and Damascus from profiting off this illicit trade."

Obviously, the current situation is unsustainable for long and the leaders of the Iranian regime are counter threatening the US and Europe that they will fully withdraw from JCPOA, accelerate uranium enrichment, and further inflame the tensions in the region.

On 7th July Iran announced that it will produce uranium at 5% enrichment, exceeding the limit set in the JCPOA signed in 2015. In many respects the increase is a symbolic gesture, although a provocative one. Increasing the uranium enrichment from the 3.67% limit set by the JCPOA to 5% gives Iran no real advantage while representing a dangerous and regressive diplomatic stance, which has been quickly exploited by the US and Trump himself.

While the United States has clearly orchestrated the current situation by pulling out of the JCPOA, the actions of the Iranian regime will create more unfavourable conditions for the reducing of tension, potentially weakening the position of the European signatories to the JCPOA who are currently attempting to save the agreement.

In the short term however, the priority remains to stop the war and organise to expose the real designs of the Trump administration. The trade union, labour and peace movements around the world are already well aware of the dangers of a further conflagration in the Middle East, not just for the people of Iran, but for the whole world. They must continue to act in support of the Iranian people and expose the dangers of tensions escalating further.



- **UNISON North West supports the struggle of the Iranian people for peace, human and democratic rights and social justice.**
- **We support the struggle of Iranian workers for the removal of sanctions, better working conditions, a living wage and trade union rights.**
- **The recent heightening of tensions and the threat of a new war in the Persian Gulf can only exacerbate the dire conditions under which most Iranian people live.**
- **UNISON North West supports CODIR's campaign for peace, justice and social progress in Iran.**
- **UNISON North West says No to War, No to Sanctions and No to foreign intervention in Iran!**



Power corrupts as graft tightens its grip in Iran

In Iran people have resigned themselves to the fact that the fight against graft seems to be unwinnable due to its structural nature and institutional unwillingness to tackle corruption.

Jamshid Ahmadi reports

THE IRANIAN media over the past few years have been inundated with reports of official corruption. Public protests by people who have lost all their savings due to the collapse of poorly regulated Investment Funds and private banks is a common occurrence in Teheran. Many cases revolve around well placed government officials and their relatives swindling banks and state-run corporations of funds without any fear of the law catching up with them.

However, the political crisis of the recent years combined with the huge gap between tens of millions of poor and the super-rich,

along with the economic crisis deepened by the impact of the economic sanctions, has transformed the situation.

In May 2019 Mohammad Hadi Razavi, the son-in-law of Iran's labour minister, Mohammad Shariatmadari, was charged with embezzlement and "disruption of the economy" after receiving 2.11 trillion Rials (around \$51m) in loans from banks, which he has failed to pay back.

Tehran's deputy prosecutor Rasoul Qahremani accused Hadi Razavi along with 30 other suspects during the second hearing into alleged corruption at the Sarmayeh Bank at a special court in Tehran.

Several trials concerning the Sarmayeh Bank have been held in Iran. Earlier this year, Parviz Kazemi labour minister from 2005 to 2006 in hardline president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's cabinet, was sentenced to 20 years, and 24 lashes.

Sarmayeh Bank managers Ali Bakhshayesh, and Mohammad Reza Tavassoli have also been convicted.

Sarmayeh bank's principal shareholder is Iran's Teachers' Reserve Fund. A major legal suit was filed when an irregularity, amounting to 150 trillion rials (about \$3.6bn), was discovered at the fund.

The fund has 800,000 members, all employed by the education ministry or retirees, who receive annual interest based on their monthly deposits. The prosecutor claims that 150 trillion rials (roughly \$3.6bn) of the fund's assets went missing as a result of fraud committed by the defendants.

According to Iranian news agency IRNA, the Rouhani administration has

opened a credit line with two major banks to compensate for the investors' losses. This is symptomatic of Iran's unregulated and corrupt banking system, when well-connected bank owners swindle the depositors and the government has to compensate them with public money.

Many believe that fighting against corruption is just a strategy in political competition between factions in Iranian ruling circles.

Every faction accuses another over corruption. While most accusations have some grounds in reality most are not brought to court and politicians do not care about these accusations anyway. To stay in power, they just need Khamenei's trust. Iranian media are not free to do any investigative work on this matter and the government is not transparent.

Iran's procurement sector carries a very high risk of corruption. Business executives report that bribery is widespread in the process of awarding contracts and licences. Favouritism is often shown to well-connected firms and individuals. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) in particular enjoys access to lucrative government contracts that are not subject to tender. Much of the IRGC's business is done through front companies that are not formally owned by the IRGC but by individuals and firms linked to it.

Iranian officials have expressed their hopelessness regarding fighting against corruption.

"I have no hope that fighting against corruption works," said Ali Larijani, the speaker of the Iranian Parliament.

Ahmad Tavakkoli, an Iranian MP, believes that "corruption is now systemic in Iran".

Khamenei, meanwhile, talks about corruption as if he believes nothing could be done: "Some years ago I talked about fighting against economic corruption. I wrote a letter to the heads of three branches of government... What is done? What did you really do?"

According to Article 142 of the constitution, "the assets of the leader, the president, the deputies to the president, and ministers, as well as those of their spouses and offspring, are to be examined before and after their term of office by the head of the judiciary, in order to ensure they have not increased in a fashion contrary to law".

This article has never been enforced.

Jamshid Ahmadi is CODIR's assistant general secretary

ABOVE: Court scene



4-5 August: Teacher protests across Iran

ON 4 AND 5 August, in demonstrations coordinated by the Council for the Coordination of Teachers' Professional Associations, thousands of teachers across Iran gathered outside regional education offices to protest against the imprisonment of teachers and calling on the government to respond to their demands. Full-time teachers were joined by retired colleagues, hourly-paid teachers and those on short-term contracts. Linda Sherwood reports for *Iran Today*.

Over a thousand teachers demonstrated in Tehran. In Isfahan, where security forces prevented parents from joining the teachers' action, protestors released a statement emphasising that teachers across the country were united in their demands.

Teachers' demands include the release of all union members arrested for engaging in legitimate trade union activities and the dropping of all cases against teacher activists. They are demanding the abolition of legal barriers to the open, free and official operation of their professional and trades union organisations. They want to see the implementation of job specifications and the payment of overdue salaries and overtime. Protesters are asking for a guarantee that their salaries will be maintained at a level above the poverty threshold.

Teachers are seeking the elimination of

discrimination in the structure of the educational system with the introduction of a grading schedule, the provision of top-up insurance packages, an immunisation programme and the renovation of schools throughout the country. They are also asking for the abolition of the 'full-time' teacher plan which increases class-contact time from the current twenty-four hours first by six hours then by a further six to thirty-six hours a week.

An ongoing dispute

The August strike was the fourth in less than a year. From 3 to 5 March this year teachers struck to demand fair pay, the release of imprisoned colleagues and free universal education as defined by article 30 of the constitution.

Javad La'l Mohammadi, an activist from Mashhad said that the most important reason for the strike was that the government believed that it was unnecessary to implement Article 30 of the constitution. Article 30 states that the government must provide all citizens with free education up to secondary school standard and expand free higher education to the extent required for the country to achieve self-sufficiency. Iran has very high numbers of teachers and students which is why, says Javad, the government is tempted to hand over education to the private sector and turn schools into commercial entities.

Education minister Mohammad Bathaei dismissed the strike as action taken by only a few teachers and condemned them for 'teaching students how to protest' - with over 100 schools involved in Kermanshah alone, the minister seems to have underestimated the extent of the teachers' discontent.

A campaign against trades unionists The authorities routinely try to block attempts to establish independent trades

unions In contravention of Iranian law, which allows for the formation of trades unions, and ILO conventions 87 (Freedom of association) and 98 (The right to organise). No trades union is officially recognised so cannot be involved in collective bargaining nor represent workers in disciplinary hearings or tribunals. The government attempts to render trades unions ineffective by not allowing them offices or bank accounts. The principal bodies allowed to function and negotiate are Islamic Labour Councils which are controlled by the authorities.

The teachers' professional body (ITTA - the Iranian Teachers Trade Association) has faced legal obstacles to its function. Its activities are frequently repressed and activists arrested. The right to organise and strike is one of the teachers' major demands.

Leading members of the ITTA currently in prison or awaiting sentencing are Mohammad Habibi, Mahmoud Behesti Langaroudi, and Esmail Abdi. Abdolreza Ghanbari, Mohammad Sanayi, Rouhollah Mardani. Successive education ministers have alleged that the teachers are involved in activities that endanger national security. They argue that engaging in trades union activities and calling for improvements in pay and conditions aim to undermine national security. Trades unions maintain that those arrested are political prisoners and should not be tried on security charges.

The government may turn a deaf ear to the teachers' demands but their determination is such that the strikes will continue until concessions are won, salaries and working conditions improve and education really is free for all.

ABOVE LEFT: Esmail Abdi, Secretary of the Iranian Teachers Association
ABOVE RIGHT: Teachers protest

WORKERS

Priorities for trade unions in Iran

In a wide-ranging interview, **Mazyar Guilaninejhad**, Coordinator of the Union of Metalworkers and Mechanics in Iran (UMMI), assesses the current situation for trade unionists.

IT: Could you give us a short description of the present conditions of independent workers organisations and trade unions in Iran?

MG: According to Article 26 of Iran's Constitution, and based on the ILO Conventions 87 and 98, these organisations are legal entities. However, the government in Iran refuses to recognise independent trade unions. They are prevented from having offices, bank accounts, assemblies to elect board of members or protest rallies. They do not have the right to represent workers in collective agreements, monitor health and safety conditions or go on strike. Although a member of the ILO, Iran does not implement its key conventions.

IT: What part of Iran's economy is covered by the Metalworkers and Mechanics Union and does it have any working relationship with international trade unions or organisations?

MG:UMMI was formed in the 1944. It was registered in 1960 under Iranian law. Unfortunately, its operation was forcibly curtailed following the persecution of trade unions in 1981. A new wave of demands for the reactivation of trade unions, and formation of new ones, took place throughout the country starting in 2001, with our union eventually resuming its activities in 2005. Our union covers plants in fields such as the automotive, mining, copper, iron, steel, oil and gas industries, is a member of the IndustriALL Global Union and has fraternal relations with the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) and the National Union of Metalworkers in Turkey. Our bilingual website at sfelezkar.com covers our views and activities.



Nick Crook supports Esmail Abdi, General Secretary, Iranian Teachers Association

IT: Organisations linked with the Iranian government, such as the Workers' House and the Islamic Labour Councils, regularly participate in international meetings, as part of the government-approved official delegation. Do these government organisations make any contribution to solving the problems of the working people of Iran?

MG:The government-affiliated workers' organisations have been attending ILO conferences every year, but they have not been addressing the problems of Iranian workers and have been unable to implement ILO Conventions 87 and 98. For this reason, they have not had much influence on labour and workers issues and have thus been criticised by the unions. As these so-called representatives are selected by the Ministry of Labour, they have no links with the unions. While the representatives of these organisations are present in the Parliament, the resources of the National Welfare Fund Organisation, that supposedly belongs to the workers, are being plundered by the government who refuses to pay its debt to the workers. They have also been unable to stop the pillage to date and prevent the Welfare Organisation from going into bankruptcy.

IT: We have seen protests and strike action amongst industrial workers and government employees such as teachers in the past few years. What is your assessment of the capabilities in organising strikes to fulfill the workers' demands?

MG:As a result of the anti-labour policies, which stem from the implementation of directives from the IMF that undermine the livelihood and welfare of teachers, workers and their families, the strike process will no doubt accelerate. During the past three years, protests have significantly increased both quantitatively and qualitatively, so much so that both workers and the teachers managed to take the protests to the streets and draw in the people. This method of strike and protest started from the HEPCO and AzarAb factories and was later used by workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane mill and [INSIG] Steel plant in Ahvaz. In other cases, this style of protest was unsuccessful due to the non-existence of a workers union, strike committee, strike fund or lack of solidarity from workers in other factories.



▲ Maziyar Guilaninejhad with Ttar Ozkan, DISK representative ▲ UMMI delegation meets DISK (Turkey) and IndustriALL leadership

IT: What is your assessment of the strikes at Haft Tappeh, Ahvaz Steel, HEPCO Arak and AzarAb over the past two years?

MG: The workers' strikes in these plants were for overdue wages and against the privatisation that would cause their closure. Workers demanded that ownership be returned to the state and late wages paid. Today, the main demand of the working class in Iran is prompt payment of their wages, abolition of privatisation and cancellation of temporary employment contracts. The outcome of these strikes was to expose the ugly face of privatisation and IMF policies and to expose the illegitimacy of the privatisation processes, thereby succeeding in forcing the government to halt a number of them. The new owner of Pars Tire Company [in Saveh] who could not sack any of the employees, tried to change the titles of workers posts so that they could be laid off. The new owner is now facing workers protests which have our support. The strength of this protest included: the publicising of the demands at community level, the unity between workers and the support from workers' families. Weaknesses included the absence of a knowledgeable organised structure to lead the strikes, lack of negotiation skills in presenting the workers' demands and inaccurate slogans such as the demand for "Management Councils" to run factories with no regard to the actual balance of power.

IT: Until recently, some commentators and Western politicians welcomed the election of President Hassan Rouhani in 2013 and 2017 and his major economic plans. Would you, see these plans positively with specific regards to workers' and employees' welfare?

MG: Workers want to know what each candidate can provide for them and that their life and welfare will be improved. The

UMMI announced that implementing the directives of the IMF and WTO would lead to attacks on public services and the destruction of industries, jobs and community security by investment brokers operating within the government. Numerous cases of "privatisation", embezzlement of workers savings in the Social Security Fund, staggering amounts of imports, widespread brokering and money laundering have resulted in the destruction of more than 40% of industry and more than 5 million unemployed. How do you think a typical Iranian worker on a monthly income of \$126 feels? Last year, this figure stood at \$256 and the 50% reduction in purchasing power has made many multimillionaire middlemen. The average income of the working class of Iran is a fifth of the poverty line income. Many workers have removed health, education, suitable housing and even meat and fruit from their affordability's.

IT: The heavy sanctions imposed by the Trump administration have hit the Iranian economy hard. Where is the main impact of these sanctions and can the government do anything to mitigate the impact of these sanctions?

MG: These sanctions are a silent war against the health and livelihood of workers. They allow the Iranian extremist and militant factions to step up pressure on labour unions and civil activists. Global capitalism employs a double-edged razor policy. On the one hand, they keep the country dependent on their overpriced goods using middlemen to plunder our foreign reserves. And on the other, they quash the freedom and equality movement through hardliners as well as by promoting and supporting extremists and neoliberals. How can a government that has auctioned off public resources to cut back on health, education and housing subsidies mitigate the impact of the sanctions? The cut

back in services allows the embezzlers and the financial mafia to loot foreign exchange resources and increase commodity prices creating a suitable environment to spread corruption and embezzlement. Iran's "merchant capitalism" seeks to shut down industries and increase unemployment. The closure of factories and rising housing and food prices will lead to riots that only weaken the trade union movement and liberation movements. Many young Iranian workers and professionals are forced to migrate away from their families to earn a low income living under difficult immigration and employment conditions in other countries.

IT: What can trade unions do in solidarity, in order to provide assistance to expand and consolidate union activities in Iran?

MG: The most important arena is the struggle for peace and prevention of war. Then there is the lifting of illegal economic sanctions, the raising of wages for Iranian workers to levels that meet their living requirements, improving working conditions, implementation of ILO conventions and the release of imprisoned trade unionists. We call on trade unions around the world to support this struggle by any possible means, to oppose US policy on invasion and economic pressure on Iran and in particular to force their governments not to join the embargo on medicine and food for Iranian people. An effective international campaign is vital for trade union freedoms and the protection of rights and democratic freedoms. More than 30 people who took part in the May Day celebration this year were arrested, with four in prison and the rest on bail. Leaders of the teachers' union are also in prison. Members of our trade union in Assaluyeh were arrested while demonstrating peacefully in July 2018, to demand payment of their late wages. They were sentenced to two years' suspended imprisonment.



People's protests continue to challenge power

AS MASS protests continue to be a feature of life in Iran the threat of military intervention is in danger of neutralising their impact and playing into the hands of the regime. Jane Green considers the issues.

Massive popular protests in Iran, which began at the turn of 2017-2018, have been the starting point for a struggle across Iran's industry and workforce, which shows no sign of abating. In addition to their pressing demands for unpaid wages and salaries, working people have also targeted the policies of regime. Protests have continued to target widespread privatisation, corruption and the plunder of national resources.

The growth and spread of workers' protests has been one of the important features of the country's political scene in the past two years. The implementation of anti-popular policies such as privatisation

and economic liberalisation were imposing very tough conditions for Iranian workers even before the US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the subsequent extension of even greater sanctions upon Iran.

Since then oil exports have more than halved and the Iranian currency has lost more than 60% of its value against the US dollar. The cost of red meat and poultry has increased by 57%, access to medical supplies is restricted, forcing doctors to prescribe less effective drugs, and waiting times for operations has increased.

Poverty, unemployment and lack of job security have been exacerbated further due to US sanctions and are the main factors behind the ongoing protests. Continuous devaluation of the currency coupled with inflation has brought more poverty to an already struggling working class.

The flight of capital from Iran has accelerated. Difficulties in obtaining spare parts from industrial countries in the West has caused a number of key industries to stop production. Banking and monetary sanctions have crippled any possibility of conducting international trade. All these consequently worsen the economic conditions in Iran and it is the workers who pay the price through mass lay-offs, not being paid for months and inflationary pressures.

One of the consequences of recent labour unrest has been the revival of claims for

trade union rights in parallel with other immediate demands.

The Islamic Republic of Iran does not tolerate the operation of trade unions. The country's labour law has been interpreted by the clerical regime in such a way as to only permit regime-controlled "Islamic Labour Councils" to operate openly in workplaces. The structures of these bodies are designed so that the workers representatives are always outnumbered two to one by their government and employer counterparts.

The current struggle in Iran stresses the intensification of trade union rights and the revival of independent unions, based on ILO Conventions 87 and 98 and the Universal Charter of the Rights of Trade Unions.

One of the most important aspects of the trade union movement, in addition to meeting the demands of workers welfare, is the struggle for democratic rights, namely freedom of association, for unions, political parties and organisations, as well as freedom of speech.

In this context it is vital that the opposition movement inside Iran can operate free from outside interference or the threat of external military intervention, as is currently the danger with the bellicose actions of the United States in the region.

Any attempt by the United States or its allies in the region, Israel or Saudi Arabia, to intervene militarily in Iran will be used by regime hardliners to demonise those fighting for democracy and social justice inside the country, when it is faced with an external threat.

Such a scenario will also play into the hands of the White House hawks who see regime change as the only way forward in Iran. The opposition movement is intent on regime change but is intent on change determined by the Iranian people, not the US government or military.

In effect the United States is already fighting an undeclared war against Iran. It may not have involved any military intervention or direct loss of life, but it is an economic war intended to create the conditions for military action should that be deemed necessary.

Support for the Iranian people, in their struggle for democratic rights and social justice, must go hand in hand with opposition to US military intervention in Iran and a call for resolving any differences by diplomatic means. A military solution is no solution for the people of Iran, it is no solution for the wider issues in the Middle East and must be opposed as a threat to world peace.



THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION EXPRESSES SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONISTS IN IRAN

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Solidarity with the struggle
of the Iranian people for peace,
equality and human rights
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CODIR supports the campaign for peace, human and democratic rights in Iran. It campaigns for the release of all political prisoners and for trade unions to have freedom to organise and campaign effectively. CODIR supplies news and analysis of events in Iran and related issues from the world.

Affiliation fees:

Local organisations: £20 - £50, Regional
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Peace, Democracy & Solidarity in Iran)
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Say No to War on Iran!

The Iranian people call for peace to prevail... And, for progressive and peace-loving forces globally to plan and embark upon an initiative that would mobilise international public opinion against another catastrophic war

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WOMEN'S RIGHTS



What price protest?

ON 18 APRIL 2019 Amnesty International put out a shocking press release on the way the Iranian theocratic regime treats women's rights campaigners. Only days before, two women – Yasmin Aryani and Monireh Arabshani – had been arrested and locked up for peacefully protesting against forced veiling. A third woman arrested in late 2018 – Vida Movahedi – had been handed a twelve-month sentence for doing likewise. Laws on dress-code in Iran are notorious for being degrading, discriminatory and abusive, giving out the message that those in power reject women's status as full human beings. Even doing simple things like riding a bicycle, unless completely covered, can put a woman behind bars. But protests are gaining in strength and the regime is reacting viciously.

Amnesty exposed the scare-tactics employed by security forces to silence hijab objectors – phoning them, threatening them with arrest, bringing them into custody, sometimes letting them go and sometimes not. Women targeted had no idea whether they would end the day with their families or behind bars.

This is not, however, simply 'Project Fear'. The regime makes sure that women activists are left in no doubt how it will deal with them if they persist and the threats are far from idle. A young woman, Saba Kordafshari, arrested on 1 June 2019 for an anti-veil protest, refused absolutely to denounce the campaign or provide a 'confession'. Her torturers responded that if she remained silent, they would bring her elderly mother in too. Saba would not comply. Both mother and daughter are now incarcerated. There are, sadly, many similar stories.

Women who represent campaigners in court are also targeted, thus intimidating the legal profession as well as denying the accused women a fair trial. In March, world-renowned human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, 2003 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, was sentenced to 38 year's imprisonment and 148 lashes for defending women charged with protesting the hijab laws, as well as convicted children and other high-profile political prisoners. If administered, the lashes alone would kill her – a death sentence for seeking justice for her clients! She remains in prison while a world-wide campaign calls for her release.

As threats and interventions from outside the country escalate, so the risk of repression of peaceful protests for equality and justice and the degree of harshness meted out to those taking part increases. This is already evidenced by the harsh treatment of women political prisoners. Amnesty International tells how on 1 May four women – Anisha Assadolahi, Atefeh Rangriz, Neda Naji and Marzieh Amiri – were arrested. Anisha, Atefeh and Neda were attending a peaceful International Workers' Day event in the capital. By nightfall they found themselves in solitary confinement on trumped-up charges of endangering national security and spreading propaganda against the system. Mazieh, a journalist covering the story, asked the whereabouts of the detained women. For this simple question, she was taken first to a secret location then transferred to Tehran's Evin prison.

After their initial stretch 'in solitary', Atefeh and Neda were moved to the notoriously insanitary Shahr-e Rey prison, a filthy disease-ridden former poultry farm where women's rights campaigners have been taken in the past. Placed alongside

violent common criminals, their safety was endangered and 'political' status derecognised. Continuing her protest, Atefeh refused to wear a chador to go to the prison clinic. For this she was severely beaten by a guard resulting in damage to one of her eyes. Anisha was released from custody on 5 May only to be picked up again in mid-June and thrown into Evin. All four women were denied access to lawyers, their families and appropriate medical care.

CODIR, together with the Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women, Amnesty International and the National Assembly of Women (Britain's affiliate of the Women's International Democratic Federation), is calling on the Iranian regime to treat women political prisoners in accordance with international conventions and human rights. We are asking for the release of every woman held in detention for campaigning peacefully for women's rights and equality and against discriminatory laws. We are further calling on the regime to set free unconditionally all human rights professionals, including Nasreen Sotoudeh and other women's lawyers and advocates.

At the same time, we are demanding an end to the harassment and intimidation of women's rights activists and the permanent annulment of all laws, protocols and regulations that discriminate, disadvantage, exploit or oppress women and girls in Iran.

ABOVE LEFT: Sepideh Gholian, a social activist, was arrested while supporting the widely reported strike by workers of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Complex in 2018. Sepideh has said that sustained torture was used to extract a false confession from her. She has been on hunger strike. CODIR calls for her release.



CODIR expresses its concern for the well-being of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, pictured above, UK resident and a dual national who is serving a 5-year sentence in Iran. Like most of those detained in Iran's jails, natural justice is denied, and her basic rights routinely violated. CODIR calls for her release.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



What future for Iran's children?

ON THE 30th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, **Liz Payne** looks at the situation of children in Iran and their prospects in the face of a failing economy, ever-tightening sanctions and growing poverty.

IN THE ISLAMIC republic of Iran, more than three quarters of a million children are 'missing' from school. They didn't register for the academic year 2018/19. UN statistics show them to be disproportionately from the families of the urban and rural poor, the children of refugees, stigmatised youngsters with disabilities and girls.

Thousands are already 'out-of-school' at primary age but it is at secondary level that the problem becomes one of huge proportions. The reasons are manifold. While children in remote rural areas can often get to a relatively local primary school, many have no means of travelling to a distant secondary school.

Poor roads and lack of safe transport are key factors, especially impacting on girls. They account for 63% of the almost 220,000 children not at school between the ages of 12 and 14. Gender stereotyping and role-expectation also play a large part as girls from traditional backgrounds are pulled out. Some join their mothers and aunts at home, while others are forced into child marriage.

Poverty, however, is a major reason why 620,000 children aged 12-17 are



out of education altogether. Not only can families not afford the cost of school attendance, they rely on the children to bring in even small sums of money. This makes them vulnerable to all manner of abuse and gross exploitation in violation of ILO recommendations on child labour - including 138 prohibiting all work for children under 15; 182 banning those under 18 from all forms of sex work, the production and trafficking of drugs and

any jobs likely to harm health, safety or morals and 190 stipulating which dangerous work children under 18 cannot undertake. These include those which expose them to physical or psychological harm, hazardous work in confined spaces, using dangerous machinery or substances, underground work, carrying heavy loads, night work, long hours and 'unreasonable confinement' in the premises of employers.

Migrant families are disproportionately destitute and their children particularly at risk. Iran has one of the largest refugee populations in the world, including almost 2.5 million from Afghanistan, more than half of whom have no official documents and of whom some 800,000 are children.

A sickening video clip which went viral earlier this year highlights the issue.

We see an Afghan boy, perhaps eleven years old, selling flowers on the street. He has no permit. A government official arrives and orders the terrified child either to eat the flowers or cause his family to be prosecuted. The child, now hysterical, eats the petals but pleads not to eat the indigestible stalks. He is forced to consume every single piece.

The child-labourers of Iran are double victims - of the disastrous neo-liberal policies of the theocratic regime on the one hand, which have led to unemployment, low wages, soaring food and fuel prices and mass destitution, and of the devastating effects of sanctions on the other. Instead of concentrating on meting out horrendous punishments to minors; condemning girls to social isolation, dehumanising legislation and early marriage and attacking teachers, trade-unionists and all who fight for children's rights, the regime should ensure that education is free and accessible to all, poverty and child-labour eliminated and all children protected and respected.

Meanwhile, people everywhere must demand an immediate end to US sanctions whose effects leave the most vulnerable children in Iran and their families without hope and without a future.

CLOSING THE PAY GAP



Women workers in Iran fight back

CONTRARY TO ILO Conventions 100 and 111, which Iran has ratified, women workers in the Islamic Republic of Iran do not enjoy equal rights with men. Gender discrimination is evident not only in wage gaps, treatment for insurance purposes, and access to benefits, but also in access to the labour market as well as job security.

According to the May 2018 report of the Centre for Statistics of Iran, one of the main providers of information on the country's labour market, the rate of women's economic participation declined from 17% to 14.9% between 2005 and 2015. Women's participation dropped significantly after the age of 30, mainly due to barriers faced by working married women and mothers.

The passing of the Law on Retirement of Employed Women With 20 Years of Service, adopted in January 2017, which Iran describes as a legal means to protect women's employment, is in fact an institutional way of eliminating women from the labour market, in turn opening up the market for more male workers. In fact, those Islamic Republic initiatives that support women's employment are often restricted to specific occupations that are considered "domestic and home-based" and thus "appropriate" for women.

The gender pay gap continues to persist and the Iranian government has not taken any measures to address this. The Statistical Centre of Iran, on the 30 October, released the results of the centre's research on the average wage in the agricultural sector in the summer of 2018. According to this report,



the average daily wage of a male farm worker was 57,000 tomans and while the average wage of a female farm worker was 42,000 tomans.

The Statistics and Strategic Information Centre of the Ministry of Labour reports that the number of unemployed women in Iran has increased by 25% over the past seven years. There has been an average 1.8% annual increase in the unemployment rate in Iran over the last seven years. This compares to an average annual increase in the unemployment rate for women of 3.8%, reaching an overall rate of unemployment for women of 32.3% in 2017. The actual unemployment numbers are far greater given official underreporting and owing to the fact that the Ministry of Labour in Iran considers anyone who works for even one hour a week as being employed.

In Iran's Labour Law, there is no guaranteed protection for women when they take maternity leave, neither in terms of a job protection nor in the rules regarding unfair dismissal. A survey by the Social Security Organisation of Iran in 2018 shows that over an 18-month period, between 2017 and 2018, 47,000 women were fired during the course of taking maternity leave.

Last year, the Iranian Administrative Court revoked a bylaw that prohibited the dismissal of women during pregnancy and nursing.

According to Reza Vafaei-Yeganeh, an economic expert, referring to a report by the Centre for Iranian Statistics in spring 2019, 65% of the country's 932,000 unemployed women have received higher education,

indicating that these women graduates are not being utilised in the labour market despite the educational system's investment.

Referring to the Centre of Statistics of Iran report, he pointed out that the labour force participation rate, the most important indicator normally used to assess people's willingness to enter the employment market, stood at 40.6 percent, showing an alarming lack of incentive.

Referring to the proportion of the higher education graduates within the unemployed population, he stated that according to the Centre of Statistics of Iran report, 1.19 million people - equivalent to 40.3 percent of the total number of unemployed - have received higher education, while the rate amongst unemployed women stood at 65%.

It is clear from this evidence that women in Iran continue to be both undervalued and under-utilised in the labour market, in spite of significant achievements in the education sector. In the struggle for peace, social justice and democracy in Iran women will increasingly play an important role as they demand greater recognition and greater freedoms.

Under the present regime it is impossible to see where greater freedom for women will come. It is no surprise that in the struggles against the regime women are playing an increasing role. The women of Iran are well aware that the engagement of women in present struggles will be an important measure of how far Iran can make progress in the future.

CONTINUING THE CAMPAIGN FOR TRADE UNION RIGHTS

The Islamic Republic of Iran's reaction to protests organised by the teachers' union CCITTA and other groups of workers has been one of police brutality, condemning trade unionists as a threat to national security.

Hundreds of trade unionists have been arrested, imprisoned or forced into exile.

The Iranian Teachers' Trade Association (ITTA) (affiliated to the CCITTA), the Iranian Journalists Association and organised blue-collar workers have also faced intimidation and legal obstacles which aim to deny their rights to function as representative trade union bodies.

Iran's labour laws allow for the formation of trade unions. However, the Iranian authorities routinely seek to suppress any attempt to establish free, democratic independent trade unions.

Iran's trade unionists want nothing more than the right to exist (for example, to establish offices and secure bank accounts), the right to participate in collective bargaining and the right to represent their members in hearings or tribunals.

Teachers currently in prison or exile, or awaiting a prison sentence, include:

- Mohammad Habibi
- Mahmoud Beheshti-Langaroudi
- Esmail Abdi
- Abdolreza Ghanbari
- Mohammad Sanayi
- Rouhollah Mardani
- Bakhtiyar Alami
- Mokhtar Asadi

Teachers' complaints

The reasons for the CCITTA protests include:

- the failure of the government to provide funding for the implementation of the Law on the Administration of State Services;
- the failure to implement teachers' professional grading
- the lack of adequate wage increases corresponding to inflation and the cost of living;
- the plundering of the teachers' pension fund;
- the privatisation of education.

These complaints remain unresolved.

At the same time, teachers are calling for:

- the elimination of discrimination in the structure of the educational system;
- the right to free public education in accordance with Article 30 of the Constitution;
- the withdrawal of the 'full-time teacher plan', which will significantly increase standard contractual teaching hours by 50%;
- the release of the imprisoned teachers;
- the right to organise and strike.

Iran remains in violation of ILO Conventions 87 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise) and 98 (Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining).

Find out more

Visit www.nasuwt.org.uk/international for more information about the situation affecting teachers in Iran and how the NASUWT is working with the international community to tackle the violation of trade union rights.





Unite firmly opposes any US military intervention against Iran which would be disastrous for the people of the country and the entire region.

The US should return to the international nuclear agreement and refrain from provoking a new conflict.

Unite calls for the rights of all Iranian people to be respected and for them to be able to determine their own future free from any outside attacks or unwanted interventions.