

IRAN TODAY

Bulletin of the Committee for the Defence of Iranian People's Rights



Vol.34

No. 2

Autumn 2022

£1 , €1,5 , \$2



Protest wave engulfs Iran



Free political prisoners in Iran!

EDITORIAL

Crisis, Challenge and Change in Iran



Volume 34 Number 2
Autumn 2022

Committee for the Defence of
Iranian People's Rights

www.codir.net

Economically, politically, and socially Iran is in a serious mess. Its economy is collapsing, a social explosion of discontent is underway, and its dictatorial political system in crisis.

It is difficult to underestimate the scale and impact of the catastrophe of the economic crisis.

Inflation on essential and general goods, including items such as bread and eggs, is running at 42% and there are shortages of many commodities, including medicines. Wages in some sectors are unpaid and all workers' salaries are devalued. Trade union activities are banned, and further authoritarian measures are put in place daily.

People are paid in Iranian rials, but the cost of goods are tied to the US dollar. One dollar is now worth 300,000 rials. In 1979 it was 70 rials to the dollar!

The Financial Times reports that, in addition to economic collapse, the country is experiencing widespread water shortages, not because of climate change but mismanagement and lack of investment in the supply infrastructure. The failure of the regime to put money into, regulate and protect the rich natural resources of the country is leading to the desertification of many fertile areas and the disappearance of lakes and reservoirs.

But, despite state oppression, farmers have joined teachers in protesting against the crisis. In many areas the perfunctory and preferred chants of the regime on the streets of "Death to America!" are being replaced with, "Death to the Dictators!" in Tehran.

The response of the theocratic regime has again followed the path it has taken for decades. This year, as well as thousands of arrests, the death penalty has been used more than 250 times in the first six months of 2022 to the end of June - all meted out without any semblance of a fair trial! In May 230 teachers were arrested following protests on International Workers' Day and 23 are still in custody, their fate unknown.

The mismanagement, widespread corruption and dictatorial actions of the state are the primary cause of the crisis, exacerbated by US led economic and banking sanctions, which have made worsened the conditions of workers and their families. The regime has sought relief with behind the scenes deals with the West and US, but the current US President and his two predecessors have dashed the regime's hopes and it is now desperate.

Change, however, is coming. This was reflected in last year's (essentially single candidate) sham presidential election, when turnout was the lowest since 1979 at less than 42%, with many spoiling their ballot papers despite the requirement for stamped identification at polling stations. Manifestly, the political theocracy has lost any claim to legitimacy! All signs point to a realisation on the part of the Iranian people that enough is enough and the current regime, the source of all their difficulties, is beyond reprieve. Their demand for a fundamental change cannot be misunderstood. They struggle for peace, human and democratic rights, and social justice. However, they are also clear that they reject any form of external intervention under any guise whatsoever. The people of Iran have demonstrated in the past that they are able to manage change in their country provided that foreign interventions contrary to their interests do not frustrate their struggle. The theocratic regime is a threat to the people of Iran. Iranian working people know this. They need our solidarity in their struggle for change and democracy.



Iranian Government 'reacts brutally'

On Saturday 2 July, **Jamshid Ahmadi**, CODIR's Assistant General Secretary, and **Liz Payne** of CODIR's National Executive Council, addressed delegates at the NEU's International Solidarity Conference in London.

They updated attendees on the intensifying struggle of teachers in Iran and its brutal repression by the authorities and outlined the key demands of the Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations.

The NEU's "Educate" Magazine (July 2022) carried the following article by Liz Payne, explaining the conditions giving rise to the long running protest and why international solidarity going forward is imperative.

Iran's theocratic regime does not recognise trade unions, but teachers and educational workers have formed the nationwide Coordinating Council of Iranian Teachers' Trade Associations (CCITTA) which has organized many protest actions, including petitions to the Iranian authorities and international organizations, sit-ins at schools, walk-outs, and rallies. In yet another

attempt to get their voices heard, thousands of teachers and educators gathered outside Iran's parliament in Tehran, and at education authority offices across the country on 12th May. Such actions have gained momentum in recent months and have met with violent suppression by the authorities. Teacher leaders and activists have lost their jobs and been arrested and imprisoned on baseless accusations, including "acting against the national security". The regime's response on 12th May was no different. An end to violence against educators. Teachers and their associations insist that they are exercising their legal rights to freedom of association and to hold peaceful demonstrations, as guaranteed in Articles 26 and 27 of Iran's Constitution. CCITTA persistently campaigns for an end to violence against its members and the framing of union activists, for the immediate and unconditional release of all jailed teachers and trade union activists, and for their colleagues' reinstatement in their jobs. It also continues to voice its long-standing demands for:

- ◆ Implementation of an equitable pay grade structure, as required by the Civil Services Management Act,
- ◆ Fair pensions,
- ◆ A halt to privatization of the education service and
- ◆ Free, high quality public education for all Iranian children and young people, as specified in the constitution.

Iran's government has consistently failed to implement the above, mainly on the pretext of lack of budget, while large sums of public money are

allocated to state security, including the brutal Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. In an open letter to delegates at this year's ILO conference in Geneva (summer 2022), CCITTA wrote: "Over the years and especially in recent months, the Iranian government's economic policies have created widespread poverty and misery for the public, primarily the workers. This situation has created a yawning class divide, shrunk people's livelihoods, and has eventually led to public protest. It is unfortunate that instead of responding appropriately and solving problems, the government has reacted brutally to these lawful protests".

The letter told how a recent false report on state radio and television accused well-known teacher activists of collaborating with foreign "spies". It called on delegates at the ILO Conference to demand the unconditional dropping of all charges against imprisoned trade unionists and their immediate release and for the Iranian government uphold the rights of all workers to freedom of association and freedom of speech, including the right to peaceful assembly, without fear of state intervention.

Continuing solidarity with Iranian educators is of paramount importance at present, as their protests draw in the support of millions of students and their parents across the country and other independent Iranian professional associations, as well as that of unions, international associations, and solidarity organisations from across the world.

CODIR is calling on the NEU to continue its campaigns in support of the demands of CCITTA and Iranian teachers for their basic rights to organise, assemble and express their just demands and for the immediate release of all education leaders and activists held in Iranian prisons and asks that the union invites CCITTA representatives to address its conferences. We hope that, as well as the huge work it does as an independent union, the NEU can raise the situation of Iranian teachers with the TUC, Education International and the ITUC. We ask that NEU branches affiliate to CODIR and become involved in its campaigns in support of teachers' rights in Iran.

The plight of the nurses in Iran



Dr Liz Payne is a member of the national executive council of the Committee for Defence of

the Iranian Peoples Rights (CODIR), which campaigns for

Iranian nurses, especially women, face great challenges as they strive to care for patients, advance the status of their profession and improve the woefully inadequate public healthcare system in Iran. This situation is not new, but the working and living conditions of the nursing profession deteriorated with COVID, as pressures increased in hospitals and other healthcare institutions.

Among the challenges faced is the significant nurse and nurse educator shortage, coupled with an aging workforce. Staff are overburdened and exhausted, and care compromised. There are currently 1.5 nurses per 1,000 patients in Iran, half the global average. In late 2021 the Ministry of Health announced that it would recruit 40,000 nursing staff but this has resulted in only 13,000 more posts filled. This is at a time when there are tens of thousands of unemployed nurses in the country and, according to the head of the Iranian Nursing Organization, "5,000 nurses were laid off" when the peak of coronavirus was over. Due to the shortage, nurses are forced to work overtime, for which they receive about 50 cents an hour, and this is frequently paid only after long delays, while during Covid some overtime was not paid at all. A recent government pledge to recruit a further 100,000 is unlikely to fare better without a massive injection of funding.

Overall, the nursing profession is inadequately resourced in terms of training, recruitment, in-service development, and retention of a sufficient number of competent personnel to deal with social emergencies such as the COVID pandemic. Iranian nurses made huge sacrifices during the pandemic, yet they suffered massive losses, both in terms of their livelihoods and lives. The Iranian authorities failed to



provide the resources needed. Nurses were laid off in private hospitals and many of them had to work long and exhausting hours without overtime pay. By May 2021 more than 100,000 nurses and other medical staff were infected with the virus. Even when vaccinations started, frontline workers, including nurses, did not receive them promptly. This led to the death of hundreds of healthcare workers across the country, including more than 300 nurses in the first 18 months of the pandemic. The response of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei was simply to honor fallen healthcare workers as "martyrs of service", akin to fallen soldiers.

Over the past four decades, under the Islamic Republic of Iran, the rights of female nurses, together with those of all women, have been violated grossly, and they have had limited opportunities to raise their voices in defence of their rights. This is now changing. Nurses in Iran have been fighting against privatization of the health sector, for payment of unpaid wages, and for job security, decent wages and conditions of service, the right to organize and for recognition of the status of their profession.

Currently, around 50% of nurses in Iran are hired on a temporary basis through private employment agencies, with 89-day contracts, low wages, and no job benefits such as sick leave, extended health insurance, employment insurance, overtime pay, or pension plans. And

those in fulltime permanent employment are not paid appropriately either, their wages bearing no relation to the level of skills required for their roles. There have been reports of increasing mental health issues, including suicide cases, due to significant job pressures and lack of job security. All of this has led to an exodus of nurses in recent years. According to the head of the Health Committee of the Iranian parliament, in the last 24 months 2,000 trained and experienced nurses have left the country in hopes of finding better living and working conditions elsewhere.

The head of the Iranian Nursing Organization blames the incompetence of the government for this situation, while the Secretary-General of the House of Nurses and Deputy Head of the Iranian Nursing Organization believes that, given that the Ministry of Health is involved in factional disputes and profiteering, it is unlikely that the situation of nurses in Iran will change much.

However, although any complaint about pay or working conditions often leads to firing, Iranian nurses have not kept quiet. They have raised their voices in protest by writing to the authorities, rallying in front of government offices and parliament, and by taking to the streets and gathering in protest outside hospitals and other health institutes. They are convinced that change is possible - and they need our support.



Woman rights activist forced to make televised confession!

CODIR stands alongside the women of Iran against the renewed enforcement of mandatory hijab, one of a long list of misogynist policies enforced ruthlessly by the Islamic Republic.

Amidst the ongoing wave of repression being meted out by the theocratic dictatorship in Iran, towards striking workers and protesters, concerns are also growing of a crackdown on limited social freedoms as regime militia are once more unleashed upon the civilian population, particularly the women of Iran. This has resulted in a growing frequency of ugly incidents involving 'morality enforcers', including the recent forcing of a young woman to confess and repent her 'immoral behaviour' before the television cameras of the state broadcaster.

Over recent weeks, the Iranian people have borne witness to an increased presence in the streets of the dreaded and reviled Guidance Patrols or morality police. These units are mandated by the regime to roam

the streets and enter public spaces to check upon and enforce adherence to rules and norms on 'chastity' and 'proper behaviour' under the laws of the Islamic Republic - including the compulsory wearing of hijab for women in public.

Against the current backdrop of harsh economic conditions, acute poverty and growing unrest inside Iran, President Ebrahim Raisi ordered the full enforcement of hijab laws on Tuesday 5 July.

Following this order, women deemed not to be in compliance have been ejected from public spaces, government offices, and public transport, as well as attacked and harassed by regime militia and supporters in the streets.

Iranian women's rights activists have responded by launching a social-media campaign with the hashtag #no2hijab to draw attention to the renewed restrictions and encourage people to boycott them. On Tuesday 12 July, coinciding with the regime-declared 'National Day of Hijab and Chastity', many women activists in Iran posted videos of themselves online, publicly removing their veils.

Further public outrage in Iran has been stoked in recent days following the appearance on national television of 28-year-old artist and writer, Sepideh Rashno, during which she appeared to give a coerced confession to having engaged in 'immoral behaviour' and apologised for an altercation with a regime supporter over the removal of her hijab on a Tehran bus.

Ms. Rashno was identified and arrested by security forces two days later. The authorities in Iran claim that Ms. Rashno was permitted one short telephone call to a listed relative, but her family have not heard from her. Judiciary officials informed her family that a legal case has been opened against her in Branch 3 of the Evin Prison Prosecutor's Office.

On Tuesday 19 July, a video began to circulate showing a mother crying and pleading with a morality police unit not to arrest her ill daughter. In the video, the mother attempts to stand in front of the police van containing her daughter and continues to tearfully remonstrate with the unit. The van moves forward before the mother is pulled aside and left distraught on the ground. This video has also gone viral, provoking widespread anger amongst the public.

Within a couple of days, three reformist-aligned newspapers took the rare step of publishing lines critical of the morality police, calling for their reining in, and warning of an explosion in social unrest otherwise.

Hassan Khomeini, a reformist figure and grandson of the late-founder of the Islamic Republic, took to his Instagram account (where he has 600,000 followers) and re-posted the video with the caption, "Whatever this is, it is not guidance, it is not Islamic, it is not wise and it has no benefit!"

Sensing the public mood, the authorities subsequently climbed down and the Tehran Police Department announced it would be taking disciplinary action against the unit involved in the incident.

We unequivocally condemn the practice of extracting forced confessions and recantations from opponents of the regime and its policies, and the perpetuation of these ordeals by filming and televising them.

Finally, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of Sepideh Rashno as well as all those detained in the recent clampdown. We call upon all those concerned with women's rights to show solidarity with women in Iran and make their protests in writing to the embassies and missions of the Islamic Republic of Iran.



August 2022

JCPoA: No to escalation with Iran and nuclear proliferation in the Middle East!

The situation in the Middle East is never far from the news headlines. In recent months that has meant a renewed focus on the Iran nuclear deal, including a debate in the House of Commons at the end of June this year.

Steve Bishop assesses the prospects for a new agreement with Iran and the implications of failure to reach a deal.

The House of Commons debate on 30th June this year, on Iran's nuclear deal, was opened by Robert Jenrick MP and set the terms of the debate in the context of Iran's potential to develop nuclear weapons and what Jenrick referred to as Iran's "other destabilising activities in the region".

Earlier in June, the UK, Germany and France had released a joint statement saying that they were ready to conclude a deal with Iran. That would have restored the joint comprehensive plan of action (JCPOA), the basis of the Iran nuclear deal which held until May 2018, when the United States unilaterally walked away from the agreement. Following the statement by the European powers it was revealed that indirect talks between the United States and Iran had resumed in Doha.

By mid-August reports were circulating that a "final text" had been agreed. However, Tehran has indicated that, from its perspective, progress has been made but there are still outstanding details to be finalised.

The need to reach a deal is widely recognised on the Left as a prerequisite for any chance that Iran may be engaged more positively with the international community. The lifting of sanctions could not only reduce Iran's uranium enrichment programme, confining it for purely civilian purposes, but also be used as leverage to address the regime's appalling human rights record. Both issues would send positive messages across the Middle East by reducing the likelihood of conflict and bringing the issue of human rights to the forefront of the debate.

In his contribution to the debate Jeremy Corbyn MP was very clear that, "Any discussion with Iran must include a discussion of human rights". However, Corbyn pressed on to widen the debate to consider the issue of peace in the Middle East, in the context

of the non-proliferation treaty review conference this August in New York. In this regard he expressed the view that,

“While I fully appreciate that Iran clearly has developed centrifuges and enriched uranium almost to weapons-grade, two other countries in the region either have nuclear weapons or could. One is Israel, which clearly does have nuclear weapons, and the other is Saudi Arabia, which could quickly develop nuclear weapons if it wanted. The urgency of having a negotiation and a revamped version of the 2015 agreement, or something like it, is important if we are to try to preserve the peace of the region.”

While the issue of peace in the region and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons was central to Jeremy Corbyn’s argument, other contributions chose to sidestep the issue and focus upon the trustworthiness of the Iranian regime, going so far as to question whether any kind of deal was even possible.

Steve McCabe MP was keen to revert to a more punitive approach with regard to Iran, focussing upon “the malign activities of those who control the Iranian regime” while failing to see the bigger danger of not addressing the issue of nuclear non-proliferation in the wider context of the Middle East.

The activities of the Iranian regime are indeed “malign” as the Committee for the Defence of the Iranian People’s Rights (CODIR) has spent the last 40 years playing a central role in pointing out, while campaigning for peace, human rights and democracy for the people of Iran.

However, in the context of the geo-political situation in the Middle East, and the increased international uncertainty due to the war in Ukraine, an agreement which could be the beginnings of a more stable region would be worth aiming for.

The situation inside Iran remains finely balanced. The punitive sanctions imposed following the unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 deal by the United States has seen the Iranian economy contract by 6% year on year according to the IMF. Social unrest has been gathering momentum as a result of the impact of sanctions upon the economy. Widespread job losses have plunged many into poverty with inflation running at over 40% according to the World Bank.

Concern with the situation has been expressed by Taghi Rostamvandi, Iran’s deputy interior minister for social affairs, who has observed at a government conference that,

“In recent years, people’s tolerance has decreased in correlation with rising economic pressure. The alarm bells should ring for us if people think a secular or non-religious state might be more able to deal with the challenges rather than the Islamic

state.”

Such fears are exacerbated by the fact that Iran’s population is predominantly young, with 45% being under 35 years old and less wedded to the aims of the Islamic regime than some of their elders. It is from this section of the population that demands for better jobs, educational opportunities and greater democracy are being heard most vociferously.

The imperative for the regime remains to secure a deal. It is believed if US sanctions are lifted, this will bring some economic relief for the government. Tehran would be able to access tens of billions of petrodollars trapped in foreign central banks and rapidly ramp up oil exports. For recently elected President, Ebrahim Raisi, a nuclear deal is seen to be the opportunity to deliver on economic promises and hopefully keep the country calm.

Some hardliners within the Iranian regime however are willing to risk a no deal situation arguing that, what they term a “resistance economy” has prevailed, in spite of the severity of the sanctions regime to date, and that they could continue with this while maintaining social stability.

The extent of social discontent in evidence across the country may contradict such an assessment but the fact that some inside the regime see toughing it out as an option will be of concern to much of the Iranian population. Tehran has been forced to freeze many longer-term development plans to tackle issues such as water shortages, and the number of protests over the past four and a half years suggests a clear correlation between economic pressure and social unrest.

The situation in Ukraine has already had an impact upon the likelihood of a deal being agreed. Talks in Vienna which started in April 2021, aimed at reviving the Iran Nuclear Deal, were suspended recently when Russia insisted that the US sanctions should not be an impediment to its trade with Iran. The Islamic Republic relies on the import of grain, fertilisers, cooking oil, and meat from Russia, which have been abruptly halted. Ironically, the US and its European allies are attempting to leverage pressure on Iran to step-in and provide oil and gas to the West to fill the void in supply from Russia.

There is little doubt that the regime in Iran is under pressure due to the deteriorating economic situation. At the same time the West is under pressure to find some accommodation as a result of its issues with Russia. A revival of some form of the JCPOA may well be expedient for both, while at the same time alleviating some of the pressures of poverty from the people of Iran.

Certainly, any deal should be linked to the wider issue of nuclear non-proliferation in the Middle East, as that really would be a major step forward for peace in the region.

An urgent call for solidarity!

Iran is undergoing a massive upheaval. The movement for change is gathering momentum! CODIR believe it is time for standing in solidarity with the people of Iran and their struggle.



For almost five years now, the theocratic dictatorship ruling Iran has been experiencing arguably the most acute and multidimensional crisis in its forty-year-plus reign - and a crisis that shows no sign of abating anytime soon.

The Islamic Republic is more or less completely isolated internationally, after years of pursuing a malign and reckless foreign policy and the more recent abrogation by the US of the 2015 JCPoA - leading to the re-imposition of crippling sanctions on Iran. On top of this, the regime faces a serious and growing crisis at home with a support base which is estimated to have shrunk to 20%, at the very most, out of an 85-million-strong population. Years

of gross mismanagement, endemic corruption, and sanctions have combined to create the proverbial 'perfect storm' in Iran.

It is estimated that around 45% of Iran's population are under 35-years-old. This is a legacy of the late Ayatollah Khomeini's call for the creation of a new generation of 'Islamic Revolutionaries'. Ironically, it is this very generation that have turned their backs on anything remotely resembling the vision of the Islamic Republic's founders and who comprise the system's most ardent opponents. For it is this demographic group, having never known anything other than the Islamic Republic, that most demand the trappings of a functioning and viable economy - real jobs, decent wages, and prospects - let alone human and democratic rights and political freedoms, and that have been so abjectly failed and let down. Youth unemployment is currently estimated to be running at 30% to 60% in Iran depending on the particular age group and locale concerned.

From the turn of 2017-2018, Iran has been the scene of a growing popular protest movement owing to the serious disgruntlement of mainly young adults from the lower social classes at the regime's blatant disregard for their livelihoods, prospects, and means of survival, amidst an increasingly tough environment inside the country.

The sudden announcement of a triple-fold hike in the cost of petrol in November 2019 effectively lit the touchpaper for huge protests in cities and towns across Iran which the dictatorship's security forces ruthlessly put down with lethal force and an internet blackout that lasted for several days. At least 650 mainly young protesters were killed and disappeared by the regime.

The simmering widespread discontent has continuously manifested itself from summer 2020, with the country reeling from a collapsing economy and the disastrous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, in an ever-widening protest movement encompassing most sectors of Iranian society. The hugely popular and effective teachers' protests are the latest example of this and are regarded as particularly significant in that they pertain to a youth-facing sector... Essentially, the teacher's demands and objectives are as much for the good of Iran's students, future generations, and tomorrow, as they are for the teaching and educating sector itself.

And, despite the dictatorship's default recourse to intimidation; arbitrary arrests and detention; and brutal, even deadly, violence, most Iran observers and analysts are coming to the conclusion that the regime is losing its grip on the situation. Some are even going as far as to draw parallels between this situation and that immediately before the uprising that culminated in the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

AFFILIATE TO CODIR



**Solidarity with the struggle
of the Iranian people for
peace, equality & human
rights**

STARTS HERE!

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 organisations £50,

National organisations: £100 to £250.

For information on CODIR please write to us at: CODIR-B.M.CODIR, London, WC1N 3XX

E-mail: codir_info@btinternet.com



Protest wave continues to engulf Iran

Growing unrest in Iran has been spilling over into open street protest against the regime as Western sanctions continue to bite and the economy struggles.

Jane Green assesses how the struggle against the theocratic dictatorship in Iran is unfolding.

Iran often makes international headlines as part of the debate regarding the Iran nuclear deal talks, the agreement reneged on by Donald Trump in 2018. The situation facing ordinary workers inside the country rarely breaks into the headlines of the international media.

However, the extent of violence this year has even prompted the United Nations to comment. Recently, UN human rights experts issued a statement condemning the "violent crackdown against civil society in Iran," urging "those responsible for using excessive force to be held to account through comprehensive and independent investigations." The UN went on to condemn the "excessive use of force against protestors, with what appears to be an active policy to shield perpetrators and prevent accountability."

The UN has been compelled to comment as since May, hundreds of workers, teachers, and other activists have been arrested for peaceful protest. At least five protesters have been killed and the Iranian government has imposed internet shutdowns, as the protests have rocked Iran.

While workers in many sectors across Iran have participated in growing protests, teachers have been at the forefront of the current wave rocking the country. Since late May, more than 230 teachers have been arrested by security forces throughout the country, including 23 who were summoned before the judiciary to face charges. Protesters' grievances have included sub-poverty-line wages as well as the arrest and imprisonment of their leaders, among other basic labour rights issues. Prominent teachers' rights advocates Rasoul Bodaghi and Jafar Ebrahimi have not been heard of for several weeks, after their arrests by Intelligence Ministry agents. They are being held in solitary confinement in Tehran's Evin Prison where their families have been denied permission to visit them. In spite of the obvious injustices being perpetrated by the Iranian regime resistance continues inside the Islamic Republic's prisons. Ten teachers have been on hunger strike since June 18 in Saqqez, western Iran, to protest their unlawful detention.

The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) has issued a statement demanding an end to the harassment of the families of its imprisoned activists, Reza

Shahabi and Hassan Saeedi. The statement condemns the pressure on the families of teachers, workers and other detainees to make false confessions. It goes on to demand "an immediate medical examination of Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saeedi and the unconditional release of all workers, teachers and other detainees in this case."

The current wave of protests and imprisonments is part of a pattern which has been consistently growing within Iran over the past five years. Over that period the theocratic dictatorship ruling Iran has been experiencing arguably the most acute and multidimensional crisis in its forty-year-plus reign, a crisis that shows no sign of abating anytime soon.

The widespread discontent has continuously manifested itself from summer 2020, with the country reeling from a collapsing economy and the disastrous handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. The popular and effective teachers' protests are the latest example of this and are particularly significant as they pertain to a youth-facing sector. The teacher's demands and objectives are as much for the good of Iran's students and future generations, as they are for the teaching and educating sector itself.

Global unions and teachers' organisations, including Education International and the ITUC, have also expressed solidarity with the teachers in Iran and have written to the authorities there demanding that they respect the rights of the teachers and release all imprisoned teacher and union activists.

The Committee for the Defence of Iranian People's Rights (CODIR) has called upon the trade union and labour movement internationally to rally around, and stand in solidarity with, the detained Iranian trade unionists and teachers. CODIR is calling upon all those standing for human and democratic rights to write letters of protest to the Iranian authorities, via the diplomatic missions of the Islamic Republic of Iran, demanding the unconditional release of their innocent counterparts currently languishing in the theocratic regime's prisons and detention centres.

Interview with Maziar Gilaninejad, spokesperson for the Union of Metalworkers and Mechanics of Iran (UMMI):

We will be a barricade against anti-worker policies!



- ◆ - Our union will take all necessary routes to realise the rights of the working people [of Iran].
- ◆ - The aim of the so-called "[Council for the Conciliation of Labour Relations](#)" is to delegitimise labour relations [inside the country].
- ◆ - We are unequivocal [in stating that] we will not allow the aspirations of the Chamber of Commerce and the full implementation of neoliberal anti-worker policies to pass.

Abridged and translated from [AndisheNou](#)

Maziar Gilaninejad, spokesperson of the UMMI, talks about the critical situation in workplaces in Iran; labour protests in the country; and the unresponsiveness and questionable performance of the authorities and managers of factories and projects in Iran.

Q: The country's economic situation is dire. Widespread unemployment, recession, unpaid salaries and wages of workers, and the spread of labour protests are the reality of Iran today. What is the UMMI's evaluation of the current situation?

The government's neoliberal policies - actually a catastrophic [act of] economic surgery - have led to inflation of at least 300 percent. Even with the payment of [an approximately] \$13 cash subsidy, people's purchasing power will not improve, and people will protest. Currently, pensioners, teachers, and project workers in the oil industry have launched a movement for their demands that could lead to some changes... The mafia nested within the government wants to import more and destroy the remaining industry, which will absolutely render the country's economy a single-product economy. For years now, we have wanted to cut off the grip of the Chamber of Commerce mafia. Every year, when it comes to determining minimum wages, this same mafia will do everything it can to disrupt this process... As long as the government implements the IMF's dictated policies and tries to undermine [the country's] public services, labour law, and the Social Security Organisation, and then eliminate them by privatising them, society moves ever closer towards disintegration.

Government officials of the Islamic Republic of Iran recognise only the

activities of the Islamic Labour Councils and the so-called [state-affiliated] "Worker's House". Is it true that the government does not allow labour unions to operate legally and independently? What do you think is the reason?

Yes, they do not allow [true] labour unions to operate - because they know that we are against the anti-national policies of capitalism, and that we would undoubtedly organise and constitute a barricade against these anti-labour policies.

How do real independent unions function in Iran? Are their current activities effective in any way?

The conditions for labour union activities are extremely arduous and difficult. To understand the extent of this difficulty, it is enough to take a look at how they [the authorities] have dealt with the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Union and the Union of Tehran Bus Transit Workers (Syndicate Vahed). Currently, our union comrade, Manouchehr Seraj has been sentenced to five years in prison in Firoozkooh on account of his union activities. Our union activists among the pensioners movement are regularly summoned [by the authorities] and receive threatening text messages, but this does not mean that we are sitting idle. Currently, in the oil industry, project workers have been able to increase their pay five times over that which they were receiving in 2020, and their working conditions have correspondingly improved across 70 percent of the projects [in the sector] since 2020. In the automotive plants and steel mills, after short-term strikes, we see tangible changes in wages. Regular follow-ups by our union with government agencies have occasionally borne fruit. We were also able to obtain exonerations for

some of our union activists in the Revolutionary Court - including for our comrade, Hamid Sharqi. But these victories are 1:1000 compared with the mafia's plays.

A year after Ebrahim Raisi's government took office, given his campaign promises and claims of representing a "people's government," has there been any change in the livelihoods of the working people, for example in the case of eliminating blank-signed contracts, or changing labour law and income levels in favour of working people?

Changes have been made, but not in a positive direction. In one year, the purchasing power of working people has declined three-fold. Food, medicine, housing, and healthcare are no longer accessible to ordinary working people. The recent suicides and self-immolations of workers [in Iran] are the result of this so-called "grand surgery". Attacking the country's labour code under the pretext that "life expectancy among working people has increased", therefore the retirement age should be raised to 65-years-old; illegal government manipulation of pensions; reducing workers' housing benefits; delaying the payment of workers' wages, which has become commonplace among contracting companies; and not repaying the government debt to the Social Security Organisation, are all part of a nationwide attack on the achievements of working people over the last year. We are unequivocal [in stating that] we will not allow the aspirations of the Chamber of Commerce and the full implementation of neoliberal anti-worker policies to pass.

It is clear that the government cannot control price inflation or the increase in housing rents, and the rising pressures on the lives of wage-earners will continue. The extent of protests is increasing accordingly. In such a situation, how can you organise effective and purposeful activities to improve the situation of working people and what challenges are there along this path?

Our union will take all necessary routes to realise the rights of the working people [of Iran], from writing letters, through negotiations, to



strikes and rallies. Going forth among the working people, talking to them, and canvassing their views; publishing "Union Messenger" monthly for 11 years; and publishing 13 issues of the united retirees bulletin called "Omid" [Hope] over three years, are just some of our strategies for organising. Engaging in dialogue with other trade unionists and trying to unite our campaigns, is another approach we have been taking. But they [the authorities] arrest and frame unionists, and imprison them to stop their activities. Nevertheless, ultimately, they cannot stop us.

According to media reports, the recent "revival of the Council for the Conciliation of Labour Relations" has been on the government's agenda. What do you think about this? Can this Council act in the best interests of the working people?

As long as workers cannot freely and independently elect their true representatives, no institution can act in the interests of the workers. What have the Islamic Labour Councils and Retirement Centres done for the working people over these past forty years, other than wrecking and ruining workers' achievements? These institutions were built to destroy the 100-year achievements of the working-class. The objective of this Council is to delegitimise labour relations. The [concept of] "elderly reconciliation" belongs to feudalism, and reviving it will mean pure lawlessness in worker-employer relations.

How do you evaluate the impact of U.S. financial sanctions on industries

from the perspective of investment, manufacturing, and especially the job perspective of workers?

Currently, the country's automotive and steel industries are experiencing huge problems due to the sanctions. The closure of steel mills across the country over the past decade, delays in oil and gas projects due to the lack of standardised parts and materials, are just some of the problems. As a result, unemployment has risen, production is declining, and the government's economic path is oriented towards brokerage and imports.

Sanctions have led many Korean and Japanese investors, who were traditionally active in the Iranian market, to leave Iran. Only the Chinese, in the oil and gas industries, have been able to stay active in our country and reduce foreign exchange pressure to some extent through their financial operations. However, the contracts of these same investors are not formulated for the benefit of ordinary people, the environment, and the working people, owing to the involvement of the brokers who write the contracts in the [country's] Chamber of Commerce. Rentier actions in the financial sector are also interesting. The Chinese give Yuan to our oil company. In the process of converting Yuan to Dollar and then to Rial, the Iranian foreign exchangers and dealers make handsome profits. Of course, with Mr. Raisi coming to office, and announcing that no new project will be signed-off, construction activities have faced new obstacles which have compounded the unemployment crisis for Iran's workers.

Solidarity with political prisoners in Iran!



The Islamic Republic of Iran should cease the arrest, torture, prosecution and imprisonment of workers, women, youth, university students, national and religious minorities, and environmental activists

Free all political prisoners in Iran!