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Support Iran's resurgent workers

Since the nuclear deal between the Iranian regime and the imperialist powers was signed in July 2015 trade and diplomatic relations with the European powers have taken off. Deals signed so far are already worth billions of euros, including one for 118 Airbuses (€25bn). Now even the Americans are keen to trade with Iran's dictatorship. Oil and gas, automotive, aerospace and companies from many other industries are planning to export and even start production in Iran. For example, Chevrolets are already being exported to Iran and General Motors is also planning to re-start the Chevrolet joint venture in Iran.

In Britain the crisis-ridden Tory government is looking to Iran for big opportunities. David Cameron recently appointed the Pinochet-supporting Norman Lamont as envoy responsible for developing trade with the Iranian regime. Lamont has said that "Iran is the world's biggest emerging market since the collapse of the Soviet Union 25 years ago." Given how Lamont behaved in October 1998, when the Chilean dictator was detained in Britain, we do not expect him (and his EU counterparts) to let the rights of workers to form independent trade unions and the right to strike, or women's equal treatment by the state and society, or the rights of national and religious minorities and all other oppressed layers in Iranian society, to come in the way of the multi-billion pound trade and investment deals that the capitalists of Europe and Iran are planning.

The improvements in diplomatic and trade relations have had three main effects in Iran. First, the regime can no longer justify its smashing of workers' struggles, or those of women, the youth, national minorities, the disabled, writers and artists, or anyone else who is protesting against the unbearable exploitation and oppression, by saying that the country is being threatened with invasion - as its neighbours Afghanistan and Iraq were - and therefore treating all critics or protesters as internal enemies.

Second, so far all the economic benefits of the new deals have gone to Iran's capitalists and the regime's officials in the state bureaucracy, military and clergy. So while workers' expectations have been raised - and they can see the luxury cars and all the money that the regime's officials are flashing about - their standard of living is sinking ever lower.

Economic problems like unemployment, inflation, housing, unpaid wages and so on just keep growing. Even though official statistics underestimate all social problems by about half, unemployment is still 11.8% and is predicted to stay between 10% and 12% for a number of years, with youth unemployment at around 25%. And although inflation is now supposed to be 8.9% many workers still cannot make ends meet: around 18% of children suffer from malnutrition! The new minimum wage set by the regime is just 812,000 tomans (\$269) a month. Yet everyone in Iran knows full well that this 14% rise is totally inadequate to make up for years of real pay cuts that Iran's 13 million workers have had to endure. Even the toadies at the regime-controlled so-called Labour House estimate that the minimum subsistence wage is \$700 a month!

These hardships, coupled with the lack of basic rights like forming independent trade unions and the right to strike, have led to a resurgence in the workers' movement. So far, due to the continuing repression, these protests and strikes have been relatively small (just a few hundred workers at a time) and spread out. However, they are increasing in frequency and cover nearly all economic sectors: from automotive to the metro, from miners to nurses, from oil refining to steel, from sugar cane workers to teachers and so on.

Third, the improvement in relations has meant that many international organisations are now advising and helping the Iranian regime. Among these is the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which is helping to bring the worst aspects of European and American trade unionism into Iran. Their aim is to set up compliant or even neutered trade unions. This new danger can only be thwarted by militant labour activists intervening

in these organisations and not abandoning the mass of workers to the ‘leadership’ provided by reformists and syndicalists drafted in to build these would-be turncoat outfits.

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Last year’s official May Day celebrations, once again organised by the regime’s Labour House, were an orgy of racist rants against Afghan refugees, accusing them of causing unemployment and all the other ills that Iran’s clapped-out capitalism has caused. It is the duty of all labour activists in Iran to condemn this manoeuvre of the regime, and where possible, to intervene to expose this racism that can only serve to divide and weaken workers, both Afghan and Iranian, against the common class enemy. And all radical labour activists outside Iran must mobilise the maximum solidarity, especially now that many of the same issues are occurring in Europe (e.g., the new Trade Union Bill in Britain and the Labour Law in France) to show that the capitalist offensive is very similar everywhere. The only way workers can win their struggles against these attacks is through strengthening their cross-border solidarity.

There are currently many workers, teachers and other political prisoners languishing in Iran’s jails. Help us to support Iran’s resurgent workers by showing your solidarity with the work of our campaign and publicise issues like political executions, political prisoners, detention without trial, torture and other abuses that sustain the dictatorship in Iran.

Long live independent workers’ organisations and the right to strike!

Free all political prisoners now!

Investigate Shahrokh Zamani’s death!

Iranian workers are not alone!

Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign

1 May 2016

Launching the Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign

As explained above, the ending of sanctions and the resurgence of workers’ struggles in Iran mean that there are going to be many more protests and strikes than in the past few years. It is the duty of all radical labour activists and socialists in Europe and the Americas to step up their solidarity work so that more and more of these struggles are successful. Each successful protest or strike will increase the workers’ self-confidence and the balance of class forces in their favour, not just in Iran, but throughout the Middle East.

In order to reflect and support these struggles Iranian exiled activists, and European socialists who have co-operated with them in the past, will be launching a new solidarity campaign. The Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign, named after the militant Marxist painters’ and decorators’ leader who was murdered in prison on September 13th, will be co-ordinating its activities closely with the Workers’ Action Committee (WAC) in Iran. WAC is one of the very few labour committees that has continued its struggles, e.g., pasting posters in the streets, despite the severe repression of the past few years.

You can help us mobilise the maximum solidarity possible for the coming struggles. We will be holding a meeting on May Day (see details below) to have preparatory discussions on launching the campaign in the summer. We look forward to seeing you then and working with you in the future.

Shahrokh Zamani Action Campaign

Solidarity with Iranian workers’ struggles

The Lucas Arms, 245A Gray’s Inn Road, London.

Sunday, May 1st, 5:00pm.