

Iranian Workers' News

SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN WITH IRANIAN WORKERS

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Protest and sit-in by Chit-e Rey textile and Shadan Pour Shoe workers in front of the Majles (Islamic Parliament)

More than 1000 workers from Chit-e Rey textile factory in Shahr Rey situated in south Tehran, continued their widespread protest in recent months including a protest outside the headquarters of Bonyad-e Mostazafin (an Islamic foundation) on the 27th of May, protest in the



factory grounds and blocking adjacent roads on the 11th of June, and finally a sit in front of the Majles on the 12th of June. These workers and received no wages for the almost 3 months, and demanded payment of their unpaid wages and bonuses. (continued on page 2)

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Protest gathering by Jamko workers in front of the Majles (Islamic Parliament)

On Tuesday the 26th of June 2001, workers from Jamko clothing factory, protested against non payment of salaries and bonuses for more than a year, in front of the Majles. This gathering ended when two MPs promised the workers that they will deal with the workers demands.

Jamko has been transferred to some govern- (continued on page 3)

Sit-in by 150 sacked workers from Sherkat-e General

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Iran's presidential elections and the workers

Iran's presidential elections took place on the 8th of June and according to official figures Khatami was elected for a second term, with 2 million votes from 42 millions Iranians eligible to vote that

is slightly more than 50 percent of the population. The total vote of his 9 opponents all associated with the more rightwing faction of the regime and its leader managed to get about 20 percent of the total votes cast.

The results of this election like the previous presidential election 4 years ago and the parliamentary elections two years ago, show the people's participation in elections is simply a (continued on page 3)

Sponsors of the Solidarity Campaign with Iranian Workers

Professor Noam Chomsky (Massachusetts Institute of Technology-USA). Professor Istvan Meszaros (Emiritus Professor, Sussex University-UK). Liz Leicester (member Camden, Unison Trade Union-UK). David Hookes (Liverpool initiative project-UK). Albert Sohrabian (veteran activist of the Iranian workers movement-Germany). Terry Brotherstone (Lecturer Aberdeen University-UK). Hillary Horrocks (member National Union of Journalists-Edinburgh). Simon Pirani (member NUJ freelance branch-UK). Cliff Slaughter (political activist - UK). David Mather (Lecturer Caledonian University-Glasgow). David Temple (member Printing workers Union-UK). Dr A Holberg (Journalist, author-Germany). Val Moghaddam (Illinois State University-USA). Leila Patel (political activist -UK). Michael Albert (Z-Mag). Jim Smith (Trade Unionist-UK).

Protest and sit-in by Chit-e Rey ...

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These workers also protested against the transfer of their factory to the private sector, a process that had led to a halt in production and insecurity for workers. During their protest the workers announced that the new owners had taken no steps to make any new investment in this major industrial unit but had instead planned to sell its equipment and the 16 hectares of prime land belonging to the factory, causing its gradual closure and currently 1615 workers in this factory, some with 13 to 27 years of experience are unemployed and have received no salaries for 3 months.

This factory which was under the cover of Bonyad-e Mostazafin was transferred to the private sector last December. The protesting workers were giving slogans such as: "either death or payment of our delayed wages", "death to Bonyad" and demanded to speak to Majles MPs and a resolution of their problems.

These workers who had come to the demonstration wearing their work clothes tried to enter the Majles building a number of times but they were confronted by security forces and during the scuffles, one of the main entrances to the Majles was pulled off. One of the protesters said: "Bonyad has given the factory to a few individuals without any consultation with the workers, and this transfer includes giving the workforce. In other words Bonyad has sold us like slaves for a pittance". Another worker said: "our question for those responsible for the factory and the government is have they ever faced a situation where their children went to bed hungry? Have they faced a day when they couldn't pay for their daily expenses and the rent? And finally have they ever replaced three meals a day with eating one potatoes? This is the story of our life for the last year, full of

problems."

This sit-in which lasted until dusk in pouring rain, was repeated the next day Wednesday the 13th of June. On this day in addition to Chit-e Rey workers, 400 workers from Shadan Pour Shoe factory joined the protest outside the Majles. Their factory, which also belonged to Bonyad-e Mostazafin, was privatised in 1999 and 475 workers have received no wages for 10 months, their repeated protests have led to no results. One of the workers from Shadan Pour Shoe factory, referred to this privatisation, returning the factory to Rassekh Afshar (the son of one of its previous owners, who was removed after the anti royalist uprising): "when Rassekh got ownership of the factory he promised that he will employ 500 new workers bringing the workforce to 1000. but this promise was never materialized. Then by selling the factory equipment he claimed he wanted to buy new machinery to improve productivity. But this promise was never kept either". Another worker referred to the fact that some of the workers have been forced to beg in order to earn some money and many workers have been evicted by their landlord with their furniture thrown into the street. He said: "a few of the workers have had heart attacks and died. A few have become paralysed, the pressure is enormous and there are no other jobs and no wages. The factory owner is connected to the Bonyad and other government organs. This man who supposedly has no money, found money to contribute to the election funds of Fallahian (one of the candidates in the recent presidential elections), how come? The first day we talked to a judge about our case, he said I will punish this man and force him to pay you .. the second time he said leave alone he is poor creature of God! The officer of the security forces tells us you will see

I will get your money and then next time we see him, his approach is completely different"

A large number of anti riot policemen were sent to the sit-in and tried to disperse the gathering, but the workers resisted and continued their sit-in in front of the Majles. The security forces were stopping other people approaching the protesters.

After two days of protest outside the Majles, as their demands were not met, Chit-e Rey workers gathered once more outside the factory and stopped the manager leaving the factory for 3 hours. On the 19th of June they broke the main entrance of Bonyad-e Mostazafin and staged a sit-in there. One of the workers said: "when they stopped us entering Bonyad, we were forced to cut the chains of the railings," adding "put yourself in our place, what can we tell our wife and children .. we are only asking for raw materials to restart production". In response to a reporter who asked him if such gathering and violent behavior is a good idea? he replied: "when no one responds to our demands, what can we do?"

Following this protest the director of Bonyad Mostazafin, addressed the workers and said that all wages will be paid that day, before the end of the working day. He confirmed that raw material necessary to restart the factory will be provided and until the issue of ownership is resolved Bonyad will take responsibility, so that the factory can continue production.

Bonyad-e Mostazafin with more than 30 thousand milliard Tomans, controls 40 per cent of Iran's economy. It owns hundreds of factories, mines, construction companies, trading and transport companies, thousands of hectares of land, orchards and fruit producing land and is the largest economic institution of the Middle East. The director of Bonyad-e Mostazafin is directly nominated by Iran's supreme

religious leader, Ayatollah Khamneii. he is not answerable to any one else and does not pay any taxes. □

Protest gathering by Jamko workers ...

(continued from page 1)

ment chronies under the guise of 'privatization' and has faced a complete recession for more than three months. The director of this company, who refuses to invest any money in it is trying to close it down claiming that there is a cash flow program and a shortage of raw materials.

Workers in this factory have staged a number of protests over the last year in front of government offices and centers, demanding that the authority deal with their demands. More than 150 workers in this factory gathered outside the Ministry of Industry in Tehran on the 27th of May, demanding their unpaid wages and bonuses. The police intervened and stopped the demonstration.

The government 's program, in accordance with a neo liberal approach of structural readjustment, has lead to increasing transfer of production units to the private sector.

As a result of this policy many production and service units have closed down in the last few years and thousands of workers have been thrown to the endless queue of the unemployed without the minimum social cover. □

Gathering by Kamorad ...

(continued from page 6)

we have to sell our family property and my daughter's dowry to pay back loans."

Those responsible for this company have closed down 80% of the production and the moulding section of this factory and its personnel face uncertainty or have been transferred to other sectors. □

Iran's presidential election and the workers

(continued from page 1)

way of expressing their hatred of this undemocratic, religious ideological state. A fact that is shown by the refusal of people to vote for candidates associated with the supreme leader and the more right wing faction of the regime who consider themselves god' representatives on earth and therefore deny the right to vote.

It should be noted that in these elections, like previous elections, only the representatives of the two factions of the regime were allowed to put forward candidates and none of the forces outside the current regime, even those adhering to the Islamic constitution, were not allowed to put forward candidates.

These elections took place at a time when a new wave workers protests is taking place throughout the country and especially in major cities and industrial centers. These protests are against non-payment of delayed wages, factory closures and the threat of mass job losses and privatisations which have worsened considerably the living conditions of the majority of workers. These protests are very wide spread and after months of other protests, which bore no results, workers, have adopted new forms of struggle such as sit-ins in front of the Majles. (Islamic Parliament)

To such an extent that representatives from both factions of the regime, from conservatives to reformists, have admitted that the destiny of 'Allah's' heavenly (religious) state depends on the resolution of the economic problems and down to earth issues. These problems resulting from a despair of workers and ordinary people form the inability of Khatami's first term presidency to deliver any change.

On the day of the elections, a number of conditions, including hatred of the more fundamentalist faction, as well the compulsory nature of the

vote for many civil servants, military and security personnel and their families, resulted in a vote for Khatami.

However the election results show that 1) 14 million people, i.e. one third of those eligible to vote, didn't participate in elections and boycotted them. 2) A majority of the 21 million who voted for Khatami, only did so as they were not presented with another choice and this was the only to express their opposition to the regime, as admitted by the leading intellectuals of the 'reformist' faction Abbas Abdi and Saeed Hajarian.

In his analysis in the paper 'Norooz' (Tehran, 17th June 2001) Abbas Abdi concludes that the vote of the 21 million who did vote for Khatami should not be taken as popular support for the program and the record of Khatami or the 'reformist' faction.

In any case the reelection of Khatami to the presidency will bear no economic or political benefit to workers. Firstly because from a political point of view as he has repeatedly emphasised, Khatami has limited himself to working by reforms within the confines of existing political order. A framework, which based on the constitution of the Islamic state, has given a half god status to the Vali Faghih (supreme religious leader) and on this basis he can deny the peoples' will and vote. A power that has allowed the Vali Faghih and his allies to control more 60 percent of financial, industrial and economic institutions without any inspection or control by the government, the Majles (Islamic Parliament) or the people. A group of 'Aghazadeha' (offspring's of mullahs, high ranking leaders of the regime) who according to Rabbii (a presidential adviser) have relied on this god like power to embezzled 400 milliard dollars of Iran's wealth in the last 20 years. These 'Aghazadeha'

have monopolised such major economic power that without their approval no minor step in the economic sphere can be taken. Secondly from an economic point view, again as Khatami has emphasised time and time again, and as his 4 year record shows, he has followed the same economic program as his predecessors in the Islamic regime and he intends to continue with the same program. I.e. economic restructuring, privatisation or in other words the programs of the World Bank and the international Monetary Fund for 'economic restructuring' which was started by Rafsanjani during his presidency and over the last ten years has destroyed the economy, creating recession in production and industry and making millions of workers unemployed (Rafsanjani and his associates are now recognised as the largest most powerful economic Mafia in Iran). In this way as the escalation of workers protests showed in the midst of electoral propaganda, workers from Chit-e Rey textile factory and Shadan Pour Shoe staged a sit in front of the Majles a few days after Khatami's victory. Workers who are despairing of the actions and inabilities of Khatami's government are looking to other methods to progress their demands and as Abbas Abdi admits in his analysis of the presidential election results, the so called 'reformist' Khatami faction is not the representative of the 21 million who voted for it, out of desperation. The reformists must clarify who they represent amongst the voters who were against Vali Faghih as the principal leader of the Islamic order, and the faction that supports him.

As 'reforms' reach a dead end, the 'reformists' are clarifying their final position, maintaining the current Islamic regime. Given the experience of the last few years, is there any other support for workers but their unity and independence? □

Workers Struggles in Iran

Protest demonstration by Bafnaz textile workers in Isfahan

On Tuesday the 22nd May 2001, workers from Bafnaz textile factory in Isfahan (central Iran) demanded a resolution of the problems of this industrial unit by organising a protest demonstration and blocking the main road, Chahar Bagh, in the city. Workers from this plant have not received any wages for 2.5 months and were shouting: "unemployment and poverty are two sources of immorality" they also gave the slogan: "the battles between the two factions of the regime have nothing to do with us" reiterating that the differences between the two factions of the government have nothing to do with the real interests of the workers. According to the paper Kar va Kargar (Tehran, 23rd May 2001) one of the demonstrators said: "the workers situation is so bad that a few days ago one of the workers tried to commit suicide but other workers tried to dissuade him and they succeeded to convince him that they can solve his financial problems jointly."

Gathering by Kouh Fard workers in Isfahan

On Sunday the 24th of June, workers from Kouh Fard factory, producers of audio-visual equipment in Isfahan (central Iran) staged a protest against non payment of their wages and mismanagement as well as the refusal of the managers to deal with the workers demands.

Protest by Tabriz carpet and blanket factory

On the 22nd of June, workers from Tabriz carpet and blanket factory signed a petition complaining about their working conditions and demanded a return to work for work-

ers who had been expelled in a non human act.

Protest gathering by Parchin ammunitions factory

On Wednesday the 20th of Jun, a group of workers expelled from Parchin ammunitions factory gathered outside the presidential offices, demanding a return to work. Carrying a placard these workers wrote addressing the president: "Pay attention to the demands of us workers with 8 to 13 years experience who continue to work day and night and face sacking". The workers had brought their wife and their children to this protest.

Simultaneous national strike by Power plants workers

In an unprecedented action, last May, workers from a number of Power plants went on strike simultaneously, This strike which led to power cuts of 4 to 6 hours in 25 provinces in Iran, was against the plan to 'moderate human resources' in other words plans to sack workers from Ghom Power plant (in central Iran). This strike started in Ghom and spread to other plants very quickly.

The only excuse given by the ministry of Energy for these power cuts was technical problems.

Sit-in by Takhteh Seh Layii workers in Sari

On Tuesday the 19th of June, more than 100 workers from the Rajaii (tree ply) factory in Sari (northern Iran), in the 4th struggle of the last one and a half years, demanded that their demands should be met and their problems resolved. These workers asked for the payment of their delayed wages and profits. This factory, which has been transferred

to the private sector, has now been closed for 20 months and its workers are unemployed.

Protest gathering by workers in Shariati Hospital in Tehran

On Saturday the 23rd of June, a number of workers from Shariati hospital, part of the Medical Faculty of Teheran University, protested outside this hospital following the transfer of transport services in this hospital to the private sector. This section has 160 service workers whose job security is in jeopardy.

Workers from Ghataat-e Fouladi (steel) workers close the main road

Workers from Ghataat-e Fouladi (steel) company staged a protest against non payment of their wages and bonuses and closed the Tehran-Karaj road for yet another time. Although there are raw materials available, the factory's production is stopped. According to workers, the managers, who in addition to this factory have 4 other units under their control in other parts of the country, have taken similar steps elsewhere, to obtain grants from the government and have practically blocked the workers wages and benefits.

Sit-in by Fars compressor manufacturers workers in Shiraz

Workers from Fars compressor manufacturers in Shiraz (southern Iran) staged a sit-in in the second half of June. A large number of workers from this factory face uncertainty and job losses. Workers in this factory are demanding payment of their unpaid wages and bonuses, a return to work of those who have lost their jobs and job security.

Sit-in by Bridgestone tyre factory in Shiraz

Workers in Bridgestone tyre factory in Shiraz (southern Iran) returned to work after a week of sit-in at the beginning of June, following promises by those responsible to deal with their demands.

Their protest was against non-payment of wages and bonuses.

Protest gathering by Iran Jeika workers

On Wednesday the 30th of May, tens of workers from Iran Jeika garment manufacturer, situated in Rasht (northern Iran), gathered and closed the road outside the provincial offices in this town, in protest at non payment of their wages and bonuses. They said that after

the factory was transferred to new owners, it was closed down and for nearly a year the workers have received no payments, this is under circumstances when these workers are not only deprived of the meager national insurance cover but the social services refuse to even renew their health insurance booklets.

Iran Jeika factory has 142 workers with 10 to 25 years work experience and 95% of them are women workers many of whom are the sole breadwinner in the family.

Protest by Nurses against increase in working hours

On Tuesday the 12th of June, a number of nurses from Medical Science Faculty in Tehran, protested against the increase of their working hours from 175 hours a month to 191 hours and gathered outside the personnel offices of the University. They said as their profession is a difficult job dealing with human life, increasing their working hours is unjust.

Protest gathering by Behpoush Company workers

On mid day the 17th May 2001, workers from Behpoush clothing company, situated on the Tehran-Karaj road, which come under the authority of the Bank for Industry and Mining, gathered outside the headquarters of this bank in Tehran shouting protest slogans. Workers held a placard clarifying that they were protesting at non-payment of their wages and benefits for 24 months and demanded that the authorities dealt with their problem.

It should be noted that during last year, workers from Farassa construction products company, another company under the cover of this bank, protested a number of times against non payment of there wages.

Protests gathering by Rissandegi-Bafandegi Kashan factories workers

On Tuesday the 12th of June a number of workers from Rissandegi-Bafandegi Kashan (textile and knitting factories) gathered in the 22nd Bahman street in Kashan (central Iran) in protest at non-payment of their wages. Prior to this on the 20th May 2001, workers from this factory had gathered in a demonstration in the same street demanding payment of their delayed wages.

More than 1500 workers from these factories have lost their jobs and from now on it is only likely that 511 workers will be able to return to work.

Strike by Sarab Baft textile workers

Workers from Sarab Baft textile factory went on strike for a few days in protest at nonpayment if their wages

on time.

Sit-in by 150 sacked workers from Sherkat-e General

On Saturday the 24th of June, 150 workers sacked from Sherkat-e General, producers of air conditioning systems, some of whom have more than 20 years experience, staged a sit-in in the factory grounds, to protest at their sacking, in the factory grounds.

Those responsible for this company used plans for restructuring the plant to sack the workers and the Labour offices of Eslam Shahr, (in south west Tehran) approved this decision. These workers were sacked while 200 contract workers were employed on short-term contracts. In fact many managers in Iran sack their experienced full time workers and increasingly use temporary workers on short-term contract. These workers receive the lowest salaries and benefits and constantly face the threat of loosing their jobs as the managers can sack them at any time.

According to one of the sacked workers, Sherkat-e General has 5 production lines and currently 4 of them are working and the fifth line will start soon. This production unit has no budget deficits nor is it lacking raw materials. He added: while the workers have been sacked, every day the company produces 720 water based coolers and the workers have to do overtime during weekends and holidays.

The workers in the sit-in announced that they would continue the sit-in until they win their demands.

Protest gathering by Oil company trainees in front of the Oil Ministry

On Thursday 30th of June, around 50 ex-trainees of the Oil company, gathered in protest outside the Oil Ministry.

In 1994, the Oil company advertised that it would accept 152 trainees, with qualifications below the high school diploma and 100 school leavers with diploma, for employment in oil and gas installations. These trainees were supposed to be employed in the Oil company after a two year training period, however the company is refusing to honour its promise and these trainees have demonstrated a number of times over the last 4 years and staged a number of sit-ins with no result.

Protesting workers from Baresh textile closed the Tehran-Isfahan road

Workers from Baresh textile factory in Isfahan (central Iran) closed the main Tehran-Isfahan road on Saturday the 2nd of June in protest at non-payment of their wages for over 4 months.

Before this protest, more than 1000 workers from

this factory, had staged a demonstration on the 6th of May by walking towards the city center, but the military forces and anti riot police attacked this peaceful demonstration and injured a number of workers, injuring some of them and arresting more than 50 workers, dispersing the demonstration.

Gathering by Kamorad workers in Ghom

On the morning of the 17th of May, nearly 100 workers from Kamrad workers, producers of industrial tabs in Ghom (central Iran) gathered outside the provincial offices in this town demanding payment of 2 months unpaid wages, they also protested against the poor health conditions in the work place and insecurity in their jobs. One of the workers said: "we have not been paid any wages for 2months that is why (continued on page 3)

About the campaign

Solidarity Campaign with Iranian Workers has been set up to seek the support of **International organisation, trade unions and workers organisation throughout the world for the struggles of the Iranian working class against job losses, to obtain their wages on time, to demand pay increases, to obtain the right to set up their own independent organisation, the right to strike, the right to social security and insurance and all other basic workers rights. With this in mind, the Campaign considers providing regular information about the struggles of Iranian workers as its most important task.**

Iranian Workers' News is published every month in English, French and German.

Please note the following contact, fax and email addresses:

editor@iranian-workers-news.net

sciw@iranian-workers-news.net

Fax: 44 870 133-5373

Britain: SCIW

Po Box 23734

London SW5 9GB

Germany: Post fach 103817

60108 Frankfurt