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# Union Messenger

Monthly Bulletin of Iran's Trade Unions

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## EDITORIAL

Whenever a production unit wants to save money, first they target the workers and lay them off, delay their pay, cut their overtime, or cut the benefits such as lunch and transportation. In the same manner, when governments claim that they want to create jobs and boost businesses, they first target the labour laws and discount or disregard laws that benefit the workers. The right to be protected by labour laws, which was gained through the hard struggle of workers 68 years ago, is one of the greatest achievements of Iranian workers... Even now, 68 years later, capitalists and reactionaries are still at work to get rid of the labour laws that protect workers.

The nuclear negotiations between Iran and the 5+1 group is not limited to nuclear issues at all, but includes economic issues such as planned efforts for cooperation with the global capitalism and implementing the prescriptions of the IMF and WTO, which both parties are interested in. Isaac Jahanguiri, Iran's Vice-President, said last month that government's economic strategies for this year are to expedite privatization plans and carrying out deregulations related to liberalization of economy... As such, a number of guidelines and by-laws have been drafted and put in place to facilitate the return and operation of American, Japanese and EU companies in Iran. Revising customs regulations, the so-called bill of support for production and improvement of business, deregulations in foreign trade, allocating colossal amounts of savings from the elimination of subsidies to the banks- and particularly private banks- and revising the laws for the operation of foreign insurance companies in Iran's market, are some of the measures taken by the [Rouhani] government... The works ask who is going to purchase the Markazi [central] Iron Ore and Central Alborz Coal company that have been put

up for sale and their workers have opposed to their privatization and gone on strike? Will the wealth of the Iranian nation be given to those who do not obey any laws, and will exploit workers and cut their already low wages even further by taking advantage of deregulations? Boosting business for whom? Which state-owned plant or company did ever boost after it was sold to private sector? All that happened was that the buyers got huge loans and then invest them in Dubai or Istanbul, while Steelworkers wages were not paid for 6 months... Now the national oil industry is the target of privatizations. They want to sell the oil and petrochemical and power generation industries to private capital against the will and interest of the people. As far as workers are concerned, the deregulations have led to deterioration of social security, extended working hours beyond 8 hours, promoting blank contracts and refusal of employers to obey the existing labour laws... Hiring workers as apprentices with no benefits and circumventing labour laws is just one example.

Currently, deregulations in industry to wipe out the achievements of the working class, promoting completing lawlessness for capitalism, preventing the revival of the social body of the union movement, and controlling and curbing the labour movements, are measures taken to protect the astronomical profits of domestic and foreign capital. We need to stay alert and along with our sisters and brothers in Markazi Iron Ore and Central Alborz Coal and Bafgh Mine companies oppose these privatizations, deregulations and acting against the law, which we saw one example of which in determining the minimum wage for this year.

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**UNION IS OUR RIGHT!**

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## HAFT-TAPPEH WORKERS DEMAND THEIR UNPAID WAGES

ILNA- A number of workers at Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Mill went on strike on July 28<sup>th</sup> demanding their unpaid wages for the past 1.5 months. As one of the workers told ILNA, striking workers demand their unpaid wages for June and July. He said that the employer deposited only 50% of the wages for the month of June. Haft-Tappeh sugarcane mill employs 1000 workers, 700 of which went on strike for unpaid wages. He added that extended healthcare benefit is another issue that workers are struggling with, as the funds have not been paid to the insurance company.

The Union of Metalworkers and Mechanics expresses its support for the workers of Haft-Tappeh in their struggle for their legitimate demands.

## WOMEN WORKERS IN IRAN AND THEIR CHALLENGES

By: *Reza Karshenasan*

Gender discriminating laws and policies of capitalists in workplaces has opened the door for employers to double-exploit female workers. Widespread corruption, privatization policies, liberalization of economy, deregulation of workplaces, lowering labour wages and expanding the "special" economic regions have had disastrous impacts on the lives of women workers, and particularly those who are the head of the family...

ILNA (Iran's Labour News Agency) reported in February 2014 that "Women are paid 1/3 of what men are paid, and in best case, this ratio is 2/3<sup>rd</sup>." Workplaces with less than 10 workers are not covered by the Labour Law, and a significant number of workers of such workplaces are women... Another problem that women are faced with in workplaces is employers' requests and expectations contrary to "ethical and religious principle. "Many women are left with no choice but to leave their job to avoid these requests." In

another report about the working conditions of women in Touba slaughter house in Neyshabour, ILNA wrote: "These women are mostly the head of the family... Night shift starts at 5 p.m. and extends to 8 a.m. the next day... Because of the poor job market, these women have to endure this unjust working condition." These are just a few examples of brutal exploitation of women in workplaces.



ILNA had also reported about the nurses working in private hospitals whose wages is reduced to 1/3 of the nurses working in public hospitals. As described in this report, the contracts of these nurses are temporary and their working conditions are "stress-full, hard and hazardous..." "In the past, to avoid higher insurance premiums for hazardous jobs, private hospitals did not report nurses' jobs properly to social security organization, and this caused complicated problems for retired nurses."

With the implementation of the second phase of elimination of subsidies, there remains the questions that how women in general, and particularly the female workers, would be able to live on the current wages? Such exploitation by capitalism is only possible in the lack of labour organizations. Working women have always had a significant role in the proud history of the union movement and struggles in our country. Now is the time that women's demands are safeguarded: equal pay with men, ending the gender

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discrimination in jobs, job security before and after maternity leave, the right to choose proper personal clothing and attire. These demands are reflected in the demand of the struggles of the union movement to respect the union rights and fair increase in wages based on the real rate of inflation. In order to succeed in union struggles, the union vanguard leaders should appeal to and recruit more and more working women (teachers, public employees, nurses, etc.) to the struggle in the ranks of the labour-union movement. Organizing the workers, and particularly female workers, in trade unions is the duty of all union activists and all independent trade unions.

## 10% OF POPULATION SUFFERS FROM HUNGER

Minister of Cooperation, Labour and Social Welfare claimed that fighting with hunger is one of the policies of the new government [of President Rouhani], and said: "So far 7.5 million individuals have been indentified to be covered under the food aid program, and 7.2 million individual are already benefiting from the food aid programs."



This is only the tip of the iceberg. According to the FAO statistics, half of the population of Iran is living under the line of poverty. In contrast, high-end luxury cars, which have been bought with the wealth produced by the same population, are roving in the streets of Tehran.

## IRAN IN ILO BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

### LOOK WHO SITS IN WHICH POSITION!

The news was short: "For the second time, the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected as the main board member of the ILO." This is when Iran is one of the states that violate the fundamental Conventions 97 and 98 of ILO. The Convention 87 that was ratified and adopted in the aftermath of the WWII thank to the efforts of World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) highlights the union rights of working people and the freedom of union activities of workers. What is ironic is that those who are expected to monitor the implementation of these Conventions [IRI representatives in ILO], themselves violate these Conventions and deny the workers their union rights!

## THE POWER OF THE WORKING CLASS

### *A glance at the history of labour movement in Iran*

The month of July is one of the most memorable months of the year for the labour movement of Iran. It was 68 years ago when the oil industry workers in the South of Iran led by the Central United Council of Workers of Iran could organize the largest labour strike in the Middle East and defeat the British colonial power and its Monarch puppets, and gain its rights. This year, too, 5000 workers of Bafgh iron ore mine could force the government not to privatize this mine through their successful united strike.

As one of the protesting workers told ILNA (Iran's Labour News Agency): "Most of the contracts... are temporary... Workers are concerned about the workforce 'adjustment' and wage cuts if the mine is privatized... Cancer, and heart and lung diseases due to severe pollution are common among workers..." The privatization issue is so obvious that even the custodian of the labour ministry has to confess that: "I am sorry to say that privatization of industries and mines has not been a successful practice and has even led to extensive unemployment in privatized

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industries."...Although the Minister of Labour and the rest of state administration have been following the prescriptions of the IMF and are determined to implement privatization, but they are not aware of the power of the working class... Last year the labour unions in Iran, such as Bus Transit Workers of Tehran (VAHED) and Mechanics and Metalworkers (Felezkar) supported the strike of Polyacril workers which led to the release and going back to work of detained workers... Comrades, don't overlook our power and have faith in our power. As long as our shoulders are our supports, we can embrace victory.

## NO TO IMF ORDERS, PRIVATIZATION, JOB LOSS AND DETENTION OF WORKERS!

It is now 5 days since the workers at Bafgh Iron Ore mine went on strike to protest the privatization of the mine company. We've learned that not only the two arrested workers have not been released, but around mid-night 5 other mine workers were arrested together with the Chairman of the City Council of Bafgh. These are the remaining workers in "the list of 18" who, previously, police were not able to find and arrest them.

The experience of the workers has taught them in the course of privatization, the employer wants to increase the production with lower cost and higher profits which entails laying-off part of the workforce and then cut the wages. Knowing that most of the contracts of the workers at Bafgh Iron Ore mine are temporary and the contracts will not be renewed in case there are any problems between the employer and the workers, the workers went on strike. In the first strike, two months ago, when the Minister of Labour showed up in the gathering of the workers, he made a historical comment: "...If this strike [that went on for 39 days] would've lasted even 339 days, I would have not allowed even the smallest harm to you workers." Today we know how we will be harmed. What is clear is that this government will

fully implement the prescriptions of the IMF. Confronting the workers' representatives is on the agenda of this government in order to remove any obstacle in the way of privatization and deregulation and dismantling the Labour Law. The promises conveyed to the IMF and WTO are much more important than promises and commitments to the workers. We witnessed this last year, in determination of minimum wage by the government.

Having seen the illegal treatment of workers' representatives, which started with firing and taking to court the secretary of the trade union of workers of Chadormaloo mine, and later on was done to the representatives of workers of Polyacril and then Razi Petrochemical and Abadan Refinery, and today continues with attacking and suppressing the workers and their representatives in Bafgh Iron Ore mine, it is obvious that we are next. The message of these confrontations for workers' organizations is crystal clear: **Privatization and complete lawlessness for higher profits for capitalism; and unemployment and prison for workers and their leaders.**

The Union of Metalworkers and Mechanics fully supports the demands of the workers of Bafgh Iron Ore mine, and demands the release of all the workers' representatives and revoke the arrest orders of other workers' representatives. We will spare no effort to assist these workers and their families will be under the protection of our union.

## The Union of Metalworkers and Mechanics of Iran

August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014



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