

The Current Labor Class Situation and the Labor Movement in Iran

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Since fifteen years ago, a new cycle has been forming in human history that is resulting in the current labor class situation world wide and consequently in Iran. With the destruction of the collective economic system in key parts of the globe and the gradual erosion of many of its crowning achievements by the forces of capitalism and globalization, the global assault on social, political, economical, cultural, healthcare, and educational achievements of the labor class grew to unprecedented dimensions. The gradual demise of labor achievements such as setting the minimum number of hours worked, official contracts of permanent employment, the suppression of labor organizations in some countries, changes of position adopted by the leaders of some international labor entities, fostering of individualism over pluralism and collective, global responsibility, and the elimination of many government subsidies for healthcare, welfare, education, food and housing for laborers and their families that were eliminated within the prescription of globalization, privatization, and the political spread of neo-liberalism were events that took place throughout the world.

In our country, the suppression and abolishment of free and independent worker syndicates and the destruction of other labor organizations and associations led to the monopoly of economic, political, and social arenas by government officials and executors of guidelines set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, presented with a religious and ethnic facade.

In the vacuum created by the lack of true representatives for the labor class in various social arenas, the social situation became highly polarized.

With the absolute lack of planning, and following privatization programs without the presence of free and independent labor unions and federations, and without the creation of any socio-economic security blanket for the unemployed, retirees, the sick, rural populations, and the socially marginalized, the working class has faced a profound and horrendous crisis that has been unprecedented in the history of Iran. The rapidly rising rate of unemployment, implementation of economic policies (of the Chicago economists), and elimination of subsidies created a grave situation that worsens daily.

The influx of cheap and poor quality smuggled goods through 68 unsupervised ports and other smuggling outlets for goods such as products from China and other South-Eastern Asian countries, lowering of duties on imported goods, reliance of the huge domestic brokers on importing goods and attracting commissions numbering in the tens of millions have inflicted irreparable damage to the country's industry. Moreover, the privatization and corrupt policies have further devastated the economic planning. Consequently, thousands of small and large workshops have faced stagnation and bankruptcy, and the cost of utilizing the employed workforce increased.

Increasing inflation, shrinking wages and the exclusion of various workshops from the supervision of existing labor laws, based on legislative memoranda, guidelines, and bills passed by the fifth, sixth, and seventh Parliament, assaults on protesting workers who demanded their unpaid wages, crushing of labor demonstrations by the security police who themselves were wage-earners, submission of the employed workers to deteriorating work conditions to prevent summary termination, the growing numbers of unemployed causing fear among workers to demand their rightful earnings, creation of disappointment and hopelessness among the workers of low literacy, experience, and skills resulting in growing rates of substance abuse to escape mental and spiritual despair, especially among the job-seeking youth and lower echelons of society, years of stagnation in the labor movement as a result of an eight year war and another eight years of rebuilding after the war that was declared as a sacred national program, prevented workers from freely organizing and demanding their rights. The eight years of reforms and the endeavor for expansion of the political, social, and educational atmosphere, and psychologically preparing people and workers in particular to think and express their demands, led informed and experienced workers to find solutions and ultimately to establishing and re-activating true labor syndicates within the framework of the ILO Convention 87 and efforts to organize all workers followed.

The current Labor Law was approved when the true labor organizations such as Solidarity Association of Iranian Labor Syndicates and the Labor Syndicate Organization and the legitimate labor representatives had been savagely eliminated from the work and production arenas. Consequently, after nine years of being passed around between the Parliament and the Guardian Council, the Labor Law was approved by the Expediency Discernment Council with many discrepancies, conflicts with the Constitution and global conventions, and lacking input from the workers and their representatives.

In recent years in which the assault on workers' rights has increased, temporary work contracts in violation of the Labor Law have replaced official contracts even in cases of permanent jobs. Business and industry owners have taken full advantage of this crisis and viciously exploited workers.

The economic restructuring in accordance with the autocratic policies of global Capitalism stemming from the channels such as the World Bank and the IMF, which in fact are the vehicles advancing the policies of the cartels, trusts, multi-national corporations, and the international stock market, adopt economic plans for underdeveloped countries that result in brutally low wages. These policies allow them to exploit this cheap labor by either exporting the cheap labor from underdeveloped to developed countries, or by transferring heavy, harmful and polluting technologies and industries such as steel, chemical and petrochemical, etc., that p, takes advantage of defenseless and unorganized workers and therefore exports the grim crisis of Capitalism to Africa, Latin America, and South Asia.

The economic restructuring policies in our country, and to that end, International Imperialist capitalist policies have resulted in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and the unemployment of millions of workers, most of them young and educated.

Achieving labor rights throughout the world over the past three hundred years has taken many up and down battles that in developed countries have resulted in the formation of labor unions, syndicates, federations, and confederations from the workshop to the national and global level. Workers in organized labor structures effect their own control and adjustment over social and economic crises with national tripartite engagement. This experience arises in highly developed countries with sustainable development and good governance. The presence of true and legitimate labor representatives in social negotiations that enjoys the support of the unified and organized force of their peers facilitates social growth and fulfillment and prevents financial corruption and bribery.

The section of the Laws obstructing the organization of true labor unions in the country is the Sixth Chapter of the Labor Law, which examines and structures the plan for labor organizations. This chapter is in total disagreement with the principals of 26 and 27 of the Constitution, the ILO Convention 87, and Amendment 3 of Article 22 of the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights and universal Human Rights charters. This Chapter also denies the rights of people to form their own desired associations. Additionally, intrusion of non-responsible operatives in workers affairs and in crushing and assaulting workers and laborers are among the obstacles on the path to establishing free and independent worker syndicates.

Disregard for the law and its execution by those in charge of enforcing them, and the lack of knowledge of the rights of individuals in society, whether between workers, or labor activists, and government officials, including inspectors, the police, the military or the security forces, with respect to national and international labor rights are among the most significant impediments for the growth of the legal workers organizing.

Disdain for tripartite in labor decision-making, with the presence of the true and legitimate workers representatives, employers, and the government, at the highest levels such as the Supreme Council of Labor, consisting of the ministries of Labor, Information, State, and the security forces', contradicts tripartite and membership in the International Labor Organization (ILO) and application of bilateral foreign and domestic policies, all barriers for workers forming their desired organizations, and forming free and independent trade unions.

It seems that legal education, especially the Article 3 of the Constitution (People's Rights), the introduction to the Constitution about people's rights, labor laws, the basic labor conversions (eight in particular), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the civil and judicial laws, the two social, political, cultural, and economical charters of the United Nations, as well as education on social life, and the history of labor movements in the world and in Iran, knowledge of national, regional and international labor organizations and their entities such as International Labor Organization (ILO), International Transport Federation (ITF), International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC) and World Trade Organization (WTO), through conferences and seminars allowing free discussion for those claiming to represent workers, creating the sense of learning before demanding, and how to demand in the manner least expensive for the country and the people, especially workers.

Above all, wherever we are, we need to become educated about organizing syndicates, unions, national syndicate's federations and confederations, and we must extend an open invitation to all labor rights activists to form committees defending workers rights using unique treaties and charters across the country based on national and international workers rights, to include workers, intellectuals, lawyers, students, teachers, professors, nurses and other wage-earners from production and services area from the most distant and rural places, to big cities and the Capital, and to present the issues to government officials specially the Labor minister and other high-level officials to assure a common understanding and removal of obstacles to the above issues, as the sole solution to resolving crises, social tensions, and achieving national unity against foreign pressures themselves requiring enforcement of fundamental social rights of people such as freedom of speech, media and the press, freedom of associations, syndicates, parties and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), without greed and monopoly, creating national unity and utilizing the creative aptitude of people, mostly wage-earners and their families. These people in fact own and protect the country and the government must serve them.

The only way to have a free and democratic society is to eradicate the obstacles on the path to organizing workers and other social classes.

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