

February 26, 2007

Vahed's Case Has Not Been Processed In A Typical Manner

A talk with Mansoor Osanloo, by Mihandokht Mesbah for Deutsche Welle Radio

The trial of the President of the Tehran and Suburbs (Vahed) Bus Drivers Syndicate was held on Saturday February 24, 2007 in Branch 14 of the Revolutionary Court, behind closed doors. His family, who was not allowed into the courtroom, protested in front of the courthouse on Moallem Street. In his interview with Deutsche Welle radio (see <http://www2.dw-world.de/persian/interviews/print/1.215039.1.html>), Mr. Osanloo confirms that the Vahed Syndicate case is not a political case.

Your crime is “fomenting against national security” and your court hearing was closed. Did they specifically tell you what “fomenting against national security” means?

Mansour Osanloo: No! At the arraignment, they charged me with two crimes and I can only speak about them generally. Judge Mohammadi stated that my crimes are advertising against the government and colluding and aggregating to disrupt national security. If I speak openly about the details of what they asked and what I responded, according to a warning by Judge Mohammadi they may charge me with further crimes and I may pay a senseless price for it. But in summary, there is nothing that explains the charges and I fully believe and my attorneys agree. There was no evidence related to these charges in the entire file.

How was the hearing?

Mansour Osanloo: The court hearing was a continuation of the inquisitions at the Evin prison. The judge had certain questions and pursued a particular vein of closed-ended questions where I was forced to answer yes or no and could not elaborate on the answers. Judge Mohammadi stated at the conclusion that I could say anything I wish as a last defense. They gave me the opportunity for an oral defense and they said I could write a statement from my attorneys and submit them. I agreed that I would present a statement from my two attorneys Dr. Mowlaie and Mr. Khorshid within five days.

You stated somewhere that your attorney read over 1,200 pages and could not find any evidence against you. With what you described about the court, what is your long-term outlook?

Mansour Osanloo: One really cannot guess. I think that the manner in which the case is going is not ordinary. I see this case as a backlash from the Islamic Workers Council attack on the Vahed Syndicate office. After that attack, the piling on of charges and recurring arrests went hand in hand. The Workers House people beat us up in front of the Security forces. They broke our skulls. We complained, and our complaints began to be effective we suddenly were confronted with our own arrest and charges levied against us. That is because those who caused this situation wanted the main issue to fade away.

What I mean to say is that the Vahed case has not been dealt with the “usual” process. The heavy price that our colleagues pay for organizing their own independent trade union has been due to these intervening factors. We have no laws on the books against forming independent unions. It seems that these charges pressed upon me are to either prevent me from going back to work or to send a message to other workers not to form unions. And the reason is that the interest of those who have leaned on us hard over the past few years, is in danger, and their capabilities could falter just like the Islamic Workers Council of Vahed and an entire section of the Workers House did. They use their relationships and instruments to influence others against us.

You mean the political and security nature of your case began from this incident?

Mansour Osanloo: Exactly! I have stated this from the first day they questioned me. I told them all of your efforts to make a case against me is because you want to destroy the Syndicate and because of our organizing activity. This despite the fact that our activities fall within the framework of nationally and internationally recognized law.

Based on what has happened so far, do you still have Syndicate meetings or has the union fallen apart?

Mansour Osanloo: No! We have meetings every week in our homes or in places with a minimum amount of public facilities. Cards have been given to financially help the suspended workers who have not been paid in 13 months so that they can purchase what they need. The Syndicate continues its work and we’re glad to report that we have had notable achievements such as a 30% increase in pay at the Vahed Company, permanent status for all contract workers, procuring two sets of garments in accordance with our collective bargaining agreement, such as a suit, coat, vest, shirt, or pants. All of these achievements were from 1347. The Syndicate has not fallen apart, but we are feeling a lot of pressure on our colleagues. They call them to security and other places and threaten them about contacting the union, but they see the union as the true representative of their rights-seeking spirit. Fortunately, this spirit of clearly seeking our rights has caused the negatively shaded impression of the government authorities to fade over time. Our efforts with the Labor Department have reached a point where by law the Management must pay us 50% of our back pay and bonuses. Of course, the Board of Arbitration and the courts have not issued the final vote, but until that time, the management must pay 50% of our back pay and bonuses.

Yesterday we delivered a letter from the Civil Rights Court to the Vahed Company and the Head of the Labor and Vocational Organization of Tehran. Mr. Madadi is pursuing this matter as we speak. We hope we can enlighten some of the authorities about workers rights, and acquire some of the rights for our colleagues as promised so they can receive part of their rightful pay after 13 or 14 months of hardship and unemployment.