Solidarity with Iranian trade unions

Letter from prison

29 April 2016

Statement by Jafar Azimzadeh and Esmail Abdi on their hunger strike starting 29 April 2016

Today it is plainly evident to all noble and fair minded individuals that millions of workers, teachers and other hard working people in Iran live under excruciating difficult and unbearable circumstances while their most basic human rights have been systematically violated for years.

These unjust circumstances and unbearable conditions are created through imposition of poverty wages, non-payment of wages and total destruction of any job security for workers through expansion of temporary work contracts.  Teachers are also facing exact same predicaments through introduction of temporary work titles such as "free teachers," "contract teachers," "Pre-K teachers,"... and more importantly by receiving 300,000 toman per month with no insurance or other benefits. All the while temporary work contracts are being institutionalized in the public and private sector. Child labour is on the rise. Lack of full implementation of Pay Parity Law and adopted policies by the Cabinet on active and retired teachers, the growing number of non-profit schools and the board of trustees and ultimately destroying free public education. Looting social security fund and other pension funds; prohibition of formation of independent workers' and teachers’ organizations and criminalization of their protests; elimination of subsidies on basic items such as bread, water, electricity, gas, dairy products....These are only examples of abuses and excruciating conditions that have been imposed on workers and teachers.

Imposition of such circumstances on workers, teachers and other wage earners, as the large majority of people in Iran, has made all aspects of life so difficult for them that by now for many workers working 12 hours a day, and in some cases 18 hours a day, has become the norm. Many teachers have resorted to having second and third jobs. And yet the majority of workers and teachers are still unable to support their families and enjoy the most basic living conditions and thus they have been pushed from the poverty line to bare survival.

However, in response to this miserable situation, different administrations have resorted to repression and suppression of workers’ and teachers’ protests; they have imposed more rightlessness on workers in order to farther loot and take away even more from people.

As a result of the continuation of such policies, since Rouhani's administration coming to power strikes and protests have been officially banned in numerous work places and industries, all protest actions by workers and teachers, even the most peaceful ones in the workplaces are subject to suppression. Hundreds of workers and teachers have been summoned by courts, arrested and subject to prosecution. All leading labour activists have been fined with serious criminal charges and some of them like us are subject to long prison sentences.

Most figures of the few independent organizations of workers and teachers, including us, are faced with heavy security charges and some of them are serving long prison terms in jails across the country.

We are accused of "assembling and colluding with intent to act against national security" and thus jailed with long sentences in Evin prison. But we like thousands of other workers and protesting teachers have done nothing but defending the human dignity of ourselves and our fellow workers. All our activities and that of our other fellow colleagues in "Teachers' Trade Association," "Free Union of Iranian Workers," and other independent workers' and teachers organizations are known to the public and are very transparent.

Our endeavors to achieve our basic, legitimate and humane demands are so clear that all allegations cited in criminalizing our cases point out to them: such as collecting  signatures condemning below poverty line wages, creating independent workers' and teachers' formations and involvement in such organizations, participating in trade union gatherings in front of the parliament and the Ministry of Labour and handing letters of protest to the respective government authorities and other such civic activities.

Based on the verdicts passed against us it could be concluded that any effort and step towards implementation of the existing limited protection laws and struggle to improve living conditions and livelihoods of workers and teachers in this country is considered an act against national security.

We are fully aware and acknowledge the fact that our activities are indeed a danger to those that have lawlessly imposed mass poverty on workers and teachers. By insisting on our just demands we have challenged their plundering interests and domination, but they have prioritized their own narrow interest and security instead of our national security and in pursuit of this goal are jailing us and other labour activists and teachers in order to create obedience and docility in face of the current miserable condition.

Therefore in celebrating May First, the International Workers' Day, and expressing our solidarity with workers of the world, and in protesting criminalization of our trade union and civic activities, assemblies and strikes; poverty wages; banning of independent May 1st celebrations and Teachers' Day (in Iran, May 2nd is the official Teachers' Day-Translator’s comment); protesting ILO's lack of effective and transparent action against the violation of the most basic rights of workers and teachers in Iran,

The charge of "gathering and colluding with intent to act against national security" and other security-related charges should be removed from the existing cases against protesting workers and teachers. Such fabricated allegations against us and other imprisoned labour activists and jailed teachers must also be annulled; we therefore will begin indefinite hunger strike as of April 29, 2016 (Ordibehesht 10, 1395).

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