

"An Open Letter to All Workers of the World! An Opportunity to Share the Challenges Faced by Iranian Workers"

Greetings, comrades!

I am an Iranian worker, toiling in the industrial, agricultural, and service sectors – a worker who, apart from selling both mental and physical labor or selling both simultaneously, has no solution for a decent life.

I'm not well-known in general, and I don't gain recognition unless, due to sheer injustice and a lack of well-being, I engage in labor organizing and freedom of speech advocacy. It's only when I end up suppressed and imprisoned that I become somewhat recognized.

I am known as: Ismail Bakhshi, Reza Shahabi, Rasoul Bodaghi, Jafar Ebrahimi, Davood Razavi, Keyvan Mohtadi, Ismail Abdi, Hassan Saeedi, Reyhaneh Ansari Nejad, Anisha Asadollahi, Sepideh Gholian, Eskandar Lutfi, Aziz Ghasemzadeh, and many others. I am an unknown and deprived worker who, all over the country, gets laid off for various reasons like redundancy (labeled as labor force adjustment by capitalists) and, due to short-term contracts lasting only up to 29 days, I am deprived of unemployment insurance.

I am a worker from disadvantaged areas. I work in free trade zones without any legal protection, separate from the procedures defined by labor laws. I am a porter. I carry loads and work as a laborer trapped in the contractual relationships of manpower supply companies to remain deprived of my rightful wages by the main employers. I am a disabled worker, a recovering addict who has fallen into the grip of capitalistic companies with charitable labels. I am a woman, the head of a household, and a worker-student in need of a job, which has led to my exploitation without any accountability.

I am a construction worker who, without any insurance coverage, generates substantial profits for property capitalists while facing serious risks. I am a journalist who exposes the deep-seated wounds on society through my work, and for showcasing these wounds, the tongues of authorities and their agents silence me, inflicting psychological and emotional wounds. They associate my work, which is the result of highlighting the pain of the people through the media, with collaboration with foreign media, and these baseless accusations never retract me from my honorable work.

I am a newly emerged workforce segment, known as a cyber worker, and my workforce is organized in the realm of cyber products and services. Sometimes, I engage in scientific, technical, and specialized processing and cutting-edge technologies, and at other times, I provide services to meet people's needs in companies like Snapp, etc. I employ both my own labor and my accumulated capital over the years. I am a knowledgeable worker who, through my own progress, simultaneously serves the interests of capitalists.

I work hard, engaging in strenuous tasks that are detrimental to myself but necessary for society and profitable for capitalists. I work as a nurse in medical centers and hospitals, taking care of patients under all conditions, especially during the peak of the pandemic, battling disease and fighting for patients' health. However, my employer has long subjected me to a relentless war by employing an 89-day contract against me.

I toil in the scorching heat of the foundry furnaces, in the energy-sapping deserts of southern Iran, in the oil and petrochemical industries, in tea, rice, wheat, and sugarcane fields, in construction and industries, in ports, forests, and mines that are sometimes hundreds of meters underground, performing labor that is suppressed and paid far below the minimum wage. I create value but remain unseen, while the product of my work, like everything you create, gains recognition and easily transfers added value to the bank accounts of wealthy capitalists.

Capitalists sometimes force me into illicit work and smuggling because there are no factories or fertile fields in my hometown, unlike Baluchistan or the vast green plains of Kurdistan! As much as it should, they don't provide for my needs and the needs of others. As a result, they push me into portage and smuggling – backbreaking and life-threatening work, alongside the danger of my children being shot by border guards in the guise of smugglers. They label us as smugglers. They don't know that we, out of necessity, have to shoulder the burden of carrying luxury goods and basic necessities due to destitution. Sometimes they allow us to carry heavy loads freely, and at times, they shoot at us for minor disagreements they have with their competitors. We are porter workers, hidden employers known to respectable traders.

The same law applies in fuel smuggling. They say it's the mafia's work, which also has its hand in power. Bring domestic fuel across the border so you can survive. There is no news of productive and useful work or factories and farms because I live on the outskirts of my homeland!

My work is teaching the children of my homeland; I am a teacher. In our culture, teaching is considered the work of prophets. However, they flog me, expel me, and imprison me for defending my students who cannot afford education, for saying that education should not be about money, and for wanting to provide a minimum life for myself and my children. Those who consider themselves heirs to the prophets do this to me. I'm amazed at what hardships the children of my homeland must learn to endure in order to survive.

I face the same problem even in the university. When I teach young people in my country to question and empower themselves for managing their future lives, and when I support them to build self-confidence and trust in themselves and others, I get fired from my job.

I am tried for defending professional rights and seeking a better life for myself and my colleagues. It's interesting to note that, for example, when we strive to have a union or an association, which, according to international agreements and conventions, should be free and independent from employers and the government, we are accused of conspiracy and acting against national security by the government and the judiciary. The meaning of this accusation ("conspiring to act against national security") is that we have gathered with other colleagues to defend our rights by forming a union or association, so we must be doing something against the country's security! In my country, national security is synonymous with the security of the rulers. The rest of the people are better off living in insecurity because, with job security through unions and associations, they will inevitably demand better living conditions and ask questions like, "Where is the national wealth going? Why is there embezzlement? Why are national resources and wealth, which belong to the people and future generations, privatized?" Consequently, I, as a worker, am in the best-case scenario dealing with relative poverty, unemployment, various diseases, and homelessness. Recently, I have also been pushed below the poverty line, and I am unable to establish a professional organization to defend myself.

The labor law that has been passed in parliament is contrary to the interests of workers and international labor contracts, leaving the government free to intervene in the formation of workers' organizations. Therefore, labor organizations in my country are not independent. In 2004, a delegation from the International Labor Organization (ILO) came to Iran and observed these issues in our country's labor law. Subsequently, it was agreed to amend this law to comply with the ILO Convention No. 87. However, the government and parliament have been reluctant to take action on this matter, resulting in us not having independent labor organizations.

What we have are labor organizations that have been created with the intervention of the government and employers and are known in the workers' culture as "yellow" organizations. Even within these labor organizations, I have no way to be elected because any worker wishing to become a member of these organizations must pass through the filter of the "Supervisory Board" established by the Ministry of Labor and employers. Even if they manage to pass through this filtering process, they cannot achieve much. Job and social security is absent, and the immunity that labor representatives typically have doesn't apply here. Depending on the type of worker-employer relationship, which is often based on short-term contracts, it can serve as a pretext for the dismissal of the labor representative.

I am an Iranian worker, and the population of people in my class constitutes more than half of my homeland's population. However, only occasionally, a few individuals, fewer than the fingers on one hand, without their consent or representation, find their way into organizations and institutions such as parliament. They assume decisions for workers under the guise of worker organizations in institutions that seem to be worker-oriented but are affiliated with capitalist parties and under government control, using the name of "Worker Organization for Workers." One of these pseudo-worker organizations, an individual who has been a member of parliament for many years, has now joined the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) as a representative of Iranian workers. This is happening while Iranian workers gain nothing from this membership, and they do not know why this person and their affiliated pseudo-worker organization should be accepted by the WFTU.

Dear colleagues,

The belief that open dialogue is only possible through this letter is rooted in the reality that any contact with you in any country where you reside can be perceived as a crime for us. If you were to come to my country and engage in a friendly conversation with me at a restaurant and take a lasting photograph, it would be considered a criminal act if the security and intelligence agencies became aware of it, and you would be arrested as a spy! As of now, two French union activists named Cecile Kohler and her husband Jacques Parry have been imprisoned due to meeting with Iranian workers. Following forced confessions, which are common in Iran, they have been accused of espionage and organizing workers against national security, preventing their release, and they are now in prison. On the pretext of these accusations, some Iranian workers have also been sentenced to long-term imprisonment on charges of collaborating with these two, a charge that is fabricated to undermine national security. Therefore, we recommend that before coming to Iran, you seek exoneration from your respective governments, so that they do not consider you spies!

The diplomatic history of the French government has also shown that apparently, it is not very dissatisfied with the arrest of two union activists from its own citizens and does not make effective efforts for their release and return home. After nearly a year and a half, we have come to the conclusion that defending these union activists is a duty of colleagues everywhere else in the world.

Of course, we also know that your governments, like any other capitalist government, do not prioritize the well-being of workers beyond exploiting their labor. Examples include the two governments of Russia and Ukraine, which have been embroiled in war for reasons other than the welfare of workers in both countries. One for territorial expansion and the other for enhancing state power with extremist nationalism under the shadow of NATO, both are engaged in wars that lead to nothing but slaughter, destruction, unwanted migrations, poverty, and the suffering and wandering of workers and toilers. These wars, which are not waged for the interests of the world's great capitalist powers (including military-economic bloc countries like NATO or any other emerging bloc that competes capitalistically in various dimensions), must come to an end through the will and determination of us workers worldwide, by adhering to peaceful and coexistence policies. Because continuing such wars every day will only harm the workers of the countries involved, and then the workers of other countries.

The war initiated by Russia has become an excuse for NATO and its member countries. Today, a large part of the world is experiencing the negative social and economic consequences of this conflict. An economic war will not be easily settled between Russia and Ukraine, and a significant portion of the world's countries is facing difficulties due to their need for resources and energy available in these countries. This is well understood by our large family of workers in Iran. We have gone through an eight-year war that took away most of the nation's resources from us and turned them into ashes. Our best sons were killed in this war. Their bones are still sometimes found and displayed to commemorate that era. Even now that there is no war, they continue to fight against us, workers and toilers, due to this habit of military commanders. They fight us with the spirit of war in their roles as ministers, lawyers, and

parliamentarians, and in short, wherever they hold an office, they do not hesitate to employ any tactical or strategic maneuver to consolidate their positions. They have spread this warlike spirit throughout the fabric of our nation. Now, they are confronted with luxury while we face inflation and high prices. They confront us, fearing that we may endanger their security through any act of subversion, even though they keep sick workers in prison and do not send them for treatment. To the extent that a prisoner, to save their life, puts their life at risk by going on a hunger strike for their treatment.

Dear colleagues around the world,

In Iran, as workers, we face unique events that are likely unknown in the history of your countries. These events are mostly specific to countries like ours, with deep-rooted traditions and customs dating back thousands of years, shared with some of our neighbors.

It's reasonable to find these events unfamiliar and perplexing for your political systems, which are not ideological or religious. For instance, we have philosophical red lines for our people. For instance, we have a unique concept of determinism and free will, where we are compelled to act within defined boundaries. This philosophy takes on specific meanings in our lives. For example, we are obligated to negotiate within a tripartite body called the Supreme Labor Council to determine the minimum wage. However, it's evident in advance that with a two-to-one vote (employers and government on one side and workers on the other), negotiation only leads to one outcome: our defeat. Our free will turns into our defeat unless something extraordinary happens, and we don't feel defeated even in the face of defeat. This is the situation that makes those in power feel threatened.

This philosophical feature permeates all aspects of our lives, from career choices to lifestyle preferences, clothing choices, and everything that suits us. Even in our decision to consider sanctions as mere scraps of paper, which for years have spread the line of poverty, in every election, we are within the confines of compulsory freedom.

In the selection of a political system, this philosophy is more prevalent than any other aspect. For example, we are a republic, but our president is chosen by a 12-member body that follows a specific law to determine and approve the qualifications of individuals for the presidency (although after completing two presidential terms, it becomes clear that the person elected did not have the qualifications from the beginning). After these approvals, we are obligated to vote, not free or voluntary voting. Consequently, it is entirely clear where we are headed.

The same principle and the ratio of determinism to free will apply to the parliament and legislative council, with the quality of the initial approvers being more important than the quantity of votes for candidates presented to the voters. Therefore, under such a philosophy, laws that may seem peculiar to us are dictated by the parliament or government. For example, a worker must work as an apprentice for two years for free in a workshop, factory, or any other workplace before being recognized by the employer and, in the best case, receiving a wage equal to what the Supreme Labor Council has approved. The same law applies to university graduates, who must complete a free internship after

obtaining their degree. The government removes itself from the responsibility of technical and vocational education, which it is legally mandated to provide. This philosophy of imposed testing leaves no room for questioning, and as a result, the government and officials are unaccountable.

This philosophy also applies to the political opposition to our government. For example, a part of this opposition, which happens to reside in advanced countries, asks us for political victory against the existing government, with the condition that we first come to them for representation so they can engage in political struggle on our behalf. Of course, this is contingent on us being obedient and committed foot soldiers for them, taking to the streets to demonstrate and fight, until they lead the struggle to a successful conclusion, and we win. Afterward, they will decide which government to establish and how to take control.

This philosophy is also imposed on us by those who consider themselves part of our workers' party and, incidentally, are politically active in advanced countries. They dictate that we must first accept the residents of the labor organization that we appoint and acknowledge that unions and syndicates are reformists. They claim that only self-governing and unstable bodies lead the workers' movement. Provided that the well-trained personnel are educated and serve in these general assemblies, you should engage in the struggle.

With all these descriptions, it is reasonable for me as an Iranian worker to consciously and honorably engage in battles against various forms of governing and non-governing dictatorships to defend freedom, equality, and create a better life for the future of my class. It makes perfect sense for workers to push for class solidarity with their colleagues at the national and international levels. Today, capitalism in Iran is thriving due to our disorganization, meaning that it can do whatever it wants. That's why workers lack the strength and power to initially restrict and confine this free-market behavior. Workers worldwide created this restriction after World War II, and its outcome was hundreds of labor conventions and agreements on labor rights ratified by the International Labor Organization. However, under the neoliberalism ruling the world and the emphasis on deregulation, this tripartite system (similar to the one in our country) leans toward the interests of employers and governments due to the prevailing politics. Returning to a balance and strengthening the global working class is one of the most important tasks of workers and their representatives in this international labor organization and other institutions.

Here, labor unions must become powerful, expand their influence, and increase their share in democratizing work environments and the resulting relationships. By having a strong presence in creating democratic governments, they can effectively counter dictatorial governments and global capitalist powers. This understanding of the balance of power can lead to meaningful international support for labor and establish mutually beneficial relationships as a foundation for improving human life.

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