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May Day Reports

Despite the atmosphere of intimidation, control and repression the International Workers' Day 1391 (May Day 2012) was organized in different cities across Iran. Independent May Day demonstrations are not allowed by the government and in many cities workers were only able to organize special events and gatherings as opposed to marches and rallies. Below is the highlights of some of the reports we have received from various sources.

Sanandaj, the Centre of the Kusrdistan Province, has always been in the forefront of organizing May Day rallies and demonstrations in Iran. Labour activists in the city formed "The Organizing Committee for May 1st in Sanandaj 1391" (2012), which was composed of Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers Organizations; Free Union of Iranian Workers; Workers' Councils activists of Sanandaj, Unemployed Workers of Sanandaj, and a number of other labor activists. The original announcement for the event had cited Ferdowsi Street at 6:00 PM as the starting point, but by then security forces had completely overtaken that area, so the organizers directed the march towards Cyrus Ave, marching up towards Cyrus Square while holding up their signs. Marchers were chanting: "We're workers, we're hungry," "Workers, workers, unite!" "Imprisoned workers, political prisoners must be freed," "Teachers, workers unite!" "Bread, Housing, Freedom." Security forces were in full force, and attacked the marcher by tear gas and batons, but marchers resisted all attacks for almost 20 minutes. The news of this resistance was widely spread throughout the city. A number of marchers were arrested; since then five have been released but an unknown number continues to be in detention. . Some security forces continued to patrol Cyrus Ave all the way up to Cyrus Square until midnight, while other security forces kept driving through city streets on motorcycles.

The Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations reports: To celebrate May 1st more than a hundred workers, labor activists, their family members, and members of CCHFWO got together on Wednesday April 28th in a location in Gilan (a northern province of Iran, adjacent to Caspian Sea). The event was commenced with a minute of silence in honor and memory of all those fallen in the path of workers' liberation. One of the workers then had a brief talk on the history of May 1st; the second speaker's speech was about the latest developments concerning the lives and livelihood of working class in Iran and the world, unfolding national and international economic crisis, citing statistics on industrial accidents and other matters. Speeches were followed by art and cultural segments; including singing of labor anthems, poetry and a play dealing with issues of working class life. The last segment of this event was a discussion about the new "Draft of Labor Law" and how it would further damage and erode workers' rights in Iran. Towards the end sweets were distributed amongst the audience, and all participants also received especially produced post cards created in honor of May 1st; the event was jubilantly concluded in an atmosphere of comradery and solidarity.

In Tehran and Suburbs a range of small independent events took place. The government sponsored "Workers'

House" organized an event which was used yet one more time to promote the regime's upcoming election farce. According to various reports including the Free Union of Iranian Worker and The Organizing Council of the International Workers' Day's Ceremony -1391, A number of workers from autonomous and independent workers' formations were able to distribute their own literature raising authentic, genuine workers' demands and slogans.

Workers' Mountain Climbing Groups of Tehran Province reported that various Workers' Mountain Climbing Groups of different factories in province of Tehran had previously reached a consensus and planned on having six joint mountain climbing events for the coming year. On Friday, May 4th, 2012 they held one of these outings, at Borghan region of Karaj (an industrial suburb of Tehran). There were about two hundred workers (from: Iran Tyre, Saipa, Iran Khodro, Mina Corporation, Utility Workers) and their family members. The event was commenced by a minute of silence in honor and memory of slain workers of Chicago in 1886. There were also expressions of solidarity and support for Occupy Wall Street(OWS) movement. One of the workers also gave a brief speech on the origins and history of May 1st. The event continued with different recreational, musical, sports and dancing segments. Taking a note from OWS tradition the day's food was prepared by workers themselves and they had their lunch over a very large tablecloth. The event was concluded by 3:00 PM. Other than a single bus that was provided by one of factories, all other expenses and logistics for the event was paid and undertaken by workers themselves. See photos: <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.3912184846858.174072.1346499522&type=3&l=a4fa845f1e>

The Organizing Council of the International Workers' Day's Ceremony -1391, which is a semi-clandestine ad hoc committee also reported a news that despite prison authority's opposition and various intimidation tactics, a group of political prisoners in ward 350 of Evin prison, were able to hold a May 1st celebration inside the prison as they had originally planned to do so. Prison guards had previously raided prisoners' cells and confiscated all the literature and material relating to May 1st, the guards had also threatened to transfer some of the prisoners to ward 209 of Evin prison. Despite all these futile efforts of prison authorities May 1st was celebrated on Tuesday inside Evin prison. The program began with a number of short speeches on the history of May 1st and was followed by a musical segment consisting of different labor songs and anthems, including singing of *International*, workers' global anthem of solidarity, towards the end of the program cakes and milk was distributed amongst inmates.

The following reports were also published by The Organizing Council of the International Workers' Day's Ceremony:

Amalgamation of workers in South: (Workers from *Aslavieh, Kangan, Mah'shahr Petro chemical Complex, Laavaan Refinery, and Port of Bandar Abas*) the gathering was held on a workers' residential camp in South, based on an invitation from *Aslavieh* and *Kangan* workers. After observing a minute of silence in honor and memory of fallen fellow workers, a participant gave a brief speech, this was followed by a lively discussion about working conditions and also some criticisms on the lack of a joint statement for this year's May 1st events, and the failure of different workers organizations to come up with a unified communiqué. Towards the end of this gathering the joint communiqué of *Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, the Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations and Electrical and Metal Workers of Kermanshah* was read. Another worker also read the statement by the *Free Union of Iranian Workers*.

Mashhad: According to a report by *Bakery workers of Mashhad*, although they were not able to issue a joint communiqué for May 1st, nonetheless they were able to stop work at 10:00 AM as planned and assemble at a previously announced location. According to the report they had faced no problem from security forces while engaged in May 1st celebration.

Haji Abad: (Stonecutter workers located between Tehran and Qum) on Monday afternoon, after finishing their work shift these workers assembled around the entrance to their complex and held a discussion about their working conditions and the common problems they face at work.

Alborz Industrial Park: Workers were able to stop work for ten minutes, in majority of the factories in this complex, and spent that time discussing issues relating to May 1st and job related topics. In one of the factories a supervisor

harassed workers because of this work stoppage, but the situation was deescalated.

Kaveh Industrial Park: Majority of workers in this complex were able to stop work for ten minutes and hold conversations about their working conditions and May 1st.

Mobarakeh and Isfahan Steel: In honor of May 1st a group of workers from these two factories climbed to the summit of *Karkas Mountain* and raised the pictures of imprisoned labor leaders *Reza Shahabi* and *Alireza Akhavan* in there.

Tile and Ceramics Factories of Yazd: A group of workers from these factories climbed the summits of *Shir Koh Mountain*. In honor of May 1st while in there workers engaged in discussions about their working conditions, singing labor anthems and songs, and they honored imprisoned workers by raising the pictures of Messrs. *Reza Shahabi* and *Alireza Akhavan* on top of *Shir Koh*.

Dena Rubber workers and Shiraz Telecommunications workers: These workers jointly climbed the summit of *Dena Mountain*; they also raised the pictures of imprisoned labor leaders *Alireza Akhavan* and *Reza Shahabi*.

New Arg Industrial Park (Bam): During their May 1st event, the participants expressed their support for *Reza Shahabi*. We still haven't received a detailed report back from this event.

Cha'Bahar Free zone Industrial Park: there was a one hour work-stoppage and expression of solidarity with imprisoned labor leaders. Detailed report back from this event is still pending.

Saghez: There were three events held in this city on the occasion of May 1st:

- A number of workers, labor leaders and their family members assembled at *Workers' Square* of the city and carried out their program. Mahmud Salehi was amongst the speakers for this event, event organizers also distributed sweets amongst the pedestrians.
- Another group of labor activists participated in the government sponsored May 1st event at *Ershad Auditorium* and exposed the true nature of such pseudo worker formations by raising the authentic, genuine concerns and demands of workers.
- Bakery workers also had a May 1st event in their head quarters.

Damavand: [Saturday April 28] a number of seasonal and industrial workers gathered in Ahmad Abad neighborhood to celebrate May 1st. The event was commenced by singing of *International* (workers' global anthem of solidarity), and observance of a minute of silence in honor and memory of all those perished for the cause of liberty and equality. Afterwards a woman worker read the communiqué #1 from *May 1st Organizing Council of 1391 (2012)*, she also had a short speech afterwards. There was also another short talk in support of all incarcerated labor leaders. This year's May 1st participation was larger than last year.

More than fifty migrant workers in Tehran got together on Monday April 30th at *Sardar Park* around 5:30 PM, and celebrated May 1st by distributing sweets, and discussing labor related issues amongst themselves.

Oshnavieh: May 1st event for this year consisted of two short speeches; one on the history of May 1st and another one about the on-going labor issues of the day, there was also poetry recital, and singing of labor anthems and songs.

Mahabad: At 3:00 PM the event began by singing of *International*, followed by a minute of silence honoring the memory of all those perished carrying on the path of class struggle. Various May 1st communiqués were read followed by poetry recital.

Paveh: On April 25th a group of workers celebrated May 1st. Their program consisted of singing *International*, a minute of silence, short speeches, and poetry recital. At the end of the event they read a communiqué which they had

composed themselves.

Tabriz Central Prison: May 1st was celebrated in the Ward 15 of Methadone section of Tabriz prison (where incarcerated labor leaders have been transferred as an intimidation tactic). It consisted of short talks on the history of May Day, labor issues and distribution of sweets. The event was welcomed by other inmates.

Kamyaran: This year there were two May 1st events in Kamyaran, the first one was held on April 27th and the second one held on May 1st. Both events were attended by workers, local labor activists, and their family members.

Baneh: This year's celebration was held on April 27th the event began by singing of International, a minute of silence a brief talk and discussion of issue of enforced low wages. At the end event's organizers read a 14 points statement which they had prepared themselves.

Bokan: Since the security forces had dominated the entire city, May 1st organizers had to modify their originally announced marching plans, so they showed up on *Governor's Circle* around 7:00 PM and by distributing sweets amongst the pedestrians greeted them and thus celebrated May 1st.

***Mahmoud Salehi's statement on Sanandaj's May Day arrestees**

Defend the May 1st Detainees of Sanandaj!

To all workers! Workers' organization, Human Rights Institutions, and all honorable and free people!

International Day of Workers is a day of working class combat against Capitalist status quo. On this day, workers take to the street to raise their demands and slogans and declare war against the thoroughly fetid system of Capitalism. But in order to defend this unjust system and maintain its existence, capitalist states attack the ranks of workers with all their might and try to crush them through many different forms.

Last Tuesday, while workers and their family members were celebrating May 1st, they were attacked by security forces. Aren't we, the workers who toil day and night to produce everything for humanity, and are not even considered as second class citizens, entitled to celebrate on a single day of the year, dedicated to our needs and demands? Is happiness and welfare only for capitalists and their supporters? The extensive attack on workers and their families in Sanandaj is a clear indication of Iranian government's support for Capitalists.

Workers in Sanandaj were marching to protest: inflation and high prices, poverty and unemployment, child labor, prejudice against women, massive expulsion of workers and factory closures, migrant workers' problems in Iran and especially problems facing Afghan workers in Iran, temporary work and blank contracts, repression and censorship, incarceration of political prisoners including imprisoned workers, economic sanctions and threats of war against Iran; they were also protesting other social pathologies and crises such as addiction, suicide, and prostitution.

The workers in Sanandaj took to the street with slogan of "Bread, Housing, and Freedom." They demonstrated in public with no fear or hesitation to send a clear warning to all government authorities that workers are prepared to achieve their demands on behalf of themselves and all other oppressed people as they will.

It is the duty and obligation of all workers, labor activists, workers organizations and Human Rights institutions to demand immediate freedom of all May 1st Detainees of Sanandaj, and support their families call for freedom of their children.

Arrested workers of Sanandaj!

Our beloved, we stand with you and your families. You are the heroes who have added yet another glorious page to the history of workers' class struggle. We recall your courageousness on this occasion and declare: "Workers' movement will not retreat by means of arrests, summons or threats against workers and labour activists in Iran and various cities across Kurdistan."

Long live workers' unity and solidarity.
Long live May 1st 2012

* Mahmoud Salehi is a well-known labour activist and leader who has spent about 9 years in total in various prisons in Iran because of his labour activities and May Day organizing efforts. Mahmoud Salehi was one of the founders of the Bakers' Union in Saghez as well as a founding member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations in Iran. He is the spokesperson for the Reza Shahabi Defence Committee in Iran. Mahmoud Salehi and his partner, Najibeh Salehzadeh, who is also a member of the Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers' Organizations, were invited by the French Workers' Collective in Support of Workers in Maghreb and Middle East, which includes Five major French Trade Union federations, CGT, CFDT, FSU, Solidaires and UNSA, for a labour tour and solidarity event with workers in Iran from March 14th to April 10th, 2012. They returned to Iran on April 10th where they were greeted by hundred of friends and labour activists. Since then Mahmoud has been summoned by the Intelligence Ministry a number of times which he has thus far defied.

Report on Mayday Seminar in London Organised by IASWI

The seminar on 4th of May 2012, was organised by IASWI-UK to bring together activist involved in the working class movements in Britain, Iran, Pakistan and Egypt.

The seminar, chaired by a member of IASWI, began with a speech by Alex Gordon, president of the RMT, the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, who spoke on the development of working class resistance to austerity politics in the UK. Alex spoke about the strengths and weaknesses of the movement so far. In particular he drew attention to the difficulties of trying to organize resistance in the particularity of the present context; the levels of militancy shown, certainly on the leadership level, varies tremendously from union to union. However, Alex maintained that this could not go on forever. The fact that the government's latest assault on the power of the organized working class will challenge the basis of union organization; the government's move to destroy collective bargaining through regional pay structure is a direct attack on the existence of national workers' organizations, trade unions must fight back, or be finished as a fighting force in British political life. He finished by drawing attention to a number of test cases within EU legislation that have been used to further tie the hands of unions and could make Britain an even more ruthlessly anti union country.

The next speaker was Ahmed Nawaz, United Kingdom Convenor of the Workers Party Pakistan (WPP). He spoke first on the history of the organised working class in Pakistan, drawing particular attention to the series of onslaughts on collective bargaining and working class organizations that occurred through the rise of neo liberalism and its support from right wing religious populism. He paid particular attention to the historic difficulties of the working classes of the country, the particular brutalities they face from both their own ruling class, and the American imperialist class of which theirs is a client. One particular area of interest for the meeting was the need and possibility for regional action and organization for workers solidarity and against right wing religious groups.

Anne Alexander, an Egyptian solidarity activist and member of the Socialist Workers' Party spoke about the state of militancy and activism in Egypt, 15 months after the ousting of Mubarak. She spoke about the way that the slogan "Bread, Freedom and Social Justice", has been a way that the people have expressed a changing, more and more radical, set of demands. Particularly through the specific articulations of the demand for social justice, the balance of

class forces, and indeed consciousness, can be seen. She went on to speak about the increased challenges faced by the movement in Egypt and suggested that interested activists could get involved with solidarity work through the different organizations that work to draw attention to the situation there.

Sam Wade, a student and workers activist, spoke on the difficulties of trying to link up the struggles of the students movements with the existing labour movement. In particular, he drew attention to the fact that many student activists had been disappointed by the failure of the “cavalry” to arrive to the student movement in the shape of large scale stoppages by the organisations of university workers. He also drew parallels between this and the problems with trying to join the organised workers movement to new fronts of class struggle such as the occupy movement, or the squatters and environmental movements. He argued that the present situation has thrown up a layer of young working class activists, who are not engaged by the limited demands of the trade union movement, having already developed critiques of the wage system as a whole.

Ayob Rahmani of IASWI spoke on the working class movement in Iran. He began by describing the development of the repression of the Iranian working class from the high point of their power during the revolution of 1979, re-inscribing the organised power of the working class into the historiography of the period. He touched on the development of the workers' councils in a number of different industries and looked in detail at the way that they were suppressed in favour of so-called “Islamic Workers Councils”, which are in fact pro regime organisations.

Ayob went on to describe the present upsurge in workers protest against factories closure, delayed and non payment of wages all over the country. He stressed the importance of international solidarity with workers fighting for representation in what can be one of the most dangerous places in the world for worker activists.

The seminar ended with a very lively debate, with questions from the floor and responses from speakers. Apart from some controversy and debate about the historic position of the SWP with regard to the Iranian Worker’s Movement and their alleged support for the Iranian government, an allegation denied by Anne Alexander, most of the debate and discussion involved all of the speakers and most people present had a say.

Theoretical questions addressed included the debate around how best to understand the role of imperialism in the contexts of Pakistan and Iran, and many participants appeared to be surprised by the myriad of similarities between the situations of worker activists in both countries, and the striking similarities in the evolution of their respective political situations.. The meeting ended with a real sense of hope that there may be a way for friends and comrades to work more closely on these regional issues in the future. In particular, friends from IASWI and WPP seemed keen on arranging further meetings to discuss the possibility of supporting each other's class struggles and working to counter the growth of religious obscurantisms.

Long Live International Working Class Solidarity
International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran-UK
14/5/2012

Link to:

A RadioLabour interview with Farid Partovi, International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran: How to support independent unions in Iran, May 10, 2012; <http://www.radiolabour.net/partovi-100512.html>

Link to:

Amnesty International Urgent Action: Trade Unionist Given Six-Year Sentence: Reza Shahabi

Sample Protest letter:

Free Reza Shahabi! Free all jailed workers!

I (we) have been informed that, after being incarcerated for more than 22 months, Reza Shahabi has been sentenced to 6 years imprisonment, by Judge Salavati of the Branch 15 of Tehran's "Islamic Revolutionary Court". This includes a year's prison sentence on charges of "propaganda activities against the system" and five years in prison on false charges of "conspiracy with the intention of acting against national security". Also in this court order, Reza Shahabi has been sentenced to prohibition of activities for five years, which only means an attempt in silencing this labour activist. Reza Shahabi's only crime is to be representing workers and defending the rights of workers and members of his union.

Reza Shahabi, treasurer and a board member of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburb Vahed Bus Company, has been in custody in the notorious Evin prison since 12 June 2010. After almost a year, on 25 May 2011 he was tried in a court in Tehran on charges of "propaganda against the Islamic State" and "conspiracy against National Security". As a result of mistreatment of Shahabi in jail, his health has deteriorated significantly. There is a growing fear that Reza might become paralyzed as a result of his worsening health conditions.

I (we) strongly condemn these unjust sentences against Reza Shahabi. I (we) also denounce ongoing persecution and arrests of labour activists in Iran including the repression of May Day demonstrators on May 1st 2012. I (we) demand annulment of the sentences against Reza Shahabi and the immediate and unconditional freedom of all labour activists, including May 1st Detainees of Sanandaj.

Other known labour activists who are currently incarcerated:

· Mr. Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, member of The Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations, and a Children's Rights advocate, has received five years prison term, by a "Court of Appeals." Mr. Ebrahimzadeh has been incarcerated in Evin prison since June 2012, based on false accusations. He has been under immense psychological and physical pressures.

Mr. Ali Nejati has been incarcerated in Dezfoul's Fajr prison since November 12, 2011. Mr. Nejati, a board member of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Workers' Syndicate, had already spent six months in jail based on the same bogus charges. While imprisoned, new charges were brought up against him, and although he was cleared of all charges in the preliminary court proceedings, subsequently he was sentenced to spend another year in prison. Mr. Nejati was sent to jail while he's suffering from severe heart ailment. Due to his condition he has to follow a certain daily diet, accompanied by medications, plus monthly check up by his physician.

In addition, two well-known labour activists in City of Tabriz, Shahrokh Zamani and Mohammad Jarahi, both members of the "Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organisations", who were imprisoned and released on bail last year, were arrested again in January 2012 and been detained in Tabriz prison since then. Shahrokh Zamani is facing 11 year imprisonment and Mohammad Jarahi is facing 5 year jail time.

Send Copy of your Protest Letters to: info@leader.ir, info@judiciary.ir, dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir; iran@un.int; ijpr@iranjudiciary.org, info@dadiran.ir, office@justice.ir, support@irimlsa.ir; info@humanrights-iran.ir; avaei@Dadgostary-tehran.ir; bia.judi@yahoo.com; info@mlsa.ir; CC: info@workers-iran.org