

News and Reports-Workers' Struggles in Iran- September 2, 2008- IASWI

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LabourStart Act NOW!

Iran: Protest intensified repression against labour activists - No to whippings and executions! Click: http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/solidarityforever/show_campaign.cgi?c=416

See also a Sample Protest Letter (Below):

**Gholamreza Gholamhosseini is still in prison!
Osanloo transferred to Rajayee Shahr Prison!**

Gholamreza Gholamhosseini was arrested 2 months ago. The Enghelab Eslami (Islamic Revolution) Court has asked a very high bail for his release. Up to this point, his family has not been able to come up with the money. Gholamreza was sacked for his activism in the Vahed workers' syndicate. In spite of the decision by Labour Board Office- West of Tehran, to reinstate Mr. Gholamhosseini, the Vahed Bus Company authorities refused to give his job back. His efforts to contact the authorities led nowhere, so he decided to attend the ceremony of Women's Day organized by the Tehran and Suburb Bus Company, Shekat-e-Vahed, in the Azadi Stadium. He knew that the Mayor of Tehran and the management of the bus company would be present at the event and he wanted to talk to them directly in order to get his job back. Upon his arrival in the stadium, he was arrested and was sent to the Evin prison.

The syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbsw Vahed Bus Company (Sherkat-e-Vahed), in a communiqué on August 24, 2008(www.syndicavahed.info), calls on all the workers' right activists and Workers' organizations to support the imprisoned workers until they are set free. Gholamreza Gholamhosseini must be released immediately and unconditionally!

The Vahed syndicate has also issued another news release in which they inform that Mansour Osanloo was transferred from Evin Prison to Rajayee Shahr Prison in city of Karaj near Tehran (it's also called Gohardasht Prison), which is a very notorious jail, on August 25, 2008. Osanloo was supposed to be transferred to Labafi-nejad hospital for his eye treatment; instead they took him to the above jail.

An Interview with Mr. Ali Nejati, a representative of Haft Tapeh (Seven Hills) Sugarcane Corporation's workers

(The text below based on a recorded interview, was originally printed in *Coordinating Committee to Help for Creation of Workers' Organizations' Journal "Workers' Movement, #2."* English translation* has been edited and modified from the original colloquial Persian)

****Behzad Sohrabi:** *Please introduce yourself to our readers, and give us a background of your work history, and your years at Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Corporation?*

Ali Nejati: Born in 1962, due to my family's financial needs, I've been working since I was 10-12 years old. When it was time to be just a kid or a teenager, I began to work. First in construction, afterwards I worked in a brick oven, and then I served in the Army. After my service, in age 22 I started to Work in Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Corporation (HTSC), and for 24 years, since 1984 I've been working there.

Q: What were the reasons for your protests and strikes at HTSC? What were your specific demands?

A: Our protests like all other workers; all over the world is over our living conditions. We're not immune from such issues. Workers at SHSC are in a dire situation. Our work goes on in the heat of summer with temperature going up to 45-50 degrees Celsius or more, and for winter in Khuzestan province the cold penetrates your bones, all this for minimal wages and benefits. Since June of 2006 most of our protests were over non-payment of wages. As we all know the current level of inflation in our society is so high that working class families are not able to cope with rising prices. In addition to this problem, not only we haven't gotten any raises but also our earned wages haven't been paid on time. Before when we used to receive our wages on time we already had financial difficulties; now that the wages haven't been paid for 3 to 4 months workers situation has become increasingly worse. Besides these two issues: low wages and non-payment of wages, we also have other demands, concerning job classification, workers transportation, non-temporarily official employment*, and restructuring of the work force. Some fellow workers are the most experienced, and skilled workers in this field, but under the rubric of restructuring they are either retired, or bought out. Of course the remaining workers and the corporation it self were severely damaged due to lack of this skilled work force. These issues were repeatedly discussed in the media but so far we haven't got any response from the official delegated to deal with workers issues.

** An "official" and non-temporary work contract has become one of the major demands of practically all workers, in all trades and industries in Iran. According to various sources anywhere from %50 to %70 of the total work force in Iran are currently employed on a temporarily basis. Overwhelming majority of these workers have contracts lasting for only three months. They are let go on the 89th day, and re-hired again for another 3 months. This way the employers are not obliged to provide any of the most basic benefits, and always have an abundance easily replaceable work force.*

Q: Mr. Nejati you mentioned that the second phase of your protests began in March of 2008. But even before that there were some protests. Tell us when it began, what demands you had, and what actions you engaged in? We had heard that you took your

protest to the city of Shush, and had a rally in front of the governor's office there. Please elaborate.

A: Our protests from September of 2007 became very public, and serious, and since then we have had periodic strikes. In a period of 2 to 3 months we would have strikes for a week, or for 3 to 4 weeks in a row. Our strikes were periodic until February of that year. When they didn't pay any New Year's bounce, in reaction to the severe financial hardship we forced to voice our grievances. We had a protest by the Shush governor's office, and camped out there for a few days. Our slogans were: "An affordable living is our natural right," "We're workers from Seven Hills, and we're hungry." Our protest in there went on for a few days until officials gave us promises to remedy the situation, but after a year and half nothing has happened yet.

Q: When you were protesting in front of the governor's office in Shush, was there any response from the security forces, confronting you?

A: After our latest phase of protests on May 5, 2008, our activities became very extensive, and many workers were involved in them. Workers had a march to the center of the city in Shush, and were chanting: "Death to Saedi." Saedi is a member of parliament from Shush, and as far as we know he's also the head of Agriculture Commission. This gentleman could at least reduce some of the problems for us, but so far has done nothing at all. From May 5 to 24 we had another strike. In the past 50 days workers have had many demonstrations throughout the city, and closed many roads and some of the streets leading to the factory. Security forces have repeatedly clashed with workers, but workers who are fighting over their rights have nothing to fear. They could beat us with batons, attack us with tear gas, but none of these will intimidate us. Our rights are what we demand and no one could take that away from us. We were crushed, our children were physically hurt, people had their hands or heads broken, imprisoned, had to appear in court, but we never backed off from demanding our rights. And I promise you that we will not stop pursuing our goals until we achieve our demands, and our rights.

Q: An interesting aspects of your struggle has been a 50 day strike, which has had its own effects on the Iranian labor movement, could you elaborate on this valuable experience?

A: As a worker from HTSC I would like to thank all individuals and organizations, in Iran, and throughout the world that have assisted us. This strong support was one of the reasons we were able to continue our struggle on positive trend. The way we were able to incorporate the experiences of our friends, in our own struggles, at least until now has had a positive effect. At least we reached the conclusion that today's workers should have their own free and independent organization. For the few years that we had a group called the "Islamic Council" not a single improvement was made in our working conditions. All the workers in SHSC reached the conclusion that we must have our own representatives, elected directly by ourselves. Obviously such a process does not fit with management sponsored and approved entities. Thus the workers have come to realize that today we need a free syndicate. So now we're trying to form our own free syndicate, and elect our own representatives, so our elected representatives could deal with various local, and national officials on our behalf, and also establish more extensive ties with other labor formations inside, and outside of Iran. I'm very glad that workers in HTSC have reached the conclusion that we need to establish connections with other workers through out the world.

Q: According to the Labor law all candidates for "Islamic Councils" must be approved not only by the employers, and the security forces, but also by the Ministry of Labor as

well. Needless to say such individuals are in reality representatives of the employers or the state, and not the workers. My question is what led HTSC workers to re-establish your Workers' Syndicate?

A: In the heat of the struggle, while we were defending our rights, we came to this conclusion. We saw the need for a speedy creation of an autonomous workers organization. We had many discussions, and now we have a board composed of individuals who have a track record of fighting for workers. This board is empowered by workers to re-establish the syndicate. SHSC's original syndicate was established back in 1973. Our own active members in this board have the approval of at least 70 to 80 percent of the workers.

Q: Before you decide to re-establish the syndicate, you had collected many signatures, and were trying to form another type of an organization, which was in line with the guidelines of Department of Labor. What happened to that?

A: The signatures you're referring to were collected in January, and February of this year. We had about 2000 signatures in relation with syndicate. When we went to the officials they very strongly opposed to title of syndicate. We said well if there's a legal problem we'll just create a trade organization. They were strongly opposed to that as well, and many times through the security forces of the province, and Labor department we were told that under no circumstances did the SHSC workers have the right to even form their own trade organization, which is supposedly guaranteed by the code 131 of the Labour Law. Finally we came to the conclusion that a free syndicate is what we need now.

Q: At the moment you have been able to achieve a certain level of unity amongst the workers, and you yourself are a renowned representative of the workers. How is your relationship with the workers? And to what extent do the workers agree with your views and arguments concerning their demands?

A: I can't say that workers are absolutely in agreement with their representatives, but on a general, macro level, I would say about % 60 to % 70, give or take a little. Based on workers reaction to our conduct, their very positive response to the call for strike, the talks we hold together to work through the issues, are all indication of workers relative support for us. As an example, after we had a discussion about syndicate, and although we had difficulties in that day, we were still able to gather 400-500 signatures, accompanied with their employee numbers. So at least by this standard we represent 60 to 70 percent of the work force, which is the relative majority of the workers, and we are very happy about this. Now it's possible that some other workers might not accept us, naturally there is always some opposition. Right now we have about 4000 to 5000 workers, some have a direct interest in these affairs, some have their own specific issues, some can't be directly connected to us, or join us. We all have different problems. So I hope as a genuine representative of the workers, and as a labor activist, to work towards fulfilling our goals, and recovering our wages, and our rights, as soon as possible, while relying on the backing of our fellow workers.

Q: What was very interesting for me was how you were able to mobilize 4000 to 5000 workers in this unbearable heat of Khozestan province, which a lot of people can not handle. Although you lacked any facilities for a meeting place, and no permission from the authorities to assemble, but since you were determined to have workers elect their own representatives, you were able to gather their signatures and thumb prints. Could you elaborate on this process?

A: Though we faced many obstacles as far as logistics and such, but the kind of response we have consistently encountered from our fellow-workers through our protests and

strike, the type of ethics and honesty in action, and how we've been able to utilize such experiences, has enabled us to become some kind of a model for other struggles. Of course personally I'm really not comfortable to call ourselves any kind of a model, because we have got a long way to go yet. We are simply just workers, but workers who haven't backed down and have resisted all types of obstacles and difficulties, and have arrived at the conclusion that it's only through struggle that we could achieve our legitimate demands.

Q: The comments about your struggle were not intended as some type of over-praise. What's been very evident in your struggle at HTSC for the past few years is the kind of daily organizing undertaken, which has produced its results. My next question concerns the relationship amongst the representatives themselves, how do you coordinate your tasks? Are you content with the existing coordination? If there's an issue how do you resolve it?

A: Although we've been working together for a relatively short period, but because we trust each other, and believe in our goals we've been able to maintain a satisfactory level of communication amongst ourselves.

Q: Based on the current government policies in Iran some factories, including HTSC are being restructured, or they're in the process of ceasing their operations. What do you and other workers at HTSC think about this? What are the observations you would like to share with other workers through out Iran who find themselves at this predicament?

A: As we mentioned earlier this restructuring is a very precise and calculated program. It's abundantly clear for us that the problems at HTSC are directly related to the central government's "sugar mafia," and the specific individuals involved in it. A corporation that was able to producing 100,000 tons of sugar just a few years ago, and had about 70 other affiliate corporations, like Amir Kabir and such, is today on the verge of bankruptcy, due to government's policies regarding sugar imports, and exports. HTSC is now in such a dire situation that although it desperately needs skilled workers, it's still restructuring its work force. All of this while it hasn't paid our wages for 5 months now. As a worker I have this message for all other fellow-workers in Sugarcane industry: workers at Karoon sugarcane, Mian Ab sugarcane, or at Amir Kabir Sugarcane, or other auxiliary projects in Abadan or Khoramshahr, sooner or later, they all will be facing the same problems we're facing here. As a worker I respectfully ask all other workers in our industry to support us, the way all other labor organizations in Iran such as bus drivers syndicate, or Kian Tire have supported us.

Q: In these few days that I've been a guest amongst you, I have heard some stories that like workers purchasing their daily bread on credit, with workers writing their names in the baker's ledger, hoping to pay back as soon as their 5 months delayed wages are paid. I've also heard they're selling their meager home furniture. Are these stories true, and if yes could you elaborate?

A: Yes, I'm glad that you mentioned this issue, which has become a central problem for us at HTSC. We workers, of course not just us in here but all over Iran, are having a very hard time coping with inflation that's rampant in our country. Everyone is fully aware of this problem except the officials, who are sitting on treasures, on money from oil, our national wealth, squandering, and stealing all that, having the time of their lives. Of course they won't know anything about our problems. Even when we were receiving our wages on time we had a hard time dealing with inflation, and now not being paid for 5 months, we have to sell our carpets. Officials keep talking about the dispossessed, but

they're not fooling anyone except themselves. Our only solution is to unite, and establish our own independent, autonomous labor organizations in all cities and on a national level.

***Translated by Hoshang Tarehbol.**

**** Background information about the interviewer, Behzad Sohrabi**

- Born in 1964 in Sanandaj-Iran, Behzad Sohrabi became a child laborer doing various jobs such as seasonal and daily jobs paid below the minimum wage. Eventually, he ended up being employed in the textile industry where he worked for 16 years.

In 1988, following the international workers' day celebration in Sanandaj, Behzad was arrested and spent a year in the prison. In 2005, he became a member of "Coordinating Committee to help form worker' Organizations". Behzad was the spokesperson of the organizing committee for the 2005 May Day celebration in Sanandaj. After the ceremony, he was summoned by the Sanandaj Security Office and was interrogated for long hours. In 2006, Behzad was elected as the representative of workers of Parris Spinning Factory in Snandaj. Later on, in May 2006, Parris workers went on strike for 16 hours, which resulted in achieving their demands successfully. As a result, however, Behzad was sacked by the employer for organizing the strike. That led workers to organize another strike on August 19, 2006 demanding back to work for Behzad, creation of worker's organization and job security. The security guards, undercover officers, police and special units brutally attacked and assaulted the workers and their families. Many workers were seriously wounded. And Behzad's dismissal was finalized!

Behzad was also the spokesperson and one of the organizers of the "Committee in Defense of Mahmoud Salehi". This committee provided updated information about Mahmoud's situation while in jail both in the country and abroad, did fundraising, and got workers' support both in the country and abroad for his freedom. They also called for two protest rallies before the Sanandaj Central Prison and Ministry of Justice- Sanandaj in March 2008 that contributed significantly to Salehi's freedom.

Presently, Behzad is working with "Coordinating Committee to Help Form worker's Organizations", defending workers demands and specifically in close relationship with workers of Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company, trying to contribute to their struggles. Behzad, similar to many other labour activists in Iran, has been threatened numerous times and persecuted by the government authorities and employers.

An interview with Mansour Osanloo, the President of the Board of Directors of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company (June, 2005). *

"Unemployment and lay-offs are more destructive than Earth quakes, Assist us spiritually and materially, at national and international levels!"

****Introduction:** In the early morning hours of June 2nd 2005, the headquarters of “Bus Drivers’ Syndicate of Tehran”¹ came under an extended attack, carried out by individuals wearing civilian clothing. The attackers used incendiary bombs, and Molotov cocktails, which resulted in burning the office and parts of the building. The attackers throw the bombs through windows; the ensuing heat melted the metal framings of air conditioning unit. Bus Workers’ Syndicate is located within the Bakers Syndicate building. After the attack people within the vicinity of the burning building gathered in the middle of the street fearing the spread of fire into their houses.

This arson attack came after a previous attack carried out about a month ago, on May 9th, 2005. Members, and elements of “Workers’ House²,” under the leadership of Mr. Hasan Sadeghi, carried out all these attacks. This time their aggression was carried out on a higher level.

After this vicious attack on Syndicate’s office, Saied Afshar a producer from Radio Equality [Radio Barabari] recorded this conversation with Mr. Mansour Osanloo, a leader of the Bus Workers’ Syndicate. Osanloo himself was a victim in the May 9th attack by “Workers’ House” thugs, and Hasan Sadighi. He was severely beaten, his tongue was cut, and attackers were about to cut his jugular vein. In this interview Mansoor Osanloo expresses Iranian workers call for justice as such:” ...we wish for you, who live freely, and have resources, to let the world hear our voice, our demands for justice and Syndicate. Act by any resources available to you. In here there is a lot of pressure, and they’re trying to prevent us from gathering, and possibly there will be even more pressure to come.” He continues: “...assist us, write down our bank account number. Assist us financially, so we could lighten-up this heavy load of lay-offs, unemployment, discontinuation of workers’ benefits. Assist us so we could continue pursuing these demands until the end. We workers have accepted the possibility of death and everything else (for sake of pursuing workers demands), but our fellow-workers at least should have some financial backing to support their families and dependents, so they won’t have to back down in front of tyranny, and despotism of managers, and despotic CEO of the Bus Company, that’s all!!!”

Radio Barabary: Greetings to you Mr. Osanloo. Could you tell us about the incident, and inform us of what has happened?

Osanloo: We are members of “ Founding Committee for resurrection and reopening of Bus Workers’ Syndicate of Tehran,”³ We have called for a General Assembly twice, first time on May, 13 2005, and again on June 3 2005. On May 9th [four days before our 1st assembly] an attack was organized by Mostafa Norian, the CEO of Tehran Bus Co. in order to stop us from organizing our assembly. The attackers were using twelve buses, and were all members of the so-called Workers’ House, and Islamic Labor Council⁴. They’re in fact tools of the employers, and unfortunately all were operating under the protection of security forces, which included Colonel Asaayeish, Colonel Saboori, Colonel Shabani, Major Shojaaie, Capitan Ebadi, and Capitan Khoshraftar. There were

¹ *Sandikai Kargaran Sherkat Vahed Autobusrani Tehran va Houmeh or The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company.*

² The government sanctioned so called “Labor” organization, responsible for many vicious acts of violence, and thuggery against protesting workers in the past twenty-five years. At the moment some leading members of this body are the official” representatives” of Iranian workers in International Labor Organization. Expulsion of these thugs from ILO is a common demand of all independent and progressive individuals and organizations in the Iranain labor movement.

³ *Hayate moasses ehia va bazgoshie Sandykaie Sherkat Vahed Tehran*

⁴ Islamic Labor Council, *Shorai Islami Kar*, another government sanctioned “labor” organization which has the same repugnant function as the so-called “ Workers’ House,” mentioned above.

also other members of the security forces present in civilian clothing. All these individuals from security forces didn't do a single thing to stop the attack. The aggressors broke down the door, walls, windows, and rushed inside the office stealing all the equipment. They hit, and destroyed the pictures of martyr workers of the war, and stole all the personal belongings of the members, and any document that they could get their hands on. Afterwards they collectively beat us up. I was beaten to death by a gang of about thirty to forty, on the last floor of the Bakers' syndicate, located on Hasan Abad Square, Khayam St. # 22.

This attack was carried out to stop our assembly on May 13, but in that day Bus Company workers showed up in mass, and all the surrounding streets were packed with drivers, and workers. Security forces and the police again illegally blocked the entrance to our building. According to the ILO codes 87, and 98 it's our natural right to have an independent Syndicate without any intervention from the government, or the employer, but they intervened. Keeping in mind these circumstances we asked our fellow workers, to disperse, so there would not be any violent confrontation, but nobody left, and from 11 am to noon Hasan Abad Square became a grand meeting space with more than 3000 workers. Having no other option I was obliged to give a speech, and explain our difficult predicament in creating our Syndicate, and read a communiqué on why they were preventing us from organizing our assembly. But the opinions of the workers were that this very street gathering was our official assembly! Everyone was in favor of dissolving Islamic Councils, and spoke as such. Workers were demanding free workers Syndicate. Of course in that assembly there were no written votes, but by oral vote, and participants' enthusiasm, this [vote in favor of free Syndicate] was done.

I should add, because they didn't allow us to enter our building, we announced April 3rd as our second assembly, and informed all the media of our decision. Since last week [this interview was conducted on the last week of May] an increasing pressure from security forces, police department of greater Tehran, and the management of the Bus Co., has begun to buildup, to prevent us from having our assembly. This morning executive director of the Tehran province called me on the phone demanding to postpone our general assembly. Whereas in fact assembly is not such a big deal, in a matter of two hours workers come to cast their votes, and go back to their business. I don't understand what kind of a problem would this be for this ruling faction, of our beloved country of Iran, they don't want to see free workers' assembly. This is the most basic right of any worker to have, a civil institution called Syndicate.

RB: Mr. Osanloo how did the June 2nd attack take place?

Osanloo: Around midnight, I'm not sure if it was Molotov cocktail or something else, something incendiary was thrown through the balcony of the Bakers' Syndicate [Bus workers office was located within the bakers' Syndicate]. A great fire started there, and it was so ferocious that all air conditioning frames were on fire, all the windows shattered, and smoke and fire engulfed entire upper levels of the building. All neighbors poured into the street, called the police, and tried to put out the fire by water, but the fire just kept on getting worse, so firefighters arrived. Until 2 am neighborhood was very busy. Police from the 112th precinct showed up, and wrote down a report, and all the folks in the neighborhood were witness. After this arson attack, in the morning instead of providing security and permitting us to have our assembly, they were forcing us to abandon the building, and disrupting our assembly. Today security forces in civilian clothing with their own cars repeatedly came by and kept telling the workers that they have a letter from the Governor's office banning their assembly because of "soccer game," and other lame excuses.

Look, an assembly in which a few thousand workers come and toss in their votes in ballot boxes, and leave, and not even hang around afterwards, what does this have to do

with a soccer game all the way on the other side of the city? The pressure has been steadily growing up to this very moment that I'm talking to you. For instance, a member of the Bakers' Syndicate was pressured so much that he started making loud complaints about why we were allowed [Bus Drivers] to use their building. In response the Bakers' leadership told him that they were responsible for this decision, and considered us as their own children, and that we're staying here until we have our own Syndicate. I should add that all these pressures have created divisiveness. All of this is to prevent us from having our own assembly; as an officer from 112 prescient told our colleagues: "We'll place barbed wire in front of this building so tomorrow no one will be able to enter this place!" It should be mentioned that in the May 9th attack an elder baker named Khalil Godarzi was hurt so bad that he went into coma, and was hospitalized in Sina hospital. A few days ago he passed away, and tomorrow there's suppose to be a memorial service for him in this building. The statement from that officer is an indication that these gentlemen are violating a private space. The ownership documents of this building is in the name of Bakers' Syndicate of Tehran; (bakers' guild of Lavaashi, Sangaki, and Taftoni bread), keeping in mind that this space must be kept open tomorrow so the memorial procession would go on, it is natural that we will resist to the best of our ability. To the extent possible we'll preserve this legal gathering of our own. This is a right within the boundaries of ILO, and also an amendment of the International Convention on Human Rights. This is a responsibility we have towards our wives, and children, our families, our history, and our future.

R.B.: *Mr. Osanloo, we've heard that some of the workers in the Bus Co. were intimidated, and some were even suspended, others were attacked, including yourself. Do you have any information on this to tell us?*

Osanloo: I have precise information, and will tell you exact names. Since winter, exactly from March 12, 2005 they've illegally prevented me from working, and now it's about three months that I haven't received any wages. Economic hardship has put my family under lots of pressure. I have to pay my son's university tuition, which is very expensive in Iran. I have bills, and loans to pay. These merciless employers for no reason, and only because we're in favor of our own independent Syndicate, have sacked me, and now I'm unemployed. In addition to me there are also thirteen other of my colleagues like Mr. Ali Zadhossaini, Ibrahim Madaddi, Assadollah Hajiromnan, Abbas Najankodaki, Ahad Farshi, Ayat Jadidiy, Reza Tarazi, and Behrooz Hossaini, which were dismissed. There are seven or eight others that have been suspended like: Mr.Seyeid Davood Razavi, Mahmmod Hajabri, a fifty-five years old worker with an extensive seniority. He was suspended yesterday. Many have been displaced, and they've been sent away far away. All overtime, and work benefits have been cancelled. Our monthly wage is barely about 200 Euros! Now they've stopped even this. Because we want to establish independent workers organization based on international conventions. We're not guilty of anything but Syndicalism, and don't have the liberty to even have an independent organization!

R.B.: *Mr.Osanloo, it was mentioned that the attackers [on the initial attack of May 9th] were trying to cut your tongue with a blade.*

Osanloo: Not that they just wanted to, they actually did!!! Mr. Ali Akbar Ayozi, the head of East Tehran's Islamic Council, and Hasan Sadeghi, spokesperson for the Islamic Council of Tehran, led May 9th attack. These are the same councils that no one has voted for; they're so much under the control of the owners that the Labor Department was forced by the ILO, and in presence of Mr.Juan Savamara, Mr.Waner Lun, and Mr. Papayoma, all leading members of ILO, to pass a bill without even once mentioning the Islamic Councils. Instead Labor Dept. mentioned Syndicate as the legitimate labor organization, as part of the tri-lateral arrangement [between the state, employer, and the

workers]. When these people from Workers' House, and Islamic Councils attacked us the CEO of the Bus Co. logistically supported them.

Mostafa Norin was the one who started attacking me. They were armed with brass knuckles, sticks, knives, and handguns. Hasan Sadeghi had a handgun and a walki-talkie in his hand, and kept hitting me in my mouth with his handgun. There were seven or eight other workers also present, and they were trying to get them outside of the room so they could get me alone, but they weren't successful. When they realized there were seven or eight other people present they started to chant; "Death to Hypocrite,⁵" "Death to Tudehi⁶," and gave orders to kill me on the spot. They rushed me, and put me on a large metal sheet, and Ali Ayozi began squeezing my neck, and proceeded to cut my tongue and my neck. My tongue was partially cut, also a part of my neck, and my throat, which took seventeen stitches. Four stitches are on my jugular vein. After this group attack I went to the medical examiners office, and they recorded twenty-two counts of injuries, and traumas from my head to my toe.

R.B.: It looks like Hasan Sadighi and a couple of his colleagues from Workers' House, and Islamic Councils have gone to Switzerland to participate in an ILO meeting. When you hear of such news, how do you feel?!!

Osanloo: This is a real shame. Yesterday in a letter to ILO we exposed these "gentlemen" as the ones who have violated peoples' life and their property. They've stolen Syndicate's motorcycles, and properties. We demanded that they won't be allowed to speak on behalf of Iranian workers, and they're not workers at all. They're elements of the management. From day one they've registered Workers House as a party in the Interior Dept. and not in the Labor Dept. This is an organization that from very beginning was built on violence, prejudice, and lies. They usurped the building on Abo Rayhan Ave that used to be called "Iranian Workers Syndicates House." We express sorrow and disappointment that they were received as workers' representatives, and speaking as such. We've sent letters to Mr. Juan, and Waner Lun, and had them exposed, and made it clear that they're government and management's elements, and not the spokesperson for workers. We hope that when they reach Geneva they won't be allowed to speak on behalf of workers! This is our wish, but we're short handed, if it's possible for you in there [abroad], you should expose them. We're living in a despotic country. Right now as I'm talking to you, every moment there's fear of death, terror, and destruction for our families, and my colleagues: Mr. Zadhossaini, Mansoor Haghghi, Behrooz Ferdowsi, Maddadi, and other members of the founding committee. We're struggling between life and death to institutionalize one of the articles of International Convention on Human Rights, the right to free speech, and free assembly!!!

R.B.: Mr. Osanloo, now after all these confrontations, and violations to your rights, and all the episodes created against you, what is your perspective as far as resurrection of Bus workers' Syndicate?

Osanloo: This week we've had many reports, and organized a number of meetings. Almost everyday from dawn to dusk we were in the Syndicate's office. Everyday many friends would come by, and revise the by-laws. We've put together a modern constitution, and by-laws that respond to today's issues, and concerns of the Bus workers.

Majority of the Bus Co. workers are very sympathetic to us, and agree with slogans and demands that relate to their lives. More than eight thousands until now have expressed interest in attending the assembly tomorrow.

⁵ 'Hypocrite' is like a code word in Islamic Republic of Iran for any oppositional force, and is usually the signal for physical attack.

⁶ "Tudeh Party," is the name of the- presently fractured- old-time organization in Iran. Although this organization is not a truly socialist group, it still at times is used by the government to rebait any progressive opposition, despite the existence of many more left leaning organizations in Iran.

We think that the horizon is clear. We have a good future, a democratic and just future for the people, and workers of Iran is ahead of us. We're living in an era of transition from despotism to democracy, and we'll confront all obstacles. We're not going to quit our path, or our faith. Every day there are more and more workers in favor of independent and democratic workers' organizations. The power that has preserved us up to now, and has prevented the government from taking us to jail, or killing us, is probably this very support of the board mass of workers towards the members of the founding committee.

R.B.: *Mr. Osanloo we thank you very much for taking part in this conversation. We wish you, and all your co-workers, much success in continuation of your struggle.*

Osanloo: On behalf of myself and my friends, comrades, and workers that are fighting for preservation and continuation of the Syndicate, we thank you and wish that you could get our message to everyone all over the world. There's a lot of pressure in here, they're blocking our assembly, and possibly there'll be more pressure to come.

We've opened up a bank to assist all fired and suspended worker, so their families won't fall apart. Present this bank account of ours to the world. We're asking for assistance so that workers' families won't fall apart, and they don't become afflicted with poverty and prostitution. This request for assistance is from NGOs and our fellow workers throughout Iran and the world. People of the world assist each other in times of earthquakes and floods. Illegal unemployment is worse than earthquake and demands an international support. Assist us, and utilize the bank account, so we could lighten up the load of all these lay-offs, firings, and losing of the benefits. We workers have accepted the possibility of death and everything else (for sake of pursuing workers demands), but our fellow-workers at least should have some financial backing to support their families and dependents, so they won't have to back down in front of tyranny, and despotism of managers, and despotic CEO of the Bus Company, that's all!!!"

** This interview was done on the Radio Barabari, and transcribed on Rahe Kargar's web site, with a few modifications from colloquial to written about three years ago. Many thanks to producers of "Radio Equality" (Radio Barabari) for conducting the interview.*

****Comments by the translator, Hoshang Tarehgo:**

Since early 2005 when bus driver's syndicate of Tehran began re-organizing their efforts around "reinaguration" [baz goshaei] of their syndicate *, around the simple, basic idea of an independent labor organization, they have become a constant of Iranian labor movement. By January 2006, they went beyond merely demanding, and initiated a city wide bus strike in pursuit of their goal, establishing an autonomous bus drivers' syndicate in Tehran; with a metropolitan population of about 13 millions. Though the strike had its limitations, it demonstrated once more that workers' power is present and active in Iran.

If before the strike Osanloo and the leadership cadre of the syndicate were the main targets of oppressive apparatuses of the state, after the strike we witnessed an unprecedented wave of repression unleashed on syndicate's rank and file (included but not limited to: midnight attacks and incarceration of drivers' families, and keeping them hostage until striking drivers turned themselves in,...). It would take a multi-volume book to document all the injustices and abuses this syndicate has been subjected to, but for the purpose of this introduction suffice it to say that Osanloo since then has been kidnapped, beaten to a pulp, incarcerated, and released several times. The latest communiqué from syndicate informed all that instead of a hospital that he was supposed to be taken to for his eyes; he was taken to an even more notorious prison in Karaj. By denying Osanloo the urgent medical treatment he needs, the Islamic Republic is attempting once more to endanger the life of another leader while incarcerated, by homicidal negligence, as it attempted to do so with another national labor leader: Mahmood Salehi. A forceful labor solidarity campaign, combining efforts of national and international labor organizations and activists, was able to secure Salehi's release; similar efforts will most definitely be needed to bring about Osanloo's freedom!

The interview above though dated by some three years it still gives a glimpse into everyday workings of the syndicate, the solidarity that has animated it so far, and the obstacles they still face. For a vivid personal description of the attack on Osanloo, including the stitches he received, in Persian check:

You Tube-Iran-Islamic Republic Tortures Osanloo Union Organizer, or
You Tube-Mansour Osanloo- Freedom Will Come (English), also see
www.syndicavahed.info

- The dates on syndicate's logo read: established 1968, reinaugurated 2005.

***For more information, contact info@workers-iran.org or alliance@workers-iran.org
International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI)
Background Information: www.workers-iran.org***

Sample Protest Letter:

Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,
President of the Islamic Republic of Iran
The Presidency,
Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection,
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Fax: + 98 21 649 58 80
Email: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

I am writing this to express my (organization) outrage over the recent whipping sentences and jail terms against labour activists in Iran. I (We) have been informed that Ms. Sousan Razani has been ordered to receive 9 months in prison and 70 lashes. and Ms. Shiva Kheirabadi is sentenced to 4 months imprisonment and 15 lashes; Mr. Abdullah Khani was sentenced to 91 days prison and 40 lashes and Mr. Seyed Qaleb Hosseini was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment and 50 lashes. The verdict was issued by the Criminal Court of Sanandaj – branch 101. The above labour activists are sentenced so severely only because of their participation in 2008 May Day celebration in Sanandaj. In addition, Mr. Khaled Hosseini, a worker activist, was sentenced to 91 days suspended jail and 30 lashes because of his efforts in support of Mahmoud Salehi who was imprisoned at the time. More shockingly, I (we) were informed that on July 20, 2008, Mr. Farzad Kamangar was sentenced to death after having a seven minutes trial. Farzad Kamangar is a teacher, who has been tortured gravely for allegations such as collaborating with Pejak Party, membership with PKK, transporting explosives and etc. Various individuals, progressive forces and organizations from Iran and abroad have protested his detention and the recent death sentence against him but your government has disregarded all these pleas. Another activist, Mr. Afshin Shams, was arrested in July 2008. Mr. Shams is a labour activist, a member of “Coordinating Committee to Help Form Workers’ organizations”, a member of the “Committee in Dense of Mahmoud Salehi” and a member of ”Caricaturists Society”. Moreover, there have been other arrests and charges against labour and social activists, including Mr. Gholamreza Gholamhosseini of Vahed Syndicate, as well as dismissal of labour activists, including the recent dismissal verdict against nine members of the bus workers syndicate. All the above arrests and repressive measures are clear indications of intensified offensives against the entire labour movement in Iran. I (We) call on your government to unconditionally and immediately release all prisoners of conscious and repeal all charges and sentences against labour activists in Iran. We also call for the freedom of Mansour Osanloo, the president of Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, who has been imprisoned

since July 2007 and is serving a five year jail term. We also demand the immediate recognition and realization of human and workers' rights to all workers in Iran, including the rights to organize freely and to strike.

Name

Organization

Position

Send Copy of your Protest Letters to:

info@leader.ir, dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir, info@judiciary.ir

CC: info@workers-iran.org

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For more information, contact info@workers-iran.org or alliance@workers-iran.org

International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI)

Background Information: www.workers-iran.org