

# Iranian Workers' News

## SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN WITH IRANIAN WORKERS

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### The ridiculous process of determining the minimum wage in Iran

This year determining the minimum wage of Iranian workers for the new year 1380 (March 2001-March 2002), has reached such a stage that the authorities of the Islamic Republic regime, have been forced to arrest their own agents, including Hassan

Sadeghi, the director of Kanoun-e Ali-e Shoraye Eslami-e Kar (government workers organisation) for organising a protest demonstration and disturbing "general order" and they have sent him to prison. Apparently this time, these gentlemen didn't succeed to resolve the issue in peace (continued on page 2)

### Protest gathering by workers from Tehran Bus Company

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### Protest gathering by Kafsh-e Shadanpour workers

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### Labour of women homeworkers\*

The official definition of a woman worker is a women who works in a factory, workshop, with a specific job and pay. However women who do the same type of job at home and may be with higher rates of daily production than a worker in a factory, are not considered part of this category and do not count in official statistics. For example in the year 1375 (1996) unskilled women workers (in Iran) were 4.33% of all workers and 4.74% of working women. While the true number of unskilled women workers, taking into account women homeworkers, is far higher than the above figure. In this way women who work from home, are deprived of legal benefits and their true position in production and labour is denied. It suffices to review the volume (continued on page 3)

### Protest gathering by Forsatian workers in Shiraz

On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> of April, more than 400 workers from Forsatian (textile) factory situated in Shiraz (southern Iran) gathered outside this factory on Bargh street, demanding payment of their unemployment insurance. They were also calling on authorities to deal with their grievances. This factory was closed in 1998 and 430 workers from this plant have been unemployed since then. During this 3 and half years, when they have had no jobs, they were paid a small amount as unemployment insurance, however recently the authorities announced that from April, 90percent of these workers will get no unemployment payment. The protesting workers were saying that they will (continued on page 5)

### 1000 workers from Bafnaz close Isfahan's main street Char Bagh

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### Sit-In by hospital and health service workers in western Iran

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**The ridiculous process ...**

(continued from page 1)

(this happens at the end of every Iranian year in March) behind closed doors and in the absence of any real representative of the working class. in an organisation called 'Shoraye Ali-e Kar'. Even the representatives of these, so called workers organisations, have realised that in the current situation, the issue of determining the workers' minimum wage has become a joke, losing its meaning, because :

1- In the current situation the main issue is that as the economy is completely bankrupt leading to the closure of hundreds of factories and production units, the principle of paying wages is under question. On the other hand in the factories where production continues slowly and with haltingly , workers wages have not been paid for more than a year or even two years. The main demand of more than 90% of worker's protests is for payment of unpaid wages and stopping mass expulsion , conditions that have confronted Iranian workers with situations of life and death.

2- While the minimum wage is 3 times ( 300%) below the minimum cost of living , that is the cost of living paying for the mere survival of a family of three, what does it mean to obtain an increase of a maximum of 20% in wages. The margin of poverty announced by Iranian officials is between 700,000 tomans (around 60 pounds) to 1 million and 200 thousand rials (around 105 pounds) in a month. while according to Shoraye Ali-e Kar (an organisation composed of government representatives of managers and government workers organisations) the daily minimum wage for workers for the year 1380 (March 2001-March 2002) for an 8 hour working day is determined as 18,930 rials. (around 1.70 pounds)

3- Even if minimum wage is in-

creased 2 or 3 times in accordance with the rate of inflation this increase will be nullified when according to the evaluation of independent sources the current rate of inflation is about 30 percent and the minimum wage has been increased by about 20 percent . That is from 15,260 rials (1.30pounds) in 1379 (March 2000-2001) to 18,930 rials (1.70 pounds) a day in 1380. Of course according to the government's forged statistics, the rate of inflation is 15 percent. That is why the workers real wage, as admitted by Hassan Sadeghi, has dropped 20 times over the last two decades.

Now everyone knows that the issue of pay rises with all its importance has been sidelined by bankruptcy, the complete disruption of the economy as well as recession in production and the threat of closure of major parts of the country's industry. A threat confronting nearly a million workers who face unemployment and complete poverty (hunger). This is at a time when half of the country's workforce is already unemployed and in recent years the job market for 12 million young Iranians who are eligible for employment is hopeless every year less than 2 million young people enter the job market, while the rest have no hope of gainful employment. It is clear that with the crisis reaching such dimensions, the situation cannot be resolved without major upheavals in the country's economic and political structures. This coincide with a time when the leaders of the regime are engulfed in an endless political struggle for power and are incapable of taking the smallest step to invigorate economy and production and incapable of even reducing the current crisis. A crisis which, as admitted by Khatami, in his speech of 3 years ago ,on the occasion of Iranian new Year (Norooz) is indicative of the sickness in the structure of Iranian economy. A crisis that

Rabii (a vice president and presidential advisor) admits is not only due to the way Iranian economy is organised (in a parasitic form and in the interest of the commercial mafia oligarchy associated with the state at the cost of destruction of production and industry , but also the plunder of more than 400 milliard dollars of the country's earnings by the same group over the last twenty years. The commercial and power mafia , composed of the real leaders of the Islamic Republic regime, are "Agha Zadeh ha", sons of ayatollahs ruling our country who following this pillage have become the world's richest men. It is clear that these people do not want to loose their position and the current state obtained by imposing repression and dictatorship.

Workers, especially workers in major industries who know these issues and are aware of the need for essential economic and political reforms , after the deadlock of three years of economic struggle to confront the wave of expulsions and non payment of salaries, have now reached the conclusion that they must confront the regime directly and gain popular support for their demands. Currently, almost every three days, there are major workers protests, taking the form of demonstration or picket of a government organisation. □

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### **Protest by sacked municipality...**

(continued from page 6)

economic hardship in the last five years.

These workers who are part of the 10,000 workforce in Tehran Municipality who lost their jobs following privatisation of various sectors add in their letter: it is the fifth consecutive year we are complaining about the Municipality's unjust policy which has devastated the lives of its workers, however so far the authorities have done nothing to resolve the problems of this deprived sector and these workers are grappling with poverty and destitution. □

## Labour of women homeworkers

(continued from page 1)

of work currently given by employers to women contract workers, homeworkers, to understand the extent and role of this section of the productive forces in the country's economy.

Following the implementation of the plan for economic reconstruction, the use of women's labour working from home has increased. This is mainly because the majority of men would not accept such low wages and it could be said that only elderly men and very young boys who have no other place to sell their labour, would accept the conditions of homeworking. These days, women's employment in major factories is rare and few women work in such factories. The policy of non employment of women which started during the war (Iran-Iraq war) had two major differences with the one followed during 'reconstruction' and during the plan for economic restructuring.

During the first years after the revolution, opposition to women's employment had ideological and religious reasons as men and women working in the same location was considered immoral and against religion. While during the period of 'economic reconstruction' stopping women's employment had economic reasons. Factory managers and proprietors of industry, considered employing women to be too expensive and preferred employing men, apparently because this reduced the overhead costs of the production unit avoiding the cost of setting up child care facilities and ...

During the last few years, some men have been transferred to tasks which were previously only done by women. Managers are heard saying with ease: "employing women is trouble and uneconomical."

In one industrial factory, where

nearly half of the workers were women, men were employed in the years 1368-1369 (1989-1990) to replace women to such an extent that even jobs traditionally done by women during the Shah's period (pre 1979) or even during the war, when it is impossible to employ men to the task, single girls are employed in order to avoid employing married women (not to pay for child care facilities). Most women with pre school children, cannot work in small workshops, as these workshops have no child care facility. In these circumstances the plight of poorer, divorced women who are the sole bread winner of the family is worse. These women face very harsh conditions of poverty and destitution. Prior to the implementation of the plan for economic restructuring, some factories, where the owners were more concerned about 'religious, ideological' issues than profits, these women were employed as a 'charitable' act. For example one large factory only employed women who had no male guardian or bread winner, of course the employees had to prove their status and the factory's Shoraye Eslami (government organisation). This was primarily an ideological decision, rather than an economic one.

In any case, finding a job outside the home is difficult and often impossible for women who are desperately in need of an income. Haleh Afshar writes: "Women who cannot find a job in the service sector, because of their family circumstances, finding any job is not easy.... a slightly better way of finding an income is to work from home. In these cases, the employee must have reliable 'references' and only women with good connections can find such jobs.

Some inherit these jobs from their

mother, their aunt, others go directly from the village to the home of the owner or one of his relatives. Many house servants believe they have a moral duty to their relatives and cannot adjust to the current (urban) social structure or to get married...

At the same time housework is no more a job guaranteed for life. With modernisation of life and the family nuclei being reduced to father, mother and children, old traditions of keeping servants for life, is gradually disappearing. Servants are often dismissed and house work is done on a daily rate... and there are no provisions for accidents, ill health, age, illness of house servants..."(1)

Accepting orders for jobs to be done outside a factory or workshop (i.e. at home) depends on contacts and who you know and often women will take any service or production job they can do from home. Accepting orders is not done by using employment agencies but mainly through relative and friends.

Women who have no particular skill, e.g. sewing, prefer to take jobs from factories, because it has more stability and a better pay. But getting such orders requires good connections, you must know a worker in that factory who is prepared to take the relevant material and equipment to producing or finishing the production of goods and prepared to return the final product to the factory. In these circumstances tax and insurance is reduced from the worker's pay.

In such cases, we come across the role of 'go between's' who gain an income by giving work to women. Although there aren't many such cases, they exist. A factory worker was saying: "I know someone who collects work. In the afternoon he collects the children in his house. They have to work from afternoon to late evening and at the

end they get 30-40 tomans (25-35 pence) in their hand.

Some of the jobs described by Mercede Saleh Pour (2) in one hundred types of jobs done at home, including sewing (all types of clothes, quilt making, sewing bags and leather), food products (sweets, lemon juice, pickles, jam, dried herbs, spices) most of the orders come from workshop owners. Performing tasks such as putting tea in tea packets, putting together toys, finishing decorative goods and wood work, is given to women, while part of the work is done in the workshop. Finishing assembly of certain electric goods, such as fitting the contact plastic in the electric switches, tightening screws, fitting a nut inside an electric equipment, fitting the spring behind a door bell... are amongst the type of jobs women do at home. In addition some factories give tasks such as labelling, producing envelopes and boxes, producing plastic bags.. to women homeworkers.

### **Low Pay**

Women workers who work from home earn very little and there is no relation between the work they do and the pay they get. For example it is sufficient to compare their wages with those of workers in factories. Usually a woman working from home earns about 1/4 to a 1/3 of the salary of a worker working in the factory doing the same job. In a factory, it is possible to tighten 4 to 5000 screws with an electric screw driver, while woman working at home will do this by hand, with a reduction in efficiency of 1/4 to 1/5. Why does the owner use women homeworkers? The reasons are clear, such work is profitable. Women's wages working from home is so low that managers prefer to employ them rather than employ new workers in the factory, As there are many women seeking

employment, factory owners abuse this over supply of the workforce and the competition for finding a job has reduced the workers wages to such low levels that these women can't even buy basic necessities with what they earn and their wages is far below that of men and no male worker will accept to work for such pitiful wages. It can easily be said that the daily wage of woman working from home is less than the pocket money of well off or semi well off woman, all this in circumstances when such woman have to feed and pay for their family's expenses.

The poorest working women are those who are the sole bread winner and have to work from home. This group lives in absolute poverty and they are deprived of any legal protection, they have no bonuses, no job security, no social security, they don't have retirement benefit and their future is even more bleak than their present.

### **Difficult work**

Women workers who work from home, face difficult working conditions like all women workers. The interaction of house work and production or service work, being deprived of minimum welfare conditions, makes this hardship even worse.

Combining housework and production work creates its own specific difficulties in terms of time and location. In addition to all housework chores such as cooking, cleaning, washing dishes and clothes, looking after children and the elderly... duties of a wife and a mother, they also have to do their production work. For example a woman who sits behind a sewing machine to produce garments has to make sure the food she is cooking does not burn, she has to look after the children and do various tasks for the people in the household... That

is why these women often have to work many hours during the night to finish the day's unfinished work. Most of these women are quiet used to night work. A woman sewer who worked in a workshop said: "at night when every one goes to sleep, my work starts. I have to work the quiet time of the night and do the cutting- because when the house is busy you can't do the cutting on a whole of material. If I make a mistake who will pay for the material? When I am very busy and I have to deliver the goods soon, I stay up at night so that I can meet the deadline. All this work and then we get nothing for it. Sometimes my sister in law, who knows how to sew, helps me. When I am very busy, she comes to help. I do the cutting and use the sewing machine, she does the zigzags, without help by a few people, the job does not progress". When we ask her why she is not working for herself, she replies: "I have no capital. In any case producers don't buy from us, I once became a partner in a small venture, we borrowed money to buy material, we used the best models, we couldn't pre sell them and even now after two years we haven't got our capital back and in our basement we have a lot of children's clothes. We got help from all our friends to sell these, yet many remain unsold. People buy from a boutique not from us. In exhibitions, it is so expensive to get a stall that we can't approach it. How much do you think we earn to pay for a stall. We are forced to work for workshops, if the products are not sold at least the loss is not ours. Sewing individual clothes requires patience and has little income."

In many poor small houses belonging to workers, the sitting room is also used as a workshop, putting more pressure on women. For example the house of a woman who accepts orders from a garment making workshops is full of thread

and pieces of material... sometimes the children's school bag has pieces of material. The mess in the house and damage to household goods causes stress and annoys women.

### Organisation

Urban working women can be divided into three groups: women working in factories, workshops and working from home. These three groups differ in the way they are organised and they must each have their own specific forms of organisation. Now, given that the number of women homeworkers is increasing, creation of a specific organisation, for this group of women has special importance.

On the other hand, women homeworkers, are on the fringes of society(3), they are doubly impoverished, first as part of the fringes of society then as women in this category. It is therefore important to recognise means to help the 'organisation' of these workers. The formation of self help funds has had limited success and is an example of initial forms of organisation set up by women. Other facilities also exist and efforts should be made to develop these, for example classes for the family on health and hygiene in poorer areas, educational film shows to improve self organisation. There are other potential facilities which must be used according to specific living and working conditions. □

*\* This article was written by Maryam Moseni published in Farsi in the journal "Negah-e zanan", Tehran, Towse-e publications.*

### Footnotes:

- 1- Haleh Afshar, "Indigent women in Iran", Tehran, Ketab-e Towse-e, vol. 6.
- 2- Mercede Saleh Pour, "work from home", journal Farhang-e Towse-e, Esfand 1376. (March 1997)
- 3- Article "Women's personality: from thought to practise", Negah-e Zan.

# Workers Struggles in Iran

## Protest gathering by Forsatian ...

(continued from page 1)  
continue their protest outside the factory until they get their demands.

## Protest gathering by workers from Tehran Bus Company

On Tuesday the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, workers from Tehran and suburb Bus Company (Vahed) protested against the fact that one day of their salary was deducted last month and paid to the account of Hezb-e Eslami-e Kar (a so called workers party associated with the regime). The management of this company in collaboration with Shoraye Eslami (a government workers organisation) deducted one day salary from 10,000 workers in this company and paid it to the account of Hezb-e Eslami-e Kar. Prior to this gathering, workers had signed a long protest petition demanding that their salaries should be returned, but the company's Shorayeh Eslami called the workers and demanded that they withdrew their signatures.

## Protest gathering by Kafsh-e Shadanpour factory workers

On the morning of Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, more than 400 workers from Kafsh-e Shadanpour factory, gathered outside this company's offices, situated in western Tehran, in protest at non payment of their wages and bonuses for over 9 months. This protest lasted 2 hours and caused a closure of the main road, creating heavy traffic in the surrounding area. (as well as blocking access to Tehran's International airport, Mehrabad)

Workers in this company which was privatised in 1999, have protested on a number of occasions against non payment of their wages.

## Protest by Alvan-e Sabet workers in Hamedan

In mid March, workers from Alvan-e

Sabet production and industrial factory, situated in Hamedan (north west Iran), sent a letter to the provincial authorities and the factory's managing director, demanding their legal rights. The workers protested strongly against the unjust way bonuses were distributed in this factory and said that some have been paid one milliard rials in bonuses for expert or managerial work, while the workers have been deprived of any bonuses.

## 1000 workers from Bafnaz close Isfahan's main street Char Bagh

On the morning of Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, more than 1000 workers from Bafnaz (textile factory) in Isfahan, (in central Iran), blocked the main street in Isfahan Char Bagh, for a few hours. These workers were protesting at the management's refusal to pay their delayed wage and bonuses. Workers in this factory had organised another protest gathering on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March and at that time the protest ended with management and provincial authorities' promises to deal with their demands.

This factory belongs to Hamedanian foundation which under the control of Ayatollah Mazaheri.

## Strike by drivers in Shiraz Free University

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2001, drivers of the student services in the Islamic Free University- Shiraz, in southern Iran refused to transport students in protest at non payment of their wages. According to one of these protesting drivers, the university director who spoke at the protest called it a political protest, as management had threatened the drivers by inviting bus companies and agencies as well as private mini bus services to take over the drivers jobs.

## Protest by health service employees in Gachsaran, health service

On Monday the 12<sup>th</sup> of March, employees at Gachsaran health service (in

south west Iran), protested against delays in payment of their wages. These workers said that since last March, despite promises by the management, they have not received their delayed salaries.

### **Strike by Parcheh Bafi-e Kashan factory workers**

Workers in Parcheh Bafi-e Kashan (textile) factory (in central Iran), went on strike for a few days in late February, in protest at non payment of their wages for the last few months.

### **Protest gathering by workers in Taleghani hospital**

On Sunday the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2001, tens of workers from Taleghani hospital in Ilam (western Iran), protested against non payment of their wages for the last few months, in this hospital.

### **Protest by Patou va Farsh Tabriz workers**

On the first of March, 56 workers from Patou va Farsh (blanket and carpet factory) Tabriz, who had been forced to take leave of absence, protested outside their factory. These workers were also protesting to provincial authorities with a petition, asking for these authorities to deal with their problems.

### **Protest by Sherkat-e Ab in Kerman**

Workers from Sherkat-e Ab (water works) in Kerman (south eastern Iran), issued a letter protesting at the transfer of this company to the private sector. The ministry of energy had announced in a statement that this company was being transferred to the private sector. The execution of this plan will no doubt lead to the expulsion of many workers. While protesting at this decision the workers were asking for an reversal of this decision.

### **Hormozgan workers: Pay rises should be in line with the rate of inflation**

In the first week of March, some of the workers in production and industrial units in Hormozgan Province (southern Iran), issued a letter addressed to the Iranian president explaining the economic conditions and income of workers demanding pay rises for the year 1380 (March 2001-2002). In a section of this letter the workers have written: "In addition to economic difficulties, workers in Hormozgan face the additional difficulty of living in unbearable heat. It is important that pay rises in 1380 are such that workers can pay for basic necessities."

### **Angry workers from Alaedin close the Tehran-Karaj road once more**

On the morning of Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2001, workers from Alaedin factory (producers of cookers) again closed the Tehran-Karaj road. 330 workers, have received no pay for more than a year, although they had been told that their delayed wages, from last year will be paid before the Iranian New Year (20 March 2001). These workers announced that

unless their wages are paid in full and their job security guaranteed, they will continue their protest.

### **Sit-In by hospital and health service workers in western Iran**

Hundreds of workers from Khomeini hospital in Kermanshah and workers medical centres in Eslam Abad, Javan Roud and Harsin staged one and two day sit-ins in early March, in protest at non payment of their wages for the last few months.

During the last few months, the benefits of these workers, including the right to a uniform, pay for working in deprived area... have been cut off.

### **Protest by sacked municipality workers in Tehran**

A number of workers from Tehran municipality have issued a letter demanding an investigation into the reasons behind their sacking and explaining their (continued on page 2)

### **About the campaign**

*Solidarity Campaign with Iranian Workers* has been set up to seek the support of International organisation, trade unions and workers organisation throughout the world for the struggles of the Iranian working class against job losses, to obtain their wages on time, to demand pay increases, to obtain the right to set up their own independent organisation, the right to strike, the right to social security and insurance and all other basic workers rights. With this in mind, the Campaign considers providing regular information about the struggles of Iranian workers as its most important task.

Iranian Workers' News is published every month in English, French and German.

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