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A Message from Iran's Bus Union Spokesperson to the Striking Workers¹

My warm greetings to all my dear friends at the Bus Company
My warm greetings to all my arrested friends and their families
My warm greetings to the board of directors inside and outside prison

Dear friends,

I am honored to be chosen as the spokesperson of the Bus Union. Unfortunately, Mansour Osanlu and the remaining dear friends of the board of directors of the Union are in jail and this important task has been bestowed upon me. I am here to speak to you in this position. There have been many issues that required us to gather and discuss, but you know that is impossible. I know we have no right to gather. All of us, whether we are the workers or the families of those in prison, require time to gather and talk and decide, especially those families who have loved ones in Evin Prison. But unfortunately they do not allow us. Although I am unable to meet with you face to face, but I would like to talk to you through this manner.

The first issue that comes to mind is the thousand or more of our colleagues who are in prison. They have been arrested to never ask for higher wages to support their families. They are there to never speak of unions and organization and to stay separate. They are there to never speak of strikes and unity, to never speak of truth and ask for a better world that they deserve. They are there not to speak against injustice and unfairness. But it is honorable to say that it is they who are giving us energy and encourage us to continue our path. Their message gives us strength. It gives their families strength. It is their families who honor them for their just cause. The morale of our comrades at prison is the justification to our cause. If we could have been able to gather the 17,000 bus workers, tens of thousands would have joined them, giving them flowers and celebrated them in a big gathering. Any insult to you from anyone would have been dealt with by your colleagues. Everyone is talking about you and is proud of your resolve. Everyone is saying if they increase our wages it is because of your strong will at prison. You live in the hearts of our people. Allow me to assure you that we will stand by your families and will never leave the alone. They have hard times but with their heads high are fighting for your freedom. On the issue of economics, they have organized themselves. Allow us to carry that burden. We will take care of them.

The other important issue is the imprisonment of the board of directors. It is my pleasure to inform you that many more have come forward to take on the task and are proud of it. There is much more to do. It is their duty to organize and lead the people. To fight for freedom of their colleagues including Osanlu and other board members. Allow me to congratulate you on this important task. I have no doubt that with your help and the experience you have gained we can do much better.

The third issue is the spouses of the imprisoned workers. I am encouraged to say that they have been strong and resolved. They visit each other and have organized. They are trying everything in their will to have their say. It is a pleasure and I am proud to say that while having the burden of taking care of their finances, families and children, they have courageously joined this movement giving us strength and encouraging us. I want to emphasize the importance of organization. Our strength is our unity. Without that we will be scattered.

The forth issue is the continuation of our just cause. It is our duty to do all in our power to free our colleagues. It is our duty to return our colleagues to their jobs with their heads high and no pre-conditions. Their families are doing their part. I encourage all the family members, their friends and all the bus workers to participate in the gatherings and meetings that were formed by their arrested colleagues. Our demands are important and today the release of every single member of the union and their return to their jobs has been added to them. Is there any worker who does not support these demands? Is there a single government worker who does not demand for a pay increase to allow them to live in dignity? Is there a single worker who does not support an independent union? Is there anyone who does not support the right to go on strike against injustice?

Dear Friends,

These are just demands that are in the heart and minds of every human being and will not disappear with threats and imprisonment. There are no doubts it. Even those who are members of the Islamic Unions, had they not been supported through other channels, would not be against our demands. These are the demands of the 17,000 bus drivers and their families and it is our duty to fight for every single one of them, for our kids and our future. This is why they are so much against our unions.

And finally I need to mention that the remaining board members including myself are being pursued by the authorities and at anytime we may be joining our colleagues in prison. I am proud to say that I have done all that I could for a better life for my wider family of workers. I am proud to be a member of the union, side by side with you to fight for a better future. I am very confident that no matter how hard our struggle for a better life has been, we have gained a lot; we have learned how to organize ourselves and to become a wider family of workers. Today, the thousands of the workers of the Bus Company will continue the struggle. I am also confident that you recognize your Union and our leader.

I shake your hand. Our struggle will be victorious and we must believe in that. Our strength is our union and our unity.

Gholam Reza Mirzai

Member of the Board of Directors, Public Relations Coordinator and the Spokesperson
Union of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company

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¹ Translated by United Republicans of Iran