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## Special edition about interview with Reza Shahabi

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### INTRODUCTION:

**Reza Shahabi**, is a conscientious, progressive and active member of the board of directors of the Workers' Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (known as Sherkat e Wahed), and an internationally familiar face, who needs no further introduction.

Because of its latest interview with the magazine, has been In this interview, In high level and class positions, he has answers to the most basic Iranian labor movement, practical guidance for the will help to further



importance, Mr. Shahabi's "Hayat e nou"- a student published in a special edition. addition to being a sign of the representing his prole-tarian given accurate and clear fundamental issues of the which can be an effective Iranian labor movement that promote it. Due to its im-

portance, we proceed to publish it, in this special edition, for the awareness of our co-class international workers. Since this interview has taken place before the beginning of the nation-wide strikes of the workers in oil and petrochemical industries and power plants and is expanding, in which 114 large industrial and service units have participated for about a month now, therefore, there is no talk about these great strikes. Instead we have included the supporting statement of the workers' syndicate of Wahed Bus Company (Sherkat e Wahed), for these strikes, which also expresses Reza Shahabad's positions in this case, as a supplement to his interview in this issue.

**About us:** "The Committees in Solidarity with the Iranian workers Movement -Abroad" consist of solidarity groups and individuals outside of Iran that support Iranian Workers' Struggle for: (1) Democratic rights and economic Justice ;(2) Exposing anti- labour policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran; (3) Building bridges between the Iranian and international workers' movement.

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## Interview with Reza Shahabi, a member of the board of directors of the Workers' An Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company

*By: Students' Newspaper "Hayat Noe" (New Life) – Isfahan Medical Sciences University*

July 16, 2021

**Q- With greeting Mr. Shahabi, could you please introduce yourself briefly.**

**A-** I am Reza Shahabi, a member of the Workers' Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, and its Board of Directors.

**Q- What is the line that you and your syndicate follow and what is the thought foundation of your struggles?**

**A-** Struggle for the betterment of the work and life conditions of the workers, struggle against the exploitation of workers and endeavor to reach a society without exploitation.

**Q- How many times have gone to jail in the past years?**

**A-** In 2010, while driving the bus and being on the job and in spite of having passengers on the bus, I was arrested by security officers and that led to a six years of jail sentence, and being forbidden from any syndicate activities for five years and... Overall, after adding one more year to my jail term, I spent seven years in jail. My arrest was begun on June 12, 2010 and it ended on March 19, 2018.



In the course of my arrest, I was seriously hurt in the neck and back spine, and subsequently, I had two major operations during



my imprisonment. Aside from this, from 2005, I had been arrested four times and released after a few days. My case was finally closed.

**Q- Do you think that as a worker's activist, have you done any infraction that caused your arrest and imprisonment? If not, what are the reasons for your imprisonment?**

**A-** No, I have not committed any infractions. According to the protocols of the International Labor Organization (ILO), and even according to the country's Constitution, I have acted to create the workers' syndicate and to defend the workers' rights, but I have been arrested and imprisoned for extrajudicial actions and fabricated cases.



**Q- *While in jail, had you been under pressure to do forced confessions against yourself or other workers' activists?***

**A-** Yes! many times during my interrogations, I have been beaten and tortured, both, physically and psychologically in order to be forced to confess against myself, or other syndicate and workers' activists.

**Q- *How you were treated when you were in jail? Apparently, you went on hunger strike several times, considering the life-threatening dangers that hunger strikes had for you, why did you do those hunger strikes?***

**A-** Like other imprisoned labor and Syndicate activists, I was pressured during my imprisonment and illegally deprived of the privileges provided for a prisoner, contrary to current prison laws and



regulations. Since I was deprived of my obvious rights as a prisoner, I went on a hunger strike to make my voice heard.



**Q- *Considering that you have been imprisoned several times for your workers' advocacy and considering severe repression of other workers' activists, have you ever thought to give up your activities?***

**A-** When I entered the workers' struggles, I knew that for reaching our rights, I and my colleagues have a very hard road ahead of us. I had, from time to time, suffered great pressure and did not have proper conditions neither psychologically nor physically. But with the help of a group of friends in the Syndicate I had continued and will continue my activities.

**Q- *Regarding the Labor Day(MayDay), how this Day is valued (and celebrated) in Iran? How the Labor Day can be dealt with in a principled manner rather than a superficial and "for show" way?***

**A-** Unfortunately, in our country, like in all dictatorial capitalist countries, they don't value the Labor Day(MayDay). The Labor Day should be the loud voice of the workers' protest and the voice of solidarity among all the workers of the world. The protest aspects for attaining the rights of the workers should be strengthened on this day. This day is a day of struggle and this aspect of it should be the number one and festivities and aspects like that should be secondary one. We can celebrate the International Labor Day and away from governmental official version when we have the independent syndicates, labor unions and other independent organizations all over the country, without any intervention by the government or the bosses.



**Q- *Do you think that workers standing and their conditions have improved after the Revolution, or it has worsened? How much Islamic Republic has been able to implement its slogans regarding the support for the workers, slogans that it repeated so many times right after the Islamic Revolution?***

**A-** In the capitalist societies, workers have the same situations, more or less. Unfortunately, after the Revolution and from some decades before that and with the development of neoliberalism and the expansionist projects of capitalism at the expense of the workers and wage earners' lives and work conditions, the workers' situations in Iran has worsened. Although these conditions exist in all capitalist societies, but in our country, Iran, this has been much aggravated because of the existing destructive policies and the repressive sanctions



imposed on Iran. The workers situations has worsened after the Revolution and all the slogans in support of the poor not only was not implemented, but I see no willingness to implement them and the



policies are, as before, to strengthen the capitalists and “the one percent”.

**Q- *Do you believe in the proposition that “factories should be run by the workers’ councils”? In the Haft Tappeh workers’ protests, this was one of the demands by the protesters. How much do you think this demand, considering the structure of the government, is practical?***

**A-** Yes, I believe that the factories should be run by the workers. But the workers' council will be possible when the country is facing the widespread and the nationwide protests and the organized power of the workers is already formed. This can not be done by slogan, but by changing the balance of power and the supremacy of the labor side.

**Q- *What efforts have been made to suppress the workers and their unions? How much the ambience in labor unions has been poisoned or made passive by the threats, briberies and the individuals who are agents?***

**A-** The government uses both. obvious hard suppression, such as murder, firing from work, torture and putting pressure on the families of the worker activists and also soft suppression ,such as enactment of the anti-worker laws and founding the “yellow” pro-government organizations, sowing discord among independent workers organizations and workers activists. The government-made labor unions, unfortunately, have always acted on the behest of the bosses and played the role of their agents – as it is expected from them. The independent workers organizations have stood against these pressures and threatening and the bribing of very few individuals have not been able to make the independent workers organizations passive or divert them from their own path.



**Q- *What is the goal of these confrontations and governmental suppression? Are they rooted in a particular way of thinking or ideology, or these are just reactive move?***

**A-** Since the Achilles heel of the transition from the exploitative capitalist and authoritarian systems is the protest movement of the workers and the downtrodden masses, then these movements, even on a small scale, can lead to the lessening of the profits for the capitalism. Thus, the governmental suppression is always there. Basically, the government knows that if the freedom of forming the independent workers organizations exists, they can not to attack the workers livelihood. So they don't stop these suppression.

**Q- *How these encounters with the workers' activists are related to the human rights principles and how this has been pursued by the human rights activists?***

**A-** According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are principles about the workers' rights for protest, form their labor unions and other independent organizations that were included in this declaration as a result of the efforts by the activists of the social movements of different countries. Although these principles are not enough, but they are not even implemented in the dictatorial countries. So, there is a natural and logical relationship among the workers activists and the human rights activists that needs to be expanded.

**Q- *Do the workers demand only judicial recourse regarding these suppressors and social fearmongers, or they have higher demands and more organized goals to encounter these kinds of violence.***

**A-** If you mean the existence of the financial corruption and the means of suppression in the country, positively the workers are demanding the end to this corruption and getting rid of the suppressive system. But we should consider that suppressing the workers is in the very nature of the capitalism and there are a vast number of organizations and apparatus in place. It is not like that the ever increasing suppressions is only from some individuals and groupings acting on their own. But from one hundred and fifty years ago, the prospect of the labor movement has been the attainment of a society without the class fissures, exploitation and suppression. The only way to confront this suppression and violence is the unity and solidarity of us workers, and the endeavor to create our organizations.



**Q- *You have been personally facing these threats, can you elaborate about this, have you seen any improvement in this regard?***

**A-** I and other syndical activists and worker activists have always been



the usual suspects and always under systemic suppression. Therefore, Pursuing our cases have not yielded any



definitive positive results for us. As an example, I and four other members of our Syndicate have been fired for many years as result of extra-legal interventions and letters from security apparatus.

**Q- *Do you see any necessity of the convergence between workers movement on one side and the student movement on the other side?***

**A-** Yes! Since a great number of today's students will be the skilled workers of tomorrow, also under the present conditions in our country, difinitely except very few students, the rest of them will not benefit from these conditions and will be exploited, therefor, it is necessary for both movements to have ever more convergence.

**Q- *How important do you see the role of the media in reflecting the role of the NGO's, the role of the student and civil movements and the voice of the workers? What do you expect from the media?***

**A-** If the media, in reality, advocate the student as well as other movements and advocate the workers and a society without the class fissures, then they can help the conditions for the workers and wage earners, improve the conditions for the democratic struggle, making the organizations nationwide and overall help the radical reforms in the country. Basically, the mere existence of these civil and democratic institutions would help to instutlize the democracy and improve the power of organizing and to voice the totality of the social movements. We should strive to create these and cooperate with those who are critical of the present situation.

**Q- *Overall, what path and what horizon the workers movement follow?***

**A-** To create better conditions for work and life for all the toilers and advancing towards removing of class fissures and achieving social welfare and the real freedom, not superficial one.

**Q- *What are the goals of Trade Unions in Iran at the present time ? In your opinion, are these goals attainable, considering the government's attitudes and the situation in the country?***



**A-** Trade unions seek the realization of workers' rights and the elimination of class divisions to achieve a society free from exploitation and oppression. It will certainly be achieved by creating independent trade unions in all fields, including teachers, nurses,



women and other wage earners ... and bringing them together, even in the face of government confrontation and repression, as the experience of various countries has shown in practice.

**Q- *Are these goals merely a reaction to the plight of the working class in Iran, or the workers movement has taken a special social task for itself?***



A- Considering the dire and grave conditions of the working class in Iran, it was certainly necessary that worker struggles to be pursued vigorously. In my opinion, the only class that can act in terms of structure, status and scope, at the national level and in the whole world to fight against exploitation, etc., is the whole working class, taking into account its various components.

**Q- *Does the workers movement consider itself as part of the civil society? And does it recognize itself as a participant in its construction? Or, believes in playing an independent role?***

A- I don't know what you mean by civil society. If you mean that we and the capitalists are equal in this society and have equal rights in construction of society, which is practically not the case, and as I said before, this is in contradiction with the nature of the capitalism, because capitalism system is built on the basis of inequality and the exploitation of the working class and to gain profit. The whole structure of the capitalist society is based on this inequality.

But it is clear that the overall the workers movement is part of the social and civil movement, but the workers movement in particular is after the conditions in which no class fissure exists. Otherwise, the workers, in spite their participation, will not benefit from it and the radical changes will not happen.

**Q- *What is the weight of the worker movement today in the dynamism of Iranian civil society?***

A- For several years, Iran has become a country of demonstrations and protests by different strata of the working class. Even in the conditions of Covid-19 pandemic, these protests have continued. On the other hand,



specifically, in the protests of January 2018 and November 2019 the young workers whether working or jobless were present to protest against the existing class fissure, which is also a sign



of the dynamism and growth of the workers movement that is present all over the country and is a great national force. Today, the worker's activists carry the democratic demands of all the strata of the toilers and are the flag bearers of these demands.

**Q- *With what point of view and what ideals the other forces of the civil society will approach the workers movement? How the necessity of these ideals are justified for them?***

A- The rest of the forces in the civil society should respect the demand of social justice, which is the most common demand in the country and approach the workers movement with this view. There is no Wall of



China between the democratic demands and the demand for the social justice. These two are organically intertwined and one is meaningless without the other.

**Q- *Since the workers movement has the progressive ideals in every field, this can assure other social forces for attaining those ideals. For example, in the field of freedom for women, environment, quality education and healthcare for everybody..., does the workers movement has the perfect coherence to create a process to achieve these goals? If not, what do you think are the impediments and how do you evaluate them? If yes, does the preference of the active forces is for this coherence to act gradually, or at the sharp turns such as the November 2019 uprising?***

**A-** The workers movement has the potential, and the capacity to become a process which can become rapidly an actual force. The forces of the workers movement are pursuing this coherence gradually and not only at the sharp turns like November 2019 uprising. This steady movement will lead to a leap in cohesion and then, the influence of the workers at the sharp turns will be more and determinative.

**Q- *Are transcendent ideals of the workers movement pervasive in all the components of this movement? For the spreading of these ideals how important is the role of the free media? And how much these media (non-governmental domestic and foreign) support these ideals?***

**A-** Yes! Certainly, the reflection of uncensored and realistic media is very vital, and unfortunately, since these media are all the creation of the capitalist order, not only they do not support the organs of the workers movement, but they act against them and they exploit the workers protests in order to direct them to this or that faction of the powerful.

**Q- *Are there structural problems, on large- scale integration of different trade unions?***

**A-** If you mean the vast number of small workshops in Iran's economy that makes the organizing of the trade unions difficult, yes, this problem, like in all countries, exists. But this is not a barrier to organizing and the worker's activists in big units can help the smaller ones. It has been and will be the case in all countries of the world.

**Q- *What problems should be corrected through legal means and what problems are related to government policies?***

**A-** In the present structure, practically there is no prospect of solving the workers' problems, either through legal means or through governmental policy- making, but in both areas there are constant discriminations and anti-worker actions.





**Q- *Trying to solve these problems, can it be solved, as some say, by bargaining with the relevant authorities, or by finding a supporter of the workers among them? Or, this requires the organizing of the workers forces? What is the major difference between these two viewpoints and what are weakness and strength of each one in practice?***



**A-** As was mentioned before, there is no prospect in solving the workers problem in either one. Therefore, it is not possible to hope for what is called



bargaining with the relevant apparatuses or to find a supporter of the workers among them, and logically it is not possible. Thus, you need to follow the solution in organizing the workers forces. These two solutions are against each other. Certainly, organizing and empowering the workers can be effective in bringing about the fundamental changes. Only the nationwide organization of the workers can give the workers the real negotiating power.

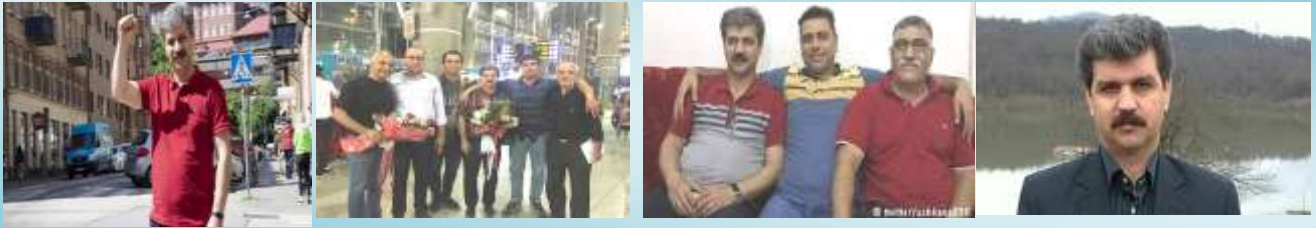
**Q- *If the government or any other related institution try to give some advantages to workers' movement, these advantages should cover what areas of the goals of the workers' movement in order to be accepted by this movement? Is granting any advantages can be considered as achieving the movement's demands? Do the worker's activists, from practical and from theoretical aspect, see any problems in this method?***

**A-** As I mentioned, the workers' movement seeks social justice and getting rid of the class fissure, not only in slogans but in practice. Unfortunately, no faction of government, not that they can not, or it is impossible, but because they don't want this important task to be achieved. We are witnessing that the majority of working class has no confidence in such promises.

**Q- *In Iran, there is an organization called "the House of the Worker"(Khaneye- kargar) under the leadership of Mr. Mahjoob. Do you consider the House of Worker an independent organization? What is the position of this organization in the workers' struggles?***

**A-** The House of the Worker is not a trade union and is registered with the Ministry of Interior in accordance with Article 10 of the law and is practically a political party. The House of the Worker has forcefully, and by the help of governing authorities, has confiscated the assets and the facilities of the workers that were in the control of the syndicates and the trade unions. The House of the Worker is working alongside the goals of the ruling power in the country, and in spite of false claim on defense of workers' rights, plays as the role safety valve in the workers' protests and the suppression of the workers.

***Thank you for your time Mr. Shahabi***



## *Statement from Syndicate of Wahed Bus Company*

**We are supporting the striking workers in the oil and petrochemical industries.**

**Greetings to the unity and resistance of the striking workers  
of different sections of the oil and petrochemical industries!**

### **Honorable workers of the oil and petrochemical industries;**

The Workers' Syndicate of Wahed Bus Company (Sherkat e Wahed), is following your strikes and protests and it is necessary that all workers, the labor movement, teachers, students, women, and whoever is caring for the destitute, to the righteous strikes and protests of you toilers.

It is unfortunate that the working conditions and the health and safety of your work environment, and dormitories are reminiscent of the forced labor camps, and despite the unbearable heat and the excruciating work difficulties, you are deprived of the minimum welfare amenities and safety facilities of the workplace. The capitalist system, by creating a structure of contracting companies, not only does not provide you with a fair wage proportionate with your working conditions, but also does not provide you with the minimum welfare amenities.



The oil industry in the past, had active Syndicates (Trade Unions), and after the Revolution of 1979, (Trade Unions) were completely disintegrated by the government in the oil industry and the workplaces of the entire country, and later on, the Workers' House (Khaney- e- Kargar) and the Islamic Labor Councils which are the handmade sets of the ruling class, were imposed on workers, that today, we are witnessing these difficult and miserable living conditions of the workers.

The Islamic Labor Councils cannot defend the workers, due to their lack of independencies and ordered structures, and because of these structures, they have always been an obstacle for workers to reach their independent Syndicate (Trade Unions). The workers and drivers of Wahed Company (Sherkat e Wahed) have many objective experiences of obstacles, created by the Islamic councils of "anti-labor" for the revival and reopening of the Wahed Bus Company's Syndicate, which the documents of the crackdown and obstruction of the Workers' House (Khaney- e- Kargar) and the Islamic Labor Councils, in cooperation with the employers are available to the public on the Website and telegram of the Workers' Syndicate of Wahed Bus Company.



The workers and drivers of the Wahed Bus, were in a very difficult situation in terms of livelihood and environment, before the revival of their Syndicate. But with the efforts and unity of drivers and workers, the Workers' Syndicate was revived, and for the achievement of their accumulated arrears demands, they launched two large labor strikes by relying on the Syndicate, which resulted in increased wages by about 100 percent and the improvement of the working environment of drivers and workers.

### **Honorable workers of the oil and petrochemical industries;**

We propose, that the most important action you can achieve after this unity and solidarity with your resistance and struggle is to create your own independent Syndicates, so that in the long term, your righteous demands, unity and solidarity, could continue and strikes and protests guarantee your rights in the long run.



The Workers' Syndicate of Wahed Bus Company has created informative experiences for the workers and the labor movement, and so far, it has achieved a lot for the workers. Considering the importance of transferring these experiences, The Workers' Syndicate of Wahed Company, believes it is its duty to provide the experiences of many years of the Syndicate's struggles, to the striking workers in the oil and petrochemical industries and other labor sections, and provide them with any support necessary.

You can launch the founding board of the oil industry workers' syndicate, with a number of the same striking workers, and in the first meeting, hold a general assembly and approve the Syndicate constitution, and by announcing the names of candidates, choose your real representatives from your co-workers attending, and form your own Syndicate in different sections.

The existence of an independent Syndicate, in difficult situations and the continuation of the struggle and seeking-rights, could lead the workers through ups and downs, and prevent the exploitation of the workers' protests by groups and organizations, that falsely claim to be the workers' supporters .

*The Workers' Syndicate of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company*

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13 July, 2021





**Dear reader,**

**Due to the importance of Mr. Shahabi's interview, we were not able to publish the detailed reports and news related to Khuzestan uprising, which started 2 weeks ago, due to shortage of water, electricity... and still continues. So far, 8 youths have been killed, and many others have been injured, arrested and imprisoned.**

**Hopefully, in the next issue, could inform you the latest detailed reports and the news about the uprising of the thirsty people of Khuzestan.**

**Best wishes,**

**Alternative Workers News- Iran**

