

# Lessons of the Protests and Strikes of the Petrochemical Industries



Petrochemical of Tabriz

## **Internationalist Voice**

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Different currents and trends of the left of capital, after the events of the presidential elections, have tried to undermine the workers' class struggle, take advantage of the situation, to own the anti-dictatorship struggle (their democracy) and put the power and potential of the working class in the service of their own anti dictatorship movement. Democratic Movement is a movement of bourgeois, anti-proletarian and actually it is a counterrevolutionary movement.

The fact is that two class movements exist in the society, the movement of Democracy and the movement of working class. We have already mentioned that the proletariat must take initiative and give its imprint to the historical events. So wrote:

**“In the case of people protests and movements if the working class dissolves itself in the Democratic and libertarian movements, it will not weaken the bourgeoisie but the proletariat itself.”**

In the recent months with decline of anti-dictatorship movement, the movement of working class has assumed a more independent form. Class struggle although defensively is growing and the proletariat puts its role on the historical developments even very slowly. In the past six months despite of an unbridled suppression, we have been witnessed a series of protests and strikes of the workers across of the country. The most important protests and strikes occurred in the petrochemical industry.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2011, 1400 contract workers at the Tabriz Petrochemical Complex in protest to the "temporary contract" went to strike. The strikers demanded "direct and collective contract" in order to receive the same benefits and job security provisions to which the permanent employed workers were entitled. When the empty promises of management and government officials failed, management tried to use of dirty trick against worker, use of strike-breaker. So they tried to replace the striking workers at Tabriz Petrochemical Complex with the refinery workers of Tabriz Petrochemical but the workers of refinery did not do that. The strike lasted eleven days, which with promise to fulfil the demands of striking workers, strike ended.

On the 9 April 2011, around two thousand petrochemical workers at the Mahshahr Petrochemical Complex went to strike. The demands of strikers were ratification of directly contract and cancellation of the temporary contracts. This strike was continuing of their protest on March 2011 that with empty promises and to excuse of new Persian year (Norows) did not result to the strike. Then the strike quickly spread to the whole complex covering of thousands of petrochemical workers at the Amir Kabir Petrochemical Industry, Khuzestan, Razi chemical, Tondguyan, BoAli and Arvand.

Management of Petrochemical in response to striking workers proclaimed that estimating of workers' desire is not in the responsibility of management of Petrochemical but “Removal of

## Internationalist Voice

contractors should be carry out with communiqué of Oil Minister”. But the workers insisted that they will not end their strike until management agrees to their demands.

Finally, after 11 days, on the 19<sup>th</sup> April 2011striking workers of the petrochemical of Mahshahr Complex after hours of negotiations with management and government representatives (Governor, representative of Mahshahr, Labor Department officials, etc.) ended their strike. To perform direct contract, Management of Petrochemical Complex took 3 months respite to measures the administrative implementation stages through the Oil Ministry. Also, the management was committed that the benefits that applied to the permanent employed workers and contract workers were deprived of it, belongs to them too. In addition, the salary of strike days should be paid and the workers should not be prosecuted because of the strike.

Before we proceed the results, achievements, weaknesses and limitations of these protests, it is essential to consider the contexts of the formation of temporary contracts with the "minimum wage". After the war and during the eight years of presidency, the commander of development “Rafsanjani” proclaimed that Iran is going to be a modern, industrialized country, very similar to Japan in terms of development and economics progress, an “Islamic Japan”. With the “workforce adjustment” policy of the commander of development, that its real translation was dismissals, redemption and widespread unemployed, a large part of the working class in order to survive were forced to accept temporary contracts. From this time onwards, temporary contracts became prevalence from small workshops to large factories and large industries. Contracting companies in all industries and economic institutions, popped up one after another like mushrooms. Nader QazyPoor executive board member of the labor fraction of the parliament and representatives of parliamentary of Urmia stated that: **"Over 80 percent of workers are with temporary contracts"**[1][Our translation]. This resulted, to a large tissue lesion to the working class and on the other side, expresses the paradox of periphery bourgeois. Bourgeoisie needs work force to gain surplus value and accumulation of capital and on the other side scramble to convert parts of the working class to the poor non-proletarian population.

Nightmare of layoffs, threatened with unemployment, lack of job security, hard work, low salaries, lack of insurance, lack of benefits and so are the consequences of temporary contracts. On the other hand, capitalism is in crisis, the crisis deepens and has spread throughout the world. Waves of the crisis is hitting from Iran to Greece, from Egypt to Spain. Bourgeoisie use this crisis as an excuse to attack the living standards of working class daily, worldwide. In Iran attack to the living standards of the working class has been ideological by the supreme leader and he declared the New Year, a year of "economic jihad" and urged people that "working as jihad". The real translation of this "economic jihad" is the austerity for the working class and grab to the empty table of workers.

It was in order to realize and actualize the "economic jihad" that "Excellent Council of Work" set the minimum wage to the workers.

# Internationalist Voice

According to Article 41 of the Labor Law of bourgeoisie, "Excellent Council of Work" that has been formed according to the convention of the International Labour Organization and consisting of representatives of employers, government representatives and representatives of the "workers" (Islamic Councils - the appendage to the Ministry of Intelligence and National Security in the workplace) that is a three unilateralism and after negotiations based on inflation determine the minimum wage of the workers. Finally the "Excellent Council of Work" increased the minimum wage for a month with 9 percent in compared to the last year for the New Year to the 330,300 Tomans, compared to double-digit inflation and With the **eliminating of subsidies** are below the poverty level. Other consequences of the elimination of subsidies will be rising of unemployment because small industries will go bankrupt because of high energy costs. In such hell circumstances, "Mohammad Yar Ahmadyan" member of the "Excellent Council of Work" has stated that: "With according to 9 percent increase of minimum wages and with regard to labour voucher, the increase of wage is over than inflation." [2][Our translation] Mr. Ahmadian ruminants Goebbels lies, providing basic necessities has become a nightmare for the working class and lower strata of society. After all this law of capital (labour law) does not include workshops under 10 persons. In other words, there is any minimum wages for workers that are working in workshops under 10 persons.

All of this indicates that the working class is not struggling for a better life but also they attempts for their physical survival. Workers are defending of the most basic level of livelihoods. Demanding unpaid salaries and official contract.

The left of capital also is busy with its role as safety valve and trying to restrict the anger and potential of workers. Demanding higher wages to match inflation and the right to organize has been entered. The left of capital also demanded the expulsion of the Iranian delegation of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and therefore was arranged protests against meetings of the ILO.

But contrary to the demand of the left of capital, this institution of the bourgeoisie and the nest of thieves (International Labour Organization) in its 100<sup>th</sup> general assembly session with the highest vote chose Iran as a board member of the ILO and in practice showed that bourgeois democracy and bourgeois dictatorship are two sides of the same coin, barbarity of capitalism and organizing of exploitation of the working class.

Under such conditions, protests and strikes of petrochemical industries show that the working class as a social force has not been defeated. Despite all the restrictions that these battles have had, especially petrochemicals strike of Mahshahr has had a tremendous achievement. Strikers did insignificant the cunning of political police at work (security officials) that tried to split the strikers and then with the trick that they will follow the demands of strikers, tried to be act. The spreading role of the strike to other industries, such as Amir Kabir Petrochemical Company, Khuzestan, chemical secrets, Tondguyan, BoAli and Arvand is very important.

# Internationalist Voice

The reaction of Bourgeois against the recent protests and strikes are also noteworthy, the bourgeoisie did not try to create another Khatoon Abad. In Khatoon Abad on 24 January 2004 the bourgeoisie draw to blood the protest of workers. Workers were protesting against their unemployed and demanding return to work. In contrast, the bourgeoisie tried to act with caution and not tense atmosphere. So first tried to get split between striking workers and then took up the isolation policy and pretend that will not get seriously the strikers, but with spreading of the strike tired to use bore tactics and referred to legal process. Finally was eventually forced to give part of the demands of striking workers.

The bourgeoisie can inaugurate bloodbath in the streets or in their black holes, which has done so many times and still survive, but know that the strike of workers, especially in key industries brings to the shaking the backbone of capitalism. The bourgeoisie has these experiences of 1979 in its historical memory. In this contexts the protests and strike of petrochemical industries that are key industries, has a special place.

Another important characteristic of strikes of petrochemical industries were rely on the class power of the working classes. Striking workers did not resorting to the institutions and organizations of the bourgeois to fulfil their demands, but they cut off the process of the accumulation of capital and surplus value. Certainly these strikes despite their limitations, will strengthen the confidence of the working class and will strengthen hope to win the upcoming battles.

Strengthen of independent of the ranks of the proletariat; rely on the class power of the working class and lessons and rubbing of democratic illusions, are lessons that should be take from these battles and intensifying of the class struggle is the perspective that facing the working. Because it is the ghost of class struggle that the bourgeoisie fear most of all, because the terrain of class struggle leading to the revolutionary destruction of the capitalist state in all countries. We don't have anything to lose but our chains and a world to win!

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30 June 2011

## Notes:

[1]Aftab News, 21 September 2010

[2]Eco News, 14 Mars 2011