



Special Report  
Suppression of  
Trade Unions in Iran

January 2019

## **Special Report on the Government Crackdown on Workers and Labor Activists in Iran**

Zamaneh Media (Stichting Radio Zamaneh, ZM) publishes labor rights developments in Iran in a bi-monthly brief in both Persian and English. Because of the violent government crackdown on labor protests and labor activists in Iran in the recent weeks, ZM is publishing this special issue before the upcoming fourth bi-monthly report.



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## Introduction

The workers of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Company (HSAI; commonly known as Haft Tappeh Sugar Cane Complex) and Iran National Steel Industrial Group (INSI) in Ahvaz, Khuzestan, who have been protesting and have been on strikes on and off in the past three months have been hit hard by government crackdown on the workers movement in Iran. Arrests, torture and forced confessions have been documented about the workers of these two production units. Many workers have been summoned, interrogated and released on bail with open cases which hangs over their shoulders.

Iran has not ratified International Labor Organization's (ILO) conventions C098 (Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention) and C087 (Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize). However, Iran has adopted the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Despite all these binding conventions, Islamic Republic of Iran does not tolerate activities of independent labor unions, it explicitly refuses to recognize the right to strike and protest for workers, and it violently suppresses every workers' protest.

In January 2019, the Iranian government started yet another violent crackdown on protesting workers and labor activists – many of whom have already been arrested in previous months. Most notable is the arrest, torture, forced confession, and re-arrest of Iranian worker Esmail Bakhshi who has come to be known as the leader of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Complex Strikes. Bakhshi has become an icon of the workers' protests in southern Iran. In Oct 2018, Bakhshi coined the slogan: "Bread, Jobs, Freedom" which has become the slogan of the labor protests across the country.



Ali Nejadi and Esmail Bakhshi two jailed workers

## Torture and Forced Confessions

Iranian worker and labor rights leader Esmail Bakhshi has been arrested twice in the past three months by Islamic Republic authorities after having spoken out against being tortured and abused in the course of his first arrest. “20:30” a program on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Television aired against Bakhshi and other labor activists stating that allegations of torture in Iranian prisons are false. The same program aired forced confessions of Bakhshi, Sepideh Gholian (a civil society activist) and Ali Nejati, another worker of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Complex and a labor rights activist.

On 18 November 2018, on the fourteenth day of the strike of the workers of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Company security forces arrested 18 workers and a civil activist. Among those arrested was Esmail Bakhshi, one of the workers' representatives who had become the leader of the protests as well as a civil society activist, and Sepideh Gholian who had gone to Haft-Tappeh to support the workers' protests.

With the increasing objections and pressure from the workers of Haft-Tappeh Complex, the Ministry of Intelligence authorities released 17 workers on bail four days after the initial arrests except for Bakhshi and Gholian who were kept in custody each for 25 days and 30 days respectively. This is their first arrest of Bakhshi and Gholian. The authorities arrested both of them for a second time on 20 Jan 2019.

On 29 December, security forces arrested Ali Nejati, the former Chairperson and a member of the Board of Directors of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Complex Worker's Syndicate. Ali Nejati remains in prison since this date and is charged with "disrupting of the public order by leading the strikes and the gatherings of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Company" as well as "propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran."

During Bakhshi's first time in detention, reports were published that indicated he had sustained physical injuries and as a result was transferred to hospital – a matter which 25 lawyers have expressed concerns about.

Only a few days after the first arrest of Bakhshi and Gholian, reports were published that indicated Bakhshi was beaten up in prison once again and had sustained physical injuries in custody. Subsequently he was transferred to a local hospital – a matter which raised great public concern.

Esmail Bakhshi was released 25 days after his first arrest with workers' pressure on 12 December 2018 on a hefty bail. Sepideh Gholian was released 30 days after her first arrest on 18 December 2018. For all the Haft-Tappeh Complex workers who have been released on bail so far, a criminal judicial case has been opened – as disciplining strategy of the security forces in Iran, these open cases are often used against active workers and labor rights activist to intimidate them to halt their activities.

After Esmail Bakhshi was released on bail, he wrote about being subjected to severe torture and abuse during his detention. He wrote that he was beaten, tortured and that the authorities had tapped his phone and were listening to his conversations with his family. Bakhshi called on the

Minister of Intelligence to come and debate him on live television and offer an explanation of his treatment while in custody.

In a note to Mahmoud Alavi, Iran's Minister of Intelligence, Bakhshi writes: "In the first few days, for no reason, they kicked and punched and abused me to the point of death. For 72 hours I could not move in my cell or even sleep from the persistent pain." He goes on to add that he suffered from broken ribs and is still suffering from pain in his ribs, left ear, and testicles. Bakhshi's testicles were tasered during interrogations.

Sepideh Gholian, who was also tortured and was the prisoner of the same authorities and in the same prison that Bakhshi was being held is attesting to the tortures that Bakhshi endured while in custody. She wrote in her Twitter account: "I saw part of the brutal beating of Esmail and I am ready to testify about the tortures that both I and my brother Esmail Bakhshi experienced in a fair court of justice." The audio file of a conversation that Sepideh Gholian and one of Khuzestan province security officers of the Ministry of Intelligence have, has been leaked and in that conversation, it is apparent that Gholian has been subjected to sexual insults and sexual accusations while being interrogated.

Esmail Bakhshi's open statements about his torture and abuse during his arrest has triggered widespread support and led to revelations from numerous Iranian political prisoners writing their own accounts of abuse and torture in prison by Islamic Republic authorities. The "I Have Been Tortured" campaign is ongoing, and many ex-political prisoners have published their accounts in Zamaneh media, other media organizations and the social media with narratives of what they have endured in Iranian prisons which constitutes as torture.

In the meantime, the Ministry of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic, the judiciary and the Iranian Parliament's Committee on National Security have all denied the allegations of torture in Iranian prisons. The authorities maintain that Bakhshi's statements are part of a plan conceived by the regime's enemies abroad to tarnish their image. On 7 January 2019, Esmail Bakhshi's defense attorney announced that some government authorities are putting Bakhshi "under pressure" to deny his claim about torture. Farzaneh Zilayi, Bakhshi's lawyer said that "they call and threaten" Bakhshi.

In connection with the new wave of arrests of workers in Khuzestan, a group of leftist journalists were also arrested. The editorial staff members of "Gaam" which is an online publication that has covered the news of the strikes and the protests of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Complex and Iran National Steel Industrial Group and had also published articles in support of the labor movement in Iran, were arrested. Among them, Asal Mohammadi, a Doctor of Pharmacy student at the Azad University of Tehran who was arrested on 4 November 2018. Amir Hossein Mohammadifar and Sanaz Allahyari were arrested on 9 Jan 2019 and Amir Amirgholi was arrested on 14 January 2019. Of the "Gaam" magazine group, Asal Mohammadi was released on bail on 5 January 2019 but the rest are still in custody.

On 19 January 2019, "20:30" a program on the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Television affiliated with the country's intelligence forces aired forced confessions of arrested workers and labor activists in Iran. The show narrated a conspiracy of foreign governments' intervention in Iranian labor movement stating that Bakhshi, Nejati, Gholian and the labor activists in Iran are being directed by leftist groups in exile who are being supported by the United States.

Part of the format of this show is confessions that are dictated by intelligence officers. As such, the show aired confessions of prisoners arrested for involvement with workers' strikes and protests. Bakhshi, Nejati and Gholian and other prisoners each 'confessed' to having links to outside dissidents and networks of leftist groups, naming media organizations and journalists in exile outside of Iran as their point of contact with the outside network.

The "20:30" program also included forced confessions of Maziar SeyyedNejad, a labor activist who was arrested along with Behrouz Mobeyni on 1 Dec 2018 in relation to strikes and protests of Iran National Steel Industrial Group in Ahvaz. Maziar SeyyedNejad and Behrouz Mobeyni remain in custody to this date.

The program interviewed government officials from the administration of Hassan Rouhani, Judiciary officials and members of parliament each denying that Bakhshi was tortured. While denying the occurrence of any torture in Iranian prisons the program suggested that Gholian, Bakhshi, Nejati, members of the Gaam magazine and other independent labor activists in Iran are affiliated with Iranian "Marxist" and "Barandaz" groups (a term describing those who want to overthrow and oust IRI) as well as the United States government.

Gholian immediately reacted to the broadcast of "20:30" on her Twitter account stating that the confessions were coerced. In a video published right after this tweet, Gholian explains that the confessions had been taken "by force of cable and baton." Iranian security forces are known for beating up prisoners with batons and or lashing prisoners using cables.

Gholian's lawyer has reported that Gholian's home was subsequently raided following her twitter statement and she and her brother were arrested. Gholian's father has reported that his family was attacked at their home. While he and his wife were beaten, his son was thrown in the trunk of a car and taken away.



Speideh Gholian prior to arrest (right) and after the arrest (left) while giving forced confessions on Iranian TV.



Ten days before the airing of the forced confessions, Sepideh Gholian wrote on her Twitter account that on the last day of her first arrest the interrogator had threatened her saying “If you go out and open your mouth, we will air you and Esmail Bakhshi’s confessions on 20:30 and we will turn you into dust.”

On 20 January 2019, hours after Gholian’s arrest, Esmail Bakhshi was also arrested for the second time. Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Workers Syndicate announced that armed security forces riding four patrol vehicles stormed Bakhshi’s house re-arresting the recently released worker.

Media organizations such as Fars, Tasnim and Mashregh who have in the past published propaganda news related to the Ministry of Intelligence and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) also confirmed the arrest of Esmail Bakhshi claiming that the labor activist was involved in the so-called “torture fabrication project” masterminded outside of the country.

On 22 January 2019, twenty-one lawyers signed an open letter addressed to Sadegh Amoli Larijani, the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Judiciary, stating that the prosecutor’s office at the city of Shoush (who is responsible for Bakhshi and Gholian’s first and second arrests) was not qualified to handle the investigation into the allegations of torture against Esmail Bakhshi. The undersigned lawyers requested that Esmail Bakhshi’s case be transferred to a neutral body within the justice system.





## Summoning, Interrogations, Intimidations, and Arrests of Labor activists

In addition to arresting and torturing of the workers' representative; warding off journalists and preventing the free circulation of news of the protests of Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Company, the security forces have arrested tens of workers in the past 28 days of the workers ongoing strikes (which has been on and off going on for the past four months). The workers are usually summoned to locations known to be used by intelligence and security forces and are interrogated and intimidated. If charges are laid, then criminal cases are opened and even if the prisoners are released temporarily on bail, the open case is used as an intimidation and silencing tool against the workers.

The same process has been going on for the protesting workers of Iran National Steel Industrial Group in Ahvaz. The 38 protests of workers have essentially been suppressed by widespread arrests of workers. In the time period between 16-18 December 2018, the security forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran arrested 41 workers of Iran National Steel Industrial Group. Most of these workers were arrested when the security forces raided their houses. Until 19 January 2019, many of the Iran National Steel Industrial Group workers were released on bail with open cases. Following these widespread arrests, reports were released that the Iran National Steel Industrial Group factory was turned into a "military compound" with a visible presence of security forces.

One of the Iranian security forces' strategies for controlling and containing labor protests has been short term arrests of labor activists in order to silence them with threats and intimidation. In line with this strategy, on 11 Dec 2018 the security forces arrested five workers and labor activists for 24 hours: Reza Shahabi and Hassan Saeedi, members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) were taken into custody along with Amir Abbas Azarmvand, Raham Yeganeh, and Kayvan Mohtadi – three civil society and labor activists.

The arrests of labor activists are not limited to the abovementioned cases. On 3 Dec 2018, Asghar Firoozi, a labor activist in Mashhad was detained for 13 days. On 12 Dec 2018, Behnam Ebrahimzadeh, a labor activist and child rights activist was arrested at his home. Ebrahimzadeh had been sentenced to 18 months in prison in an absentee court one month earlier on charges of "propaganda against the IRI." In the indictment of Ebrahimzadeh's charge, the prosecutor had indicated that by publishing news of the situation of the quake-stricken people in Kermanshah and the situation of the children of the city of Sarpol-e Zahab, Ebrahimzadeh has committed the crime of spreading propaganda against the state. On 20 Jan 2019 when Ebrahimzadeh's family went to offer his bail money for his temporary release, they were told by the Judiciary officials that the release of this labor rights activists is not allowed for unknown reasons.

On 22 Jan 2019, security forces arrested several protesting workers of Pars Petrochemical Company in the Assaluyeh Special Economic Zone of Bushehr Province. The workers were picketing and closing the entrance of the company's main building to protest layoffs.

## The Teachers have No Right to Strike

On 27 Dec 2018, law enforcement forces attacked with tear gas the peaceful gathering of current and retired teachers and educators in front of the Isfahan Department of Education. The teachers had gathered to protest low wages, the status of pensions and were also demanding the release of imprisoned teachers. The teachers were also requesting that the government starts meaningful enforcement of the Law on Equalization of State Pensions. This law mandates an increase in the payments of those under the national pension plan so that the retirees' pension payment can get closer to the mean salary of working government employees. It was reported that several teachers were arrested in the Isfahan protest.

Two days prior to the Isfahan teachers' protests, on 25 Dec 2019, Hadi Khayat Mashhadi, a retired teacher and a teachers' rights union activist was arrested at his home in Mashhad. On 24 Dec 2018, security forces arrested Ahmad Taghavi, a retired teacher in the city of Abhar, following a speech at a protest rally of retired teachers. Taghavi was temporarily released on bail on 12 Jan 2019.

According to the Coordinating Council of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association, the security forces in Iran arrested at least 14 teachers during the second round of strikes on 13 and 14 November who were all temporarily released on bail by 20 Dec 2018.

In response to and in protest against the arrests of 13-14 Nov 2018, on 1 Dec 2018 Hamid Rahmati, a Teacher from the city of Shahreza went on a hunger strike for ten days staging a sit-in inside the Ministry of Education Office in the city of Shahreza.

Esmail Abdi, Mahmoud Beheshti Langaroudi, Mohammad Habibi, Rouhollah Mardani and Abdolreza Ghanbari are among the teacher activists of Iranian Teachers' Trade Association who are currently in prison.

24 Dec 2018, defense attorneys of Mohammad Habibi announced that Branch 36 of the Tehran Court of Appeals had verbally confirmed that the court has upheld the initial sentencing of a previous court. In the summer of 2018, Mohammad Habibi was sentenced by the Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court to "seven and a half years imprisonment" for one charge, two counts of "18 months imprisonment" and "74 lashes." According to article 134 of the Islamic Penal Code, the longest punishment of all charges that is seven and a half years of imprisonment will be Mohammad Habibi final sentencing. Habibi, a member of the Iranian Teachers' Trade Association was violently arrested on 17 May 2018 in one of the teachers' protests in front of the Management and Planning Organization of Iran (MPO).



Teachers on strike in Isfahan

## Concerns About the Health of Labor Activists in Prison

In addition to severe beating and torture, workers in jail are subject to other forms of violence including humiliating conditions and non-standard detention centers. In November, security forces arrested Hashem Khastar (one of the members of the board of directors of Mashhad Teachers Trade Association) and kept him for 19 days in a mental hospital. Sepideh Gholian has recounted that security forces kept her and Esmail Bakhshi in the same cell block that the "Islamic State "(Daesh) terrorists were detained.

The harsh condition of sick prisoners in dire need of medical assistance is yet another major concern. On 1 December 2018, Saeed Shirzad, a member of the Children of Labor Defense, and a political prisoner at Rajaeeshahr Prison in Karaj was sent to the Karaj Civil Hospital after severe kidney pain. Shirzad is said to be at risk of losing his kidneys.

On 7 December 2018, Rohullah Mardani, a student activist and teacher, jailed in Evin Prison, went on hunger strike for a period of 18 days, protesting the unsafe conditions and lack of medical treatment in prison, which led to his internal bleeding.

Ali Nejati, a member of the workers' Syndicate at Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Complex, also suffers from kidney and cardiovascular diseases. According to his lawyer, Nejati's condition has been aggravated by heart and respiratory illness. He was taken to the hospital on 13 Dec 2018 due to heart problems, to be transferred later to the patient ward of the Shush prison.

Despite Nejati's critical physical condition, the Judiciary has ignored his lawyer's request for medical examination as stated in Article 502 of the Criminal Procedure Code. According to

Article 502, if a prisoner suffers a physical or psychological illness, and if the execution of the sentence has exacerbating effects on the condition or delaying his recovery, the judge will postpone the enforcement of criminal sentence by obtaining the forensic opinion until his recovery.

## Threatening Truck Drivers by High-level Judicial Officials

In the third round of the truck driver strikes, which began in September 2018, at least 270 drivers were arrested by security forces and judiciary.



Truckers on strike

**TABLE: Threats of High-Ranking Iranian Judicial Officials against Protesting Truck Drivers**

Date	Official's Name	Position	Threats and Accusations
25 September	Ali Salehi	Public Prosecutor - City of Shiraz	Accused the truck drivers on strike of disrupting public order and security, blocking public roads, deliberate destruction of public property and contributing to the insecurity on motorways, road and country roads. He also said those on strike might be "enemies of god"

			which is a crime punished by death within the Islamic Penal Code.
26 September	Abbas Jafari Dowlatabadi	Public Prosecutor - City of Tehran	Said that some of the road closures as a result of the strikes can be punishable by Article 653 of the Islamic Penal Code which is about road piracy and suggests a very hefty punishment for the perpetrators. The Islamic Penal Code considered piracy to be an act of " <i>moharebeh</i> " or animosity towards God and punishes it in accordance with the judgment of the judge with punishment such as execution or cutting off the right hand and or the left foot among other punishments.
27 September	Mohammad Jafar Montazeri	Attorney General	Accused those who are inflaming the strikes and encouraging the drivers to join, of creating public fear and piracy which can be punished by execution in the Islamic Penal Code.
28 September	Ahmad KhosraviVafa	Chief Justice Isfahan Province	Said those who are disturbing the transportation of fuel and goods "will be subject to severe judicial punishments and will most likely be penalized for such deeds."
28 September	Ali AlghassiMehr	Chief Justice Fars Province	Said those who are disrupting the security of Fars province roads and preventing truck traffic can be prosecuted for road piracy and corruption on earth. Both those charges are punishable by death according to Islamic penal code.
29 September	Gholamhossein MohseniEzhehi	First Deputy Judiciary of the Islamic Republic of Iran	Said those who incited by the enemies are disrupting transportation should be "aware that they will be facing severe punishment."
29 September	Dadkhoda Salari	Public Prosecutor - City of Kerman	Cited the Islamic Penal Code and referring to the truck drivers' strike said: "the legislator in article 286 of the Islamic Penal Code has assigned any actions that disturb the public order of the country as animosity against God and corruption on earth." He added that if actions of the protesting drivers are not

			considered in light of laws regarding animosity against God, according to Article 610 of the Islamic Penal Code, it can be regarded as acting against national security and punished by 2 to 5 years in prison. If looked upon as the disruption of order, then in accordance with Article 618 they can be punished with 3 months to one year of imprisonment and 74 lashes. As far as the destruction of public property in accordance with Article 677, they will be sentenced to six months to three years of imprisonment.
30 September	Yadollah Movahed	Chief Justice Kerman Province	Repeated the allegations of " <i>moharebeh</i> " and "piracy" and said he will investigate the driver's charges and makes sure that the cases are expedited.
30 September	Mehdi Ghavidel	Public Prosecutor - City of Zarand	Called the striking drivers, "opportunists" and said those who are damaging fuel and goods trucks on the roads can be charged with road piracy and animosity against God which is punishable by death.
1 October	Mohammad Sadegh Akbari	Chief Justice Hormozgan Province	Said the charges against those that are compromising the safety and security of roads are piracy and corruption on earth.
1 October	Sadeq Amoli Larijani	Head of the State Judiciary	Said those individuals who abuse the demands of truckers to disturb road safety and destroy public and private property and cars will be severely punished.
8 October	Mohsen Karami	Prosecutor - City of Ghazvin	Referring to the 17 truckers that were detained, said that the provincial prosecutor's office in Qazvin "will demand the most severe punishment for these people, and if they are convicted of animosity against God, severe sentences like death will be issued for them."



## Parallel Syndication

The prosecution of labor activists and police tactics against protest rallies are not the only obstacles for workers to organize independent trade union activity in Iran. The establishment of parallel unions aligned with the government and the imposition of obedient syndicates are other methods by which the Ministry of Labor and the Iranian security forces are pursuing vigorously to control and manage labor protests.

On 1 January 2019, after the arrest of representatives of the Haft-Tappeh sugarcane workers, while the news of Esmail Bakhshi's torture in the headlines, the elections to the Islamic Labor Council of Haft-Tappeh, supported by the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Intelligence, were held at the site of the Haft-Tappeh Sugarcane Complex. This was an attempt by the government and security forces to create a duplicate organization against the independent workers' union known as the "Assembly of Representatives." Previously, Mohammad Shariatmadari, the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs had promised that the government would recognize the workers' "Assembly of Representatives."

The Haft-Tappeh's "Assembly of Representatives," which has effectively put forward the demands of the workers in the past few years and organized workers of this company, consists of 24 representatives from different units of this sugarcane plant. During the recent strike, representatives of the assembly, including Esmail Bakhshi, were arrested.

In November 2018, in a similar attempt the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Intelligence of the Islamic Republic tried to form a parallel assembly to "represent" the workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, using the security branch deployed at the company. In a statement on 17 November 2018, the members of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (SWTSBC) described the parallel assembly as a "security project" and "anti-worker project" warning about the "Government's Securitization" of the independent unions.

## Why “Islamic Councils” Do Not Represent the Interests and Concerns of the Workers

In Supplement 4, Article 131 of the Labor Law (1990), three institutions have been authorized to organize a workers' trade union, one of which is the "Islamic Labor Council." The law mentions "trade associations" and "workers' representatives" alongside the Islamic councils, but workers of a production unit are only allowed to have one type of organization.

The history of Islamic councils' dates back to 1984 and the initial establishment of Islamic Labor Councils. In practice, the Islamic councils are the only associations that the Islamic Republic of Iran tolerates and, in fact, imposes on the Iranian workers. Based on their legal definition these councils are not really labor unions. As stated in Article 1 of the Law on the Establishment of Islamic Labor Councils, the main purpose of their formation is "to create coordination in the progress of affairs in productive units." Moreover, the managers and employers of the manufacturing unit supervise the process of formation, elections, and decision makings in the Islamic councils. The employers exert this power through their representatives in the supervisory board and in the council itself. They even hold the right to dissolve the council or to deny membership to anyone they find unfit.

The problem with the Islamic Labor Councils is not only the ideological aspect and the "Islamic" constraint. These councils are undemocratic and anti-union by their very nature because of the way members are elected and decisions are made. Not everyone has the right to join the council, and membership is subject to the filtering of a selection panel. The selection panel is composed of a representative of the Ministry of Labor, a representative of the ministry that the relevant production unit is a subsidiary of, and a representative of the workers of the production unit.

Islamic councils are fully subservient to the government, not even entitled to approve their constitution independently and without regard to the proposed statute of the state. In accordance with Article 2 of the Rules of Procedure of the Islamic Labor Councils (1985), the statute of Islamic Labor Councils must be approved by the Supreme Labor Council (SLC). Islamic labor councils are governmental organizations and as such are part of the state, not independent of it. The Minister of Labor is usually either elected from among people close to the Islamic labor councils - or its apparent organization the House of Labor—or someone ratified by the councils. Ali Rabiee and Hossein Kamali, who served as labor ministers at various periods, are close associates of the Islamic labor councils and the House of Labor.

The nature and function of the Islamic Labor Council in the workplace is nothing but the control of workers' protests or, as government executives say, "the management of protests."The Islamic labor councils have been working as representatives of the workers in the wage negotiations held by the Supreme Labor Council (SLC)for many years, each year imposing a "wage suppression" to appease the government.

Some members of the Islamic councils are also members of the Majlis or Islamic Parliament. In Majlis, Alireza Mahjub, General Secretary of the House of Labor, and a main Islamic council figure, signed last year a "Support for Production" bill, which would consider tax exemptions for

employers and makes expulsion of workers easier on the pretext of "special economic conditions." The bill is still under consideration in parliamentary commissions.

## **Minister of Labor: An Office with Security Links**

Ali Rabiee became the Minister of Cooperatives, Work and Social Welfare as soon as Hassan Rouhani announced the list of his cabinet in Aug 2013 and served in this position until 8 Aug 2018, when he was impeached and subsequently removed from office by the Iranian parliament. Hassan Rouhani introduced Mohammad Shariatmadari as the new Labor Minister. Shariatmadari used to be the Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade in the current government and on 28 Oct 2018 he received the vote of confidence from the parliament to serve as the new Minister of Labor.

Shariatmadari's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade came under fire when some of his deputies were arrested in relation to the currency crisis in August and September 2018. The possibility of impeachment increased when it was disclosed that Shariatmadari's ministry was involved in the widespread corruption of the recipients of the currency at a value of 4200 tomans per USD when the street price was nearly three times this value. But before the parliament made any moves to impeach Shariatmadari, he stepped down from office. Only a short while after resigning, Rouhani appointed Shariatmadari to the seat of another ministry, bypassing the threat of impeachment.

What the two ministers have in common in their public service résumé and their political background are close ties to intelligence networks of both Ministry of Intelligence and the intelligence agency of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Ali Rabiee, known as "Brother Ebad", was a member of the Revolutionary Guards, Deputy Minister of Intelligence and head of the secretariat of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) where he also served as the head of implementation affairs and had other posts as well. Mohammad Shariatmadari is also very close with Mohammad Reyshahri, the first Minister of Intelligence (1984 to 1989). Reyshahri and Shariatmadari were members of a core group who after the 1979 revolution dissolved the Organization of Intelligence and National Security and started running the new Ministry of Intelligence in 1983.