



Labor Rights in Iran

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Workers' Rights in Iran

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Introduction

This is the 11th bimonthly [Labor Rights Newsletter of Zamaneh Media](#). The focus of these bimonthly reports has been consistently on unemployment, deferment or non-payment of wages and benefits, protests and strikes, freedom of association and assembly, independent unions, discrimination at workplace, issues of labor law, contractual violations, women's labor, child labor, and the conditions of the *Kulbars*.

Zamaneh Media monitors the above-mentioned labor issues daily and this bimonthly report presents the “big picture” about the most important Iranian workers' rights issue in the past two months. The bimonthly newsletter aims to increase knowledge of the situation of the workers in Iran. Report no. 11 covers issues in the approximate range of February and March 2020. The newsletter does not claim to cover all labor issues or events that occurred in this period.

We also released an annual newsletter in May 2019 and will publish the second annual report on Labor Rights in Iran in May 2020.

Major Issues

The Persian year 1398 ended with unpleasant news for Iran's workers. In early February, the first cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19) were reported in Iran. The scale of the disaster then became larger every day. The number of infections and death toll began to increase rapidly.

The outbreak of the Coronavirus has revealed the inadequacy of the health care system in Iran. By March 15, at least seven nurses had died of the Coronavirus. Nurses working in hospitals in Gilan, Qom and Isfahan were confronted with a lack of health facilities and preventive equipment, which government agencies were unable to provide.

In the workplace, protests over unsanitary and unprotected conditions were ineffective. Despite the shortened working hours in government offices and the closure of many sporting, cultural and religious events, workers had to be present in the workplace to avoid the risk of being fired.

Under these circumstances, some business owners dismissed workers or sent them on forced "vacation" under the pretext of the coronavirus and the recession. Larger production units also reduced work hours and sent workers on unpaid leave.

The virus outbreak even prevented the minimum wage from being set for the coming year. After it was announced how much is being paid for the "livelihood basket," the Ministry of Co-operation, Labor and Social Welfare did not initiate the process of convening a meeting with the Supreme Council of Labor to set the minimum wage. According to news media close to the Workers' House, the Supreme Council meeting scheduled for March 16 was postponed. Negotiations during only one meeting are unlikely to succeed. It seems that the final decision on minimum wage will be again postponed for several months.

Nurses Without Facilities in Battle with the Coronavirus

Since late February, when the Ministry of Health publicly acknowledged the spread of the coronavirus in Iran, nurses and staff at medical centers and hospitals have faced a shortage of protective equipment while being forced to work overtime.

On March 10, Mohammad Sharifi-Moghaddam, Secretary-General of the Nurses' House, said contract nurses do not want to renew their contracts. According to him, most nurses in Iran have temporary contracts and are hired by human resources contracting agencies.¹

¹ Radio Zamaneh / March 11, 2020 <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/493515>



The nurses at Al-Zahra Hospital in Rasht have not been paid for seven months.

On March 12, the Nurses' House issued a letter to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani criticizing unequal pay for temporary, contract, and full-time nurses. The letter revealed that a recent 50% wage increase did not include contract nurses whose income is lower than the full-time nurses. According to the letter, nurses have different salaries depending on the type of contract they have.² The Nurses' House is calling for the elimination of wage discrimination, the enforcement of regulatory measures for harmful occupations, employment for 20,000 contract nurses, and protective equipment to prevent the further spread of the coronavirus. According to official Iranian news agencies, at least seven nurses have died in hospitals in the provinces of Gilan and Tehran since the outbreak.

Among the nurses who died of the coronavirus were Ali Sheikh Moradi, Narges Khanali Zadeh, Gholamreza Vosoughi Kia, Ramin AziziFar, Fariba Izadpanahi and Moloud Jafari.

On March 2, the Secretary-General of the Workers' House confirmed that nurses had died from the coronavirus, but said he was not allowed to release statistics. During the same period, at least eight doctors were reported to have died from the virus in various parts of Iran.

The most common reason for the hospital staff contracting the coronavirus was the lack of safety equipment. The situation has been such that in Gilan province the nurses have asked the private benefactors to provide the necessary equipment.

² Iran Labor News Agency, March 11, 2020, <https://www.ilna.news/en/tiny/news-883843>

According to Mohammad Sharifi Moghaddam, Secretary of the Nurses' House, contract nurses and temp nurses refused to renew their contracts at the end of the Persian year and have called for work contracts to be changed. The request comes as the Ministry of Health has issued a classified advertisement for 89-day employment, which is less than three months.

The Ministry of Health has outsourced the provision of public hospital nurses to the company *Avay-e-Salamat* in order to advance privatization policies in the field of treatment. The company is partnering with medical universities and their treatment centers in the provinces.

In the previous report, Zamaneh Media cited the legal demands and delays in paying nurses' salaries. According to some government officials, nurses have up to 19 months of unpaid wages.

Work Safety: Workers in Contaminated Environments

The Iranian government, despite the increasing number of coronavirus infections, has refused to shut down government agencies and companies in the service sector. Workers in production units and oil and gas projects are forced to continue working in collective environments without protective sanitation.

In Assaluyeh, workers on oil and gas projects warned in an open letter about the risk of a coronavirus outbreak in the workplace and in the dormitories in which they live. Iran's state-run Labor News Agency (ILNA), which is the unofficial mouthpiece of the Workers' House and the Islamic Labor Councils, announced on February 24 that several workers had contracted the coronavirus in Assaluyeh. Ministry of Health officials denied the report.

In the city of Arak, HEPCO workers demanded that disinfectant and free facemasks be distributed in the workplace.³ The prices of masks and disinfectants have risen, and they are scarce in the market. A study by the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) found that 22% of people in Tehran could not afford to buy masks and disinfectants.⁴

Temporary contract workers of Iran's state-run railway system from various parts of the country also warned of the spread of the coronavirus in the workplace and called for the distribution of free protective equipment.

The government, the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, employers and owners of public and private enterprises, however, ignored these demands. Employers at many firms have resisted calls to reduce working hours and distribute free protective equipment. The president of the Workers' Union at Iran Khodro, one of the two largest auto companies in Iran,

³ Radio Zamaneh, February 24, 2020 <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/490852>

⁴ Radio Zamaneh, March 7, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/492872>

revealed that protective equipment has not been distributed to the company's workers and they are forced to use shared machinery in small spaces at close proximity.

The situation is reported to be even more dangerous and contaminated in factories and small enterprises. In Khuzestan, a video was released of workers at the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company, which showed workers being mass-sprayed without protective equipment such as masks and gloves.⁵ Workers of Karun Cement also wrote a letter to the Minister of Health stating that the factory had taken none of the recommended measures to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.⁶

Private business owners have not agreed to close production lines or reduce working hours, arguing that private companies cannot be shut down by the government. The government, the Ministry of Labor, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, have been completely passive on this matter.⁷

Hassan Izadi, Secretary of the Gilan Workers' House, revealed on March 9:

Some factories have turned three shifts into one shift and gathered all the workers in one hall. Hundreds of workers have been forced to work in one shift, amid growing concerns about the outbreak of the Coronavirus. Some factories employ their workers in two shifts and three shifts, or 12-hour shifts.⁸

Hamidreza Emamgholiatbar, an inspector with the Supreme Council of Workers' Representatives, said most of the workers "were now working without masks and gloves for fear of being fired and their contracts would not be renewed."⁹

Unemployment Imposed on Informal and Day Laborers

Employers and business owners resisted the closure of firms as far as possible, and when they were forced to close, they laid off workers.

Alibaba Travel Agency, a startup company, said in a statement that it had fired 182 employees.¹⁰ Elie Gasht, a travel and tourism services company, also announced the dismissal of 80 workers.¹¹ The two companies cited the problems faced by the tourism industry in recent months and the outbreak of the coronavirus as the reason for the dismissal of 262 workers. These workers had

⁵ Haft-Tappeh Telegram channel, independent workers' channel, March 8, 2020; <https://t.me/kargarane7tape/2331>

⁶ Radio Zamaneh, March 4, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/492457>

⁷ Hamshahri Newspaper, March 12, 2020; www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/491695

⁸ Radio Zamaneh, March 9, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/493240>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Maidaan site, March 4, 2020; <https://meidaan.com/archive/67867>

¹¹ Kargar News, March 9, 2020; <http://www.kargarnews.ir/en/pages/?cid=48987>

temporary contracts. Many workers in the tourism and hotel industry lost their jobs in the same way.

According to Mahsa Motahar, Secretary of the Association of Trade Unions of Iranian Tourist Guides, the tour guides who were fired were day laborers. They did not have employment insurance and therefore could not receive unemployment insurance services.

Pumer company also fired 40 workers at its Kaveh industrial town in Saveh, Markazi province.¹²

Previously, on March 5, Iranian news agencies reported that hundreds of day laborers and porters in the flower and plant markets are unemployed. Most of them are seasonal workers and do not have employment or insurance contracts.¹³

Mehdi Khojasteh, a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Construction Workers' Trade Unions, also reported that thousands of construction workers are unemployed due to the outbreak of the coronavirus. Construction workers often work part-time without a contract or insurance.¹⁴

On March 8, the head of the Mashhad Hotel Owners' Union announced that hundreds of workers from the Khorasan Razavi Hotel had been sent home on forced leave.

Restaurant and grocery workers have also been sent on forced leave following a reduction in sales or the business' closure. Field reports from multiple areas that were shared by Iran's news media show that visits to restaurants, clothing stores, and shopping malls have declined, and workers in these areas have also lost their jobs.

Peddling Banned

The coronavirus situation has also affected street vendors and *kulbars* (human mules). Although peddlers continued to be present in public spaces in the early days of the coronavirus disaster, the market for peddlers, which has always flourished near Nowruz (Persian New Year), has declined as the number of virus infections has increased and traffic in cities has declined.

Gholamhossein Mohammadi, head of the Tehran Municipality's Center for Communication and International Affairs, said on March 12 that 42 vendors' shopping centers in Tehran, which were

¹² Iranian Students News Agency, March 10, 2020; <https://www.isna.ir/news/98122015154/>

¹³ Radio Zamaneh, March 5, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/492631>

¹⁴ Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency, March 11, 2020; www.irna.ir/news/83708516/

under the supervision of the municipality, had been closed. He said vendors were also barred from working in the metro stations.¹⁵

Hamid Reza Tahsili, former CEO of Tehran Municipality's Industrial and Occupation Management Company, also confirmed the closure of 42 markets, which were set up to organize vendors.¹⁶



Masked customers and vendors: vendors are still on the street.

The activities of peddlers in other parts of the country have also been banned. Last November, the governor of Abadan announced a ban on the activities of all vendors in the city and in the Arvand Free Zone.¹⁷ In the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran, Isfahan, Khorasan Razavi, Markazi, Zanjan, Kermanshah, Lorestan, Hormozgan, Yazd, and Fars the work of peddlers has also been banned.

Zahra Nejad Behran, a member of the Islamic Council of Tehran, said the city council was “consulting with agencies such as the Foundation for the Underprivileged to provide financial assistance to vendors.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Rokna News Site, March 12, 2020; <https://www.rokna.net/en/tiny/news-550473>

¹⁶ Young Journalists Club, March 12, 2020; <https://www.yjc.ir/00UXhK>

¹⁷ Islamic Republic Broadcasting News Agency, March 11, 2020; <https://www.iribnews.ir/00BBym>

¹⁸ Gostaresh newspaper, March 11, 2020; <http://bit.ly/2xzmZfv>

Mohammad Shariatmadari, the Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, also announced the payment of unemployment insurance and facilities to vendors. According to him, three trillion tomans (about 200 million USD) of credit has been considered for this work. (As of the end of March, the official exchange rate is 1 USD = 4,210 tomans. The street rate is approximately 1 USD = 15,000 tomans) The Labor Minister, however, did not elaborate on how this payment will be carried out.¹⁹

Closed Borders, Unemployed *Kulbars*

Iraq has blocked all border crossings with Iran to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. The closure of the borders has made it impossible for *kulbars* (human mules) to travel. Abdullah Ballvasi, a trade union activist in Marivan, said: “*Kulbars*, who used to make a living by crossing mountainous areas, such as the Teh-Teh border crossing, are now unemployed when the border is closed on both sides. They have no income.”²⁰

There are no specific statistics on the number of *kulbars*. According to a member of parliament, 80,000 people in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan and Kermanshah earn their living through *kulbari*. Previously, the government had promised to approve and implement the *Kulbars* Insurance Plan. The Interior Ministry, however, has over the past year repeatedly stated that it “does not recognize *kulbari* as an occupation.”

On February 28, Feblssa Mansouri, Deputy Minister of Entrepreneurship and Employment Development at the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, once again called for the “recognition of *kulbari*,” saying that by legitimizing this job, government could “control *kulbari*.”²¹

Working Children and Trash-Can Diggers

Government agencies and municipalities place the responsibility for children working on the streets on each other. These children are still on the streets with minimal protective equipment. On March 13, the Association for Helping Children at Risk issued a statement saying that the coronavirus threatens the health and lives of working children, especially garbage diggers. The association called on the government to allocate funds as soon as possible to support these children and eliminate trash-can digging as a source of income.²²

¹⁹ Student News Agency, March 10, 2020; <https://snn.ir/003UvD>

²⁰ Radio Zamaneh, March 12, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/493620>

²¹ Khabaronline, February 28, 2020; <https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/1358146>

²² Radio Zamaneh, March 13, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/493805>

Fatemeh Ghasemzadeh, Chairwoman of the Board of Directors of the Working Children's Aid Network, said on March 2 that most children who are garbage diggers work for contractors who have provided nothing so far, such as health packages or educational services. With bad living conditions and poor nutrition, working children's immune systems are weaker than those of normal children and, therefore, more susceptible to the coronavirus. Working children are always present at intersections, subway and bus stations, and in crowded and busy neighborhoods. Garbage diggers face the most danger, but they continue to work to be able to support themselves and their families.



Mehrdad Katal Mohseni, Deputy Director of Tehran's Environment Department, also confirmed that some contractors are neglecting the health of working children for their own financial gain.²³

Government agencies do not provide accurate statistics on the number of working children and garbage diggers. In the summer of 2019, when the Organizing Working and Street Children Project was being implemented, the Association for the Defense of Children's Rights announced

²³ Hamshahri Newspaper, March 2, 2020; <http://bit.ly/2QeUg6p>

that about 4,600 children in Tehran alone are engaged in garbage digging. Mahmoud Abbasi, head of the Justice Ministry's Children's Rights Commission, said last October that there were about 4,600 garbage-digging children in Tehran, more than 95% of whom were foreigners.

Arash Nasr Esfahani, Director General of Tehran Municipality's Social and Cultural Studies, said on February 26, "It is not possible to gather an accurate count of working children in any way." He described the living conditions of working children as "miserable" and said, "Their places of residence are in barracks around the garages and pits with terrible sanitary conditions. Many of these pits do not have toilets, you can rarely find a bathroom."

According to Nasr Esfahani, some eight and nine year old children are involved in garbage digging, but the majority are 11 and 12 years old. Iranian Labor Law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 15, and children under the age of 18 should not be employed in hard and harmful jobs. Nasr Esfahani blamed contractors for employing working children, saying, "Most of these children are Afghans and they work with their families to collect items from trash cans."²⁴

Yousef Afarini, head of the Shiraz Municipality's Department for the Prevention and Treatment of the Socially Injured, said on February 29 that working children and beggars would be removed from city streets. According to him, 90% of working children in Shiraz are Afghans, and, after the implementation of this decree, welfare centers will no longer accept working children.²⁵

In other provinces of Iran, including Kermanshah, Yazd, Isfahan, Bushehr, Kerman, Gilan and Markazi, government officials announced the distribution of protective equipment among working children.

On March 13, Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpay, the Governor of Tehran, called for the swift implementation of the "Plan to Organize Working Children." He said Iranian children would be sent to welfare centers and foreign nationals would be provided with the necessary facilities to cross the border would be provided with the necessary facilities to go back to their country.²⁶ A few days after the remarks, the Tehran governor's public relations officer announced the return of garbage digging children to Afghanistan.²⁷

Government officials' promises to protect working children against the coronavirus outbreak and to ban them from working as garbage diggers have so far been ineffective, and these children continue to work without protection.

²⁴ Pana News Agency, February 26, 2020; <http://www.pana.ir/news/1026342>

²⁵ Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency, February 29, 2020; www.irna.ir/news/83695276/

²⁶ Meidaan, March 13, 2020; <https://meidaan.com/archive/68137>

²⁷ Radio Zamaneh, March 15, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/494002>

Wage Suppression Continues

Meetings of the Supreme Labor Council, the authority that determines Iran's minimum wage, have been suspended for some time. Some working-class members of the Council, who are members of government affiliated unions, blamed the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare for failing to hold the meetings to set the minimum wage. They said that the Ministry would not move forward with the meetings despite the readiness of the Supreme Labor Council.

In its last meeting, the Supreme Labor Council announced the value of the subsistence basket, which, according to Article 41 of Iranian Labor Law, is one of the criteria for determining the minimum wage. The subsistence basket was valued at 4,940,000 tomans (329 USD). Independent labor organizations consider this figure to be unrealistic and less than the average cost of household necessities. The Council had previously called for an increase in the minimum wage to 9 million tomans a month (600 USD).

Representatives of the government, employers and workers, however, in the absence of any members of the independent unions, without considering the real inflation adjusted cost of living, agreed on the figure of 4,940,000 tomans (329 USD). According to Faramarz Towfiqi, a member of the Supreme Center of Islamic Labor Councils and the Wage Committee of the Supreme Labor Council, the agreement was reached while the working members of the Islamic Councils made a different proposal, although they eventually accepted the government's offer.

The Supreme Labor Council set the value of a 3.3-person family's subsistence basket at less than 5 million tomans (333 USD). Workers' current wages cover only 54% of their costs, and the real inflation rate for food and beverages is estimated at more than 50%. The Council, however, estimates that the inflation rate for foodstuffs, which consume more than a third of workers' income, is about 31%.²⁸

Even based on these calculations, the minimum wage for workers next year should be more than doubled under the law. The Supreme Labor Council, however, opposes the increase in the minimum wage and sets the official inflation rate as the criterion for determining wages.

The government and employers have not yet announced their position on the minimum wage. The government is considering a 15-20% increase in office workers' salaries in next year's budget law and seems to be proposing the same for the minimum wage. Ali Khodaei, a labor-contingent member of the Supreme Labor Council, responded by saying that if the proposed increase is going to be only 15%, workers' representatives would not attend the meeting. Employers, as in

²⁸ KhabarOnline, February 25, 2020; www.khabaronline.ir/news/1357059

previous years, have blamed economic stagnation for their inability to raise the minimum wage.²⁹

Hamid Reza Seifi, Secretary General of the Higher Association of Employers, has said, “The decision on wages should be made in a way that does not harm small businesses. In the current situation of the country, we must decide in such a way that enterprises are not forced to close. In this decision, there must be a maximum ceiling set for a worker’s livelihood so that he can live his life.”³⁰

Earlier, Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Hatam Shakarami said in a similar statement that setting a minimum wage for next year was a “difficult decision.” “When deciding on salaries, the Supreme Labor Council must consider the continuity and survival of enterprises,” he said. Recognizing that the inflation rate and the cost of living basket are the basis for determining wages, he cited job stability and maintaining existing employment, along with compensating workers’ living costs, as factors in determining the minimum wage.³¹

Shakarami’s remarks can be interpreted as the government’s stance on wage negotiations, which, as in previous periods, seeks to impose wage suppression on workers.

Retirees: Living Below the Poverty Line

According to the head of the Higher Center of Social Security Retirees, 63% of social security retirees are minimum wage earners and receive less than two million tomans (~134.00 USD). In a letter to the Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, the Higher Center called for an increase in salaries based on the real inflation rate.³²

Next year’s budget law, which was referred to the Guardian Council by order of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, without the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, provides for a 15% increase in the salaries of government employees and retirees. Accordingly, the minimum salary of government employees and retirees should not be less than 2,800,000 tomans (~187.00 USD).³³ This figure is at least 2,140,000 tomans less than the livelihood basket approved by the Supreme Labor Council.

²⁹ Tasnim News Agency, March 2, 2020; <https://tn.ai/2214715>

³⁰ EghtesadOnline, March 2, 2020; <https://www.eghtesadonline.com/n/29EP>

³¹ Toseelrani (Iranian Development) Newspaper, February 17, 2020; <https://www.toseeirani.ir/en/tiny/news-14924>

³² KargarOnline, March 7, 2020; <http://bit.ly/2U41FXn>

³³ Islamic Republic of Iran News Agency, January 22, 2020; www.irna.ir/news/83643695/

At the same time, according to the spokesman of the Integration Commission of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the proposed increase in the minimum wage does not include workers whose salaries are half or less than half of this minimum, because, according to this member of parliament, the increase would be more than 50%, which is not provided in 2020 budget.³⁴

The government has also refused, as in previous years, to provide funding for the implementation of the Pensions Equalization Act. Ali Dehghan Kia, head of the Bayan Retirees and Pensioners Association, has announced the required credit for the implementation of this law at 2.5 trillion tomans (about 167 million USD). According to Dehghan Kia, the government has provided only 950 billion tomans of this amount and the rest remains unpaid.

Not only has the government not provided credit for the implementation of the Pensions Equalization Act, but they have also refused to pay a debt of 250 trillion tomans (approximately 17 billion USD) to the Social Security Fund. All of this results in the inability of the Social Security Fund to pay pensions.

In the 2020 budget law, the government has provided for the payment of only 50 trillion tomans of the claims of the Social Security Fund. This amount will not be paid in cash but through the transfer of government shares, ie. giving petrochemical and energy products at a “preferred price” for the current consumption of all social security production units, as well as the transfer of government shares and employee houses.³⁵

Retirees gathered in front of the Islamic Consultative Assembly building in February to protest the poverty and inequality imposed on them.

Unpaid Wages of Municipal Workers

As in previous months, wages in production and service units were delayed. Municipal workers in several cities have rallied to protest the situation. In Bandar Lengeh, Bushehr province, municipal workers have not been paid for six months.³⁶

About 5,000 workers in the Rasht municipality are demanding at least three months of pay and 10 months of health coverage.³⁷ Workers of the city municipality of Marivan have had a similar experience. They have not been paid since last summer.³⁸ Similarly, city municipal workers in

³⁴ Radio Zamaneh, March 1, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/491945>

³⁵ Radio Zamaneh March 7, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/492878>

³⁶ Radio Zamaneh January 23, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/485764>

³⁷ Iran Labor News Agency, January 23, 2020; <https://www.ilna.news/en/tiny/news-863101>

³⁸ Iran Labor News Agency, March 16, 2020; <https://www.ilna.news/en/tiny/news-886754>

Alvand, (Qazvin province), Bandar Abbas's eighth district (Hormozgan province), Ahvaz Region One, and Tehran's Green Space have also not been paid for three to eight months.

City officials and city Islamic councils have promised to pay the overdue claims of municipal workers before the end of the year. Municipal workers are employed by temporary contracts through temp agencies. Most of them receive minimum wage.



Workers of Ahvaz Municipality gathered in front of the governor's office to protest the non-payment of wages.

In addition to workers in the urban services sector, workers in rail and road transport firms, the Tabas mine, the Qazvin metering plant, and the telecommunications industry in Shiraz still have between 3-29 months of salary in arrears. The workers went on strike several times last February. The outbreak of the coronavirus, however, put a stop to the protests.

Expulsions

Before the outbreak of the coronavirus, which shut down small manufacturing enterprises and became an excuse to lay off workers, large and medium-sized enterprises and auto makers put the dismissal of workers on the agenda. At the Chadormalu mine in Yazd province, the

contractor Behavand Barad fired 20 workers and reduced other workers' contracts to two months. Workers went on strike for two days. Most of the workers at the Chadormalu mine are employed by contractors.³⁹

In the automotive industry, the government has not fulfilled its commitment to inject liquidity into auto parts companies. These companies are once again on the verge of shutting down. The government had promised to pay part of the automakers' debts to the parts companies, but only 15% of the 5 trillion tomans credit (~ 334 million USD) was secured. This has put 130,000 workers on the brink of unemployment.⁴⁰

Several railroad workers have also lost their jobs in the past two months. Raja Rail Transportation Company did not renew the contracts of at least 20 attendants. Iran Traverse, as the main contractor for the maintenance of the rails of the Railways of the Islamic Republic of Iran, also fired several of its workers. In various parts of the country, those who are still employed have not been paid and have already gone on strike several times to protest the payment delay and their type of labor contracts.

Iran's oil sales have plummeted due to US sanctions, and some oil and gas projects have been shut down or are on the verge of shutting down. These conditions have delayed the payment of wages and led to major layoffs. The workers of Phase 14 of South Pars have not been paid for at least six months.⁴¹

Workers at the Arvand Petrochemical Company in the port of Imam Khomeini in Khuzestan province went on strike to protest the non-implementation of the job classification plan. They went on strike again on February 2, this time to protest the conversion of contracts into volume work.⁴² "Volume contract" means the assignment of work without considering the number of required workers. That is, in the contract, only the volume of work and the price of each work unit are specified; how many workers are employed and under what conditions and criteria are not specified. In this form of work, contractors hire fewer workers and enforce more working hours at the minimum wage.

Arrests

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been prosecuting the detainees of the gasoline protests with no news coverage. The number of people arrested during the November 2019 protests has yet to be announced. According to some lawmakers, at least 7,000 people were arrested for

³⁹ Radio Zamaneh, February 26, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/491244>

⁴⁰ Radio Zamaneh, March 3, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/491881>

⁴¹ Radio Zamaneh, January 26, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/486168>

⁴² Radio Zamaneh, February 2, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/487182>

participating in the protests. The Interior Minister said that most of the people arrested in the gasoline protests were “low-income and unemployed,” that is, members of the working class.

A spokesman for Iran’s judiciary announced the start of the trials for those arrested. News of the convictions of some of the detainees was made public by their families. Many of the detainees, however, are being tried in silence and sentenced to imprisonment, forced labor, flogging and even execution.

On February 15, the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers' Union announced the arrest and detention of Reza Dabirian, a factory worker.⁴³ On March 13, Gharib Havizawi, a worker at the Ahwaz National Steel Industrial Group, was summoned to court. He was arrested during protests by steel workers.

Farshad Khodadadian Taghonak, Khorram Agha-Beigi, and Amin Hatami, three workers of Karun Cement, were also tried on February 4 in Masjed Soleyman. They had previously been prosecuted based on the complaints of factory managers and were acquitted of their charges in 2016. Factory managers, however, objected to their acquittal.⁴⁴

In other news, Ishaq Rouhi, a labor activist in Sanandaj, went to prison to serve a one year sentence. He was arrested on Labor Day. The appeals court upheld his verdict.⁴⁵

According to the secretary of the Mahshahr Workers’ House, on the morning of January 21, two workers’ representatives were barred from entering their respective factories, Faravaresh Petrochemical Company and Kimiya Petrochemical Company. The two representatives were among the workers pursuing union demands.⁴⁶

Work Accidents

The outbreak of the coronavirus in Iran has led to the deaths of at least seven nurses, 21 current and retired teachers, and eight employees of public and private banks. Officials at the Ministry of Health, however, declined to give figures for those killed in working class sectors.⁴⁷ The death toll is expected to rise sharply in the coming weeks.

⁴³ Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers’ Union, February 15, 2020; https://t.me/syndica_7tape/2529 and Radio Zamaneh March 13, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/493749>

⁴⁴ Iran Labor News Agency, February 5, 2020; <https://www.ilna.news/en/tiny/news-868491>

⁴⁵ Workers’ Free Trade Union, February 2, 2020

⁴⁶ Iran Labor News Agency, February 9, 2020; <https://www.ilna.news/en/tiny/news-870013>

⁴⁷ Zamaneh Radio, March 15, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/494066>
And <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/494077>

During the first nine months of the last Persian year (March 21-December 21, 2019), workplace accidents killed 1,363 workers. Most of the individuals who died (494, or 38%) worked in the construction sector. Workers in this sector are usually employed without a contract and on a daily basis.⁴⁸

From January 21 to March 16, 81 workers lost their lives at work, according to reports in the Iranian domestic media. As in previous months, construction workers (building, drilling and road construction) had the highest number of work-related casualties. 30 construction workers died during that period. In the mining sector, as in previous months, many work accidents were reported. Ten miners died in work-related accidents. At least three children and eight Afghans were among the dead.

During the same period, 71 people were injured in work-related accidents. 27 of them were injured in industrial environments and manufacturing workshops, and 31 in service jobs, including municipal services.⁴⁹

These figures do not include all work-related accidents in Iran, as many of them are not reported to government agencies because they take place in either the construction sector or occupations that the government considers “unofficial.”

The outbreak of the coronavirus shut down the work of *kulbars* (human mules). Prior to that, *kulbars* were at the mercy of harsh weather and dangerous mountains while crossing borders and being shot at by Iranian border guards. On March 18, border guards in Nosud fired on a group of *kulbars*, killing three and injuring seven.⁵⁰

On March 2, the media reported the disappearance of 23 *kulbars* in the Saqqez Heights. The bodies of two who had died from the cold were recovered.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Radio Zamaneh, February 19, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/489819>

⁴⁹ The number of victims of work-related accidents in Iran is certainly higher than what is reported in the state media.

⁵⁰ Radio Zamaneh, February 17, 2020; <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/489492>

⁵¹ KurdPress, February 1, 2020; <http://www.kurdpress.com/details.aspx?id=208597>

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