

## Workers in Iran need international support

**TV International interview with Bahram Soroush**

**Maryam Namazie:** *We just heard about the horrendous news of four workers - two men and two women - who*

were carried it out on several of the workers. But there was a tremendous outcry, both inside Iran and internationally, by labour and human rights organisations. Then the government was forced to re-

*it's being meted out against workers and labour activists. Some will say it shows the strength of the regime. Others will say, well actually it's because of the strength of the labour movement in Iran.*

and labour organisations. They want the right to strike, decent pay, everything workers around the world are fighting for, but which are repressed violently by the regime in Iran.

**Maryam Namazie:**

*Some would say that workers' protests everywhere are repressed to some extent, especially when there is a real threat. Is there a difference though with the situation in Iran?*

**Bahram Soroush:**

There are certain things which are common with workers throughout the world. But we should remember that conditions in Iran are severely repressive. So to organise a strike takes a lot of courage, organisation and skill...



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*have been sentenced to flogging for participating in May Day events. Can you elaborate on that? What is the background to that?*

**Bahram Soroush:** It is outrageous, but it is true. This is not the first time either. Last year 11 workers received sentences of flogging and prison terms for taking part in May Day rallies. The sentences

voke all the sentences. However, once again this year the court in the city of Sanandaj has sentenced four other workers to be flogged from 15 to 50 lashes and to several months' imprisonment.

**Maryam Namazie:**

*Flogging is quite normal in Iran as a form of punishment for various so-called "offences". It's quite recent though that*

**Bahram Soroush:** It shows the desperation of the regime that it has to resort to such methods. It has tried everything to silence the workers' movement, but has failed. It is now facing an even stronger workers' movement. Worker's expectations have risen. They are organising better and on a wider scale. They are demanding unions

**Maryam Namazie:** *Especially when you sometimes hear about national strikes, strikes that have been taking place across various cities; it is quite astounding then, isn't it?*

**Bahram Soroush:** It is. In terms of the number of strikes, I can say that Iran is unique compared to anywhere else in the world. And just a fraction – if any - of the

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news of that is reported in the state press. We should also remember that going on strike is illegal in Iran. So that gives one a sense of proportion and scale. For example, Kian Tyre workers and Haft Tappeh sugar cane workers have been on strike for several months now, conducting a brave fight in the face of massive repression. Each May Day, workers come out to hold their independent May Day rallies, which each time is suppressed. So there is this continuous struggle going on between workers, on the one hand, and the employers and the regime, on the other; a regime, moreover, which is one of the most savage, repressive and anti-working class in the world. However, the consciousness among the workers, their mobilisation, their expectations, the growth of socialist and revolutionary ideas is such that the regime sees that as a threat.

**Maryam Namazie:** *So is that why the government comes down so heavily on them?*

**Bahram Soroush:** Well, it is both for economic and political reasons. Economically the regime is in a critical situation. So they are trying to put the burden of the crisis on the workers by cutting wages, not paying

wages and by worsening the working conditions. Workers in many, many factories, which I think is also unique in the world, have not been paid for months - some even for over a year. So demanding payment of unpaid wages is one of the most common demands in Iran which links hundreds of thousands of workers together. But also politically, the regime sees the growth of a workers' movement which is articulating its demands even more clearly and organising despite the repression, as a threat. For example, workers are forming unions despite the fact that forming a union is illegal in Iran. Nevertheless, they are doing it, sometimes under other names, and by finding different ways of organising.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Is the flogging of workers linked to, for example, the nine people who have been sentenced to stoning and the mass executions that are taking place? Is there a link to all of this?*

**Bahram Soroush:** There is a link in the sense that they are aimed at creating a climate of fear and intimidation.

**Maryam Namazie:** *So is it working? Obviously not, it seems.*

**Bahram Soroush:** It is

not. Of course, it is claiming a lot of victims, but there are also a lot of protests that are going on. The workers' organisations, the Worker-communist Party are organising and mobilising. This is a regime that has no choice. It is in an impasse: it can't go forward or back. It has to do something in order to survive; to clutch at anything; to try harsher repression. But it is futile. This is what they have tried in the past thirty years, which has only led to even greater popular hatred and protest. That's why we can very accurately speak of the desperation of the regime; a vulnerable regime, which could at any time face a massive movement of the people that will topple it, and get rid of it.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Listening to you, people and organisations like the Socialist Workers Party, George Galloway, people who consider themselves progressive and Left, who support the regime, who support political Islam in various ways, are silent at these brutalities that are taking place. What would you say to them?*

**Bahram Soroush:** Well, there isn't much to say to them. They are on the same reactionary side as the Islamic regime. They are not silent. They are ac-

tively supporting the Iranian regime and, thereby, condoning the executions, the repression, and this horrific nightmare that is the lot of the people in Iran. They have their own political mindset. But whatever it is, it is reactionary, right-wing and rotten. There is nothing Left or progressive about them. To be Left you would be on the side of people, for their rights, for progressive values, against discrimination, etc. These people are on the side of one of the most reactionary and fascistic regimes in the world. Imagine siding with Hitler's regime against people, against Jews, against socialists, against workers, against women, against gays. It is precisely that. Whatever their pathetic justifications, this is the actual stance that they have taken. They are bankrupt and isolated. We should not waste a second talking about them. They are 'have-beens'. The vast majority of the people around the world know what the Iranian regime is like, and that's why it's not at all difficult for us to mobilise people internationally. Millions of workers around the world have mobilised through their unions, through their organisations in condemning the Islamic regime in Iran and in supporting the workers' movement, jailed labour activists

and the people in Iran. And they can't wait till this regime is overthrown and buried.

**Maryam Namazie:** *Some would say it is better not to oppose the regime in Iran whilst there is a threat of US military action on Iran; once that is over then we can focus more on rights' violations of the Islamic regime?*

**Bahram Soroush:**

The Islamic regime in Iran has been reactionary from day one; for thirty years. The protests against this regime began just a few months after it came to power as soon as people realised their revolution had been hijacked. But there was a bloody repression. The revolution was drowned in blood. Tens of thousands of socialists, labour activists and other political dissidents were executed. The fight by the people was going on before Bush was even a governor anywhere. This struggle has nothing to do with the latter years' sabre-rattling of the US government against the Iranian regime. In fact the Islamic Republic owes its birth to the active and calculated support that the US and other Western governments provided for the

Islamic movement in Iran and the region because they didn't want the revolution in 1979 to develop into a Left-wing, a socialist revolution. Rather than that, they supported the Islamists. This struggle by the people of Iran has been going on for thirty years, and it is not going to stop now just because some crazy monster in the US in

can be very good friends, just as they are with Saudi Arabia and with so many other reactionary governments. The American government is looking for a repressive regime which is friendly with the US.

**Maryam Namazie:** *One final question. Obviously protests - whether in Iran or internationally*



the shape of Bush and the neo-con gang is speaking against the regime for its own reasons, or because the SWP or George Gallo-way want it! The US government's hostility towards the regime in Iran is not because this regime executes people; it is not out of concern for human rights. It is essentially because of the nuisance that the regime has been creating for the US' policies in the Middle East. As soon as the Iranian regime stops that, they

- have an impact. What can people do to stop the flogging sentences of these four workers?

**Bahram Soroush:**

They can write or circulate a petition in their unions, at their workplaces. They can send a simple email and spread the news. A lot of unions of course have been following these cases in Iran, and many of them have been very quick to respond. But it is very important to have as many people as possi-

ble protesting against these sentences; to flood the offices of the Islamic regime in Iran with emails of protest, of condemnation, and to post the news on websites; to say out loudly that workers are being flogged; that this is slavery; that this is unacceptable; that the regime in Iran is so savage that it flogs workers for defending their rights, for taking part in a rally to celebrate International Workers' Day. This should not be tolerated. Everybody should protest against it. This protest makes a difference.

The Iranian regime is in a vulnerable state. The severe repression is not a sign of its strength, but of its weakness and increasing desperation. It will be knocked down and swept aside by the people. But this struggle needs a lot of support by the people around the world to succeed.

*The above was a TV International interview with Bahram Soroush on August 13, 2008.*

*TV International programmes can be viewed here: [www.newchannel.tv/englishTV/TVInternational.html](http://www.newchannel.tv/englishTV/TVInternational.html)*

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