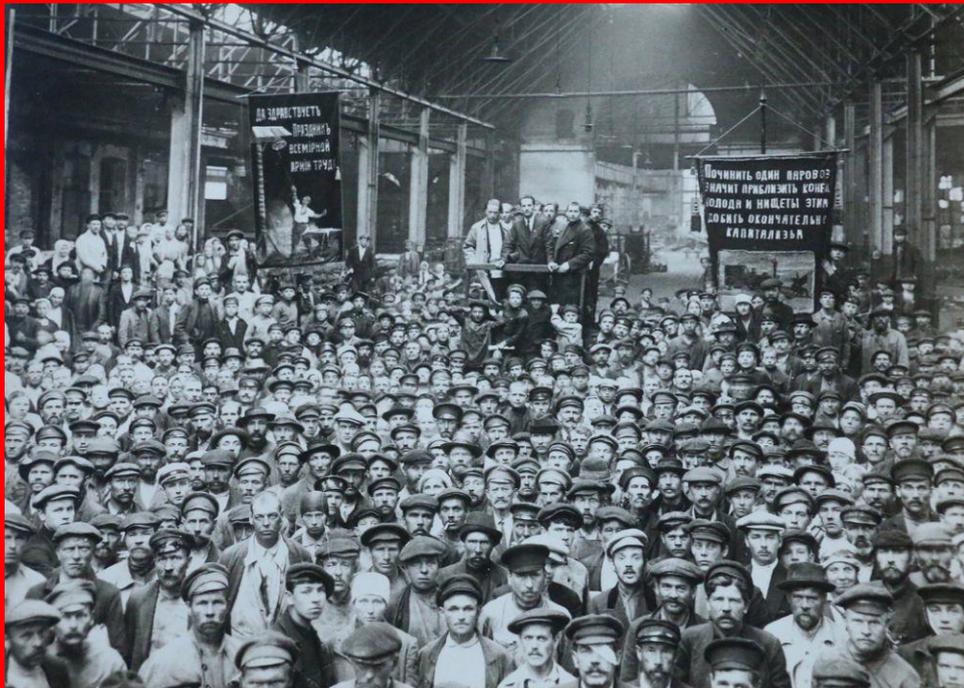


Workers' Self-Management Means Organizing Workers' Self-Exploitation



Meeting of the St. Petersburg Workers' Council

Internationalist Voice

E-mail: contact@internationalistvoice.org

Homepage: www.internationalistvoice.org

It is an undeniable fact that the consequences of the crisis of capitalism – increased violence and ruthlessness – can be seen in peripheral capitalism (even more so than in metropolitan capitalism). On the one hand, peripheral capitalism is in crisis, and on the other hand, back-breaking sanctions by Western gangsters are pushing Iran's weak and bankrupt economy towards economic stagnation and the bankruptcy of manufacturing industries. With the corona pandemic, economic and social conditions have become even more inhumane than before. Millions of workers are unemployed, and hundreds of thousands of workers are joining the huge army of unemployed. In such a situation, job security becomes a major concern. Following the recent workers' protests and strikes, the issue of self-management has been raised again in different forms in the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-Industry Company (Haft Tappeh).

Although production relations are the same as in capitalism, the management of the factory, workshop or workplace by workers themselves was a kind of utopia in the childhood of the working class. At that time, such self-management was mostly proposed or supported by Proudhon fans. This view was later articulated by the different tendencies of anarchists, anarcho-syndicalists and the left of capital, both in metropolitan capitalism and in peripheral capitalism. It is argued that the formation of workers' cooperatives is a proletarian response to the bankruptcy or closure of companies and factories. Here are some examples of workers' self-management experience. In Spain, anarchist cooperatives in the 1930s were the flagships of self-government as a revolutionary economic action. Britain, in 1971, had the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, a shipbuilding consortium. This kind of self-government was experienced by LIP workers in France between 1973 and 1974, and in 1975, this practically failed. In Portugal, in the mid-1970s, there was the flagship by Combate, which was engaged in 2001 in Argentina and in 2013 in the city of Port Said in Egypt.

Cooperatives and supervision by cooperative members do not threaten the capitalist system, and the dictatorial bourgeoisie has even enacted protectionist laws in this regard. In 1971, the Royal Bourgeoisie passed the Law on "Cooperatives", and in 1991, the Islamic Bourgeoisie passed a law entitled "The Cooperative Sector of the Economy of the Islamic Republic of Iran", in which union members supervise the affairs and progress of work.

Following the defeat of the glorious workers' struggles in the autumn of 2018, workers continued to defend themselves, but the conditions of their struggle and their demands changed. Although workers' protests and strikes have recently spread to the oil and petrochemical industries for the first time, the demands are still the most basic demands, and the struggle is still defensive. In the new conditions and with the continuation of the problems of the workers of Haft Tappeh (job insecurity, unpaid wages, etc.), the workers' cooperative was proposed as an alternative by a group of workers. Yousef Bahmani, one of the workers of Haft Tappeh, proposed the formation of a workers' cooperative, according to which shares in the Haft Tappeh Company would be transferred to the workers, and he said the following in an interview with the *Shargh* newspaper:

“Our proposal is that Haft Tappeh be managed as a cooperative, and that its shares be transferred to the workers. No one is as compassionate and committed to production, and the matter in hand, as the workers of the Haft Tappeh.” [1]. [Our translation]

The providers of this workers’ cooperative are themselves aware that this cooperative would have to operate within the framework of the market and would be governed by all market (capital) laws. More importantly, they are aware that if a cooperative were to be formed, workers would essentially become the employer and would be forced to regulate production on the basis of the market and state; they write:

“But ultimately, the cooperative operates within the framework of the market, and all the actions that must be taken in state and private ownership are essentially in the ownership of the cooperative too. The only difference between cooperatives and other forms of ownership is that, for example, in a workers’ cooperative that manages Haft Tappeh, the owner or owners are not two or three capitalists with unlimited powers; rather, the workers are shareholders, and thus the owners and profit and loss are determined based on the number of shares. The worker is also the employer and is forced to regulate the production organization based on its economic obligations and its relationship with the state, the market, the bank, etc.” [2]. [Our translation]

However, if workers assume the role of employer, this collective employer is no longer a worker, so the proletarian class identity no longer makes sense to him. In our view, worker self-management, no matter what form it takes, is nothing but a delusion and confusion for workers on the way to achieving their class identity.

Economically, self-management organizes the exploitation of the workers themselves, and workers take responsibility for the restructuring of crisis-hit institutions for this exploitation. At the expense of the workers in bankrupt enterprises, they re-emerge. Since labour management is not necessarily the opposite of bourgeois management, it can even generate more surplus value for capital by increasing labour productivity; sometimes, this is more satisfactory for capital.

Politically, self-management is more than just economically destructive. Isolated workers within the tight walls of the factory cannot extend the class struggle to other sectors. The workers are engaged in the economic reconstruction of capitalism, while the task of workers is to eliminate the capitalist economy. However, workers are deprived of their fundamental duty, which is the destruction of the capitalist relations of production and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat on a global scale. The irrefutable truth is that the proletariat is capable of managing production at the global level, not within capitalist relations of production, but after the collapse of the productive relations of capitalism.

By distorting Marxist concepts and terms, the radical phraseology of the left of capital offers a capital-friendly explanation of social events, bedazzling the workers with radical rhetoric and blinding them to the truth; they play their role well. One of the writers of the communist

party of Iran has tried his best to spread illusions to the bourgeois judiciary “an achievement as a result of the class power of the workers”. He ends his text by expressing his support for self-management and writes:

“Assemblies of representatives or the committees of the factory or the council, or any name that promotes the direct will of the labour force towards self-management, and puts it to the test, have the same approach in nature. This is the workers’ answer: Haft Tappeh is ours, and we will control its production, sales, development, ownership and everything!” [3]. [Our translation]

Whereas the author of the party trades propaganda-based generalizations about workers’ self-management, the author of the communist preparation (CP) explains his views in detail. He argues that the transfer of the Haft Tappeh Company in the form of shares to the workers is a deadly trap and a strategic mistake, and that the workers should boldly demand the “transfer of the company to the workers” with class audacity. He eloquently argues the following:

“The balance of class power in Iran is changing fundamentally. What four years ago may have seemed enough is no longer enough today. Today it is the state that must comply with the demands of the workers. The state must leave the company [Haft Tappeh] to the workers without ‘ifs and buts’ and without implying even one rial of debt to the workers. Not only that, but the state must commit to providing workers with the necessary financial resources to reorganize initial production. In addition, the state must pledge not to interfere in the management of the company and the determination of salary levels. In return, workers can allow the state the possibility of monitoring the company’s financial affairs, and workers must agree that all [profits after deducting] workers’ wages and necessary investments to compensate for the depreciation of machinery, and [the purchase] of new machinery and raw materials, will be deposited in the state treasury... From the point of view of the continuation of the class struggle, the worker can and must, in the very specific circumstances of the present, take the initiative, exercise some kind of control and supervision over public property and their own property; defend his job and job position and future, and stand against the scenario of unemployment and collective economic misery.” [4]. [Our translation]

The author of the CP states that the balance of class power is fundamentally changing, and he opposes the transfer of shares to the workers, believing that it is the state that must accept the demands of the workers, and the state must hand over the company to the workers without receiving any money in exchange. In other words, if the balance of class power in society has changed so much, and the workers have the upper hand, why are they unable to loosen their employers’ grip on the company purse strings and get the arrears they are owed? Why haven’t the fired workers returned to work? Why have the slogans of the workers’ protests become more defensive than before?

The author of the CP presents a capital-friendly image of the state and downgrades the government to the level of a charity. The state undertakes to provide the workers with the necessary financial resources. The state also undertakes not to interfere in the management of

the company and determination of salary levels. In other words, the state will serve the working class. Contrary to these demagogueries, the state is an organ of class domination over another class. Even the most democratic states are unable to do so because bourgeois democracy and bourgeois dictatorship are two sides of the same coin – the savagery of capitalism.

If we leave aside the noise and crowds about workers of the author of the CP and the radical rhetoric of the author of the CP, the author “takes the initiative”, and with “class audacity” (the gist of the word) and the “strategic alternative”, he explicitly highlights the proviso that workers must accede to the state transferring all profits after deductions to the state treasury.

Could there be a better way to advance the goals of capital? The author of the CP encourage workers to sacrifice bankrupt companies and institutions for the sake of rebuilding and organizing their own exploitation and to secure the process of capital accumulation. All these sacrifices made by workers I are also described as collective defence of workers’ job positions, in an attempt to confront the scenario of unemployment and economic misery.

Contrary to the illusion on the left of capital, the crisis in economic institutions or the recession in the factories is not based on what is “imperfect and corrupt”, but is also rooted in the capitalist system. The capital itself is also in the direction of better capital accumulation, calls for the good management and desirability of economic institutions. The isolation of workers’ protests and strikes and their confinement within the narrow boundaries of a factory or a workplace and the retreat of the working class from its class identity, alongside the police state and, ultimately, the destructive role of the left of capital, are among the underlying factors in the low-yielding struggle of workers or a problem in the evolution of the class struggle in Iran. The decolonization of the right and left tendencies of capital, the emphasis on the independent proletarian struggle and the expansion of cooperation and communication with other industries and sectors will raise the issue of the class identity of workers, which, in its own process, will shift the working class from a class in itself to become a class for itself.

We do not have a humanist, sociological and capital-friendly understanding of the proletariat; the proletariat has a class meaning. The proletariat is the only revolutionary class of our time and is the only social class that can perform such a historic task; only this social class can transform society from capitalism to socialism. For the working class to be able to carry out this historic task, it must rise to this level of proletarian class consciousness in order to put its historic task on the agenda. Marx describes the historic task of the proletariat as follows:

“It is not a question of what this or that proletarian, or even the whole proletariat, at the moment **regards** as its aim. It is a question of **what the proletariat is**, and what, in accordance with this **being**, it will historically be compelled to do.”[5]

Workers’ self-management in the interests of the workers, regardless of its form, is a strong barrier to workers achieving their class identity. Proletarian class identity is the first step in

gaining proletarian class consciousness. The possibility of the tolerance of workers' self-management by the Islamic bourgeoisie is very low due to its fragility, but not impossible. Instead of organizing capital in the crisis, continuing to generate surplus value should be organized to bring down capital in crisis.

Firoz Aakbary
10 august 2020

Notes:

- [1] [Shargh newspaper](#)
- [2] <https://t.me/s/kargarane7tape>
- [3] <http://cpiran.org/2020/6/maghalat/page4.html>
- [4] [Communist Preparation](#)
- [5] Marx - The Holy Family