

# **The Intensification of Anger and Discontent among Oil Workers: Organised Attempts to Contain the Class Struggle**



**Internationalist Voice**

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## **About This Booklet**

This booklet was being written in the wake of the protests and strikes by workers in Iran's oil industry, and in the context of the efforts of the state, capital, and its various political tendencies to control and contain workers' struggles. While the final chapter was still being completed, the popular protests of December 2025–January 2026 erupted. They were followed by the expansion of the war in the Middle East, which transformed the political and social landscape. These developments temporarily pushed workers' protests in the oil industry into retreat, without removing the material and class conditions that had given rise to these struggles.

Following the Memorandum of Understanding between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States, signs of a renewed upsurge in workers' struggles have once again become apparent. This demonstrates that, as the political balance shifts, the fundamental contradiction between labour and capital will once again find expression in class confrontations within the oil industry. At the same time, the efforts of the state, capital, and all right- and left-wing tendencies defending the capitalist order to contain, divert and control these struggles within the framework of existing social relations will also intensify.

This booklet has been written from such an understanding of the class struggle. Its purpose is to defend the class independence of the proletariat against the right- and left-wing tendencies of capital that seek to control and contain workers' struggles, and to strengthen communist positions within the conflict between labour and capital—a conflict from which liberation can only be achieved through the independent and conscious struggle of the working class itself.

## **Internationalist Voice**

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## **Introduction**

The capitalism of metropole countries, at a time when the global capitalist crisis is deepening and the instability of the world economy is increasing, primarily seeks to transfer as many of the consequences of this crisis as possible to peripheral countries. However, the scale and intensity of global economic instability are far greater than what metropole capitalism can overcome through such manoeuvres alone.

As a result of the economic and military policies of the United States, as well as the significant rise in military spending in the metropole countries, the war economy is no longer a phenomenon confined to peripheral capitalism. Instead, it has become one of the central pillars of economic policy within the metropole countries themselves.

The expansion of the war economy has led not only the bourgeoisie of peripheral countries, but also that of the metropole – including European bourgeoisies – to intensify their attacks on social budgets, public services, and workers' wages in order to finance the heavy costs of these policies. Although these attacks have even more destructive consequences in peripheral countries, they have also clearly lowered the living standards of the working class in the metropole and imposed increasing economic pressures on them.

Under such conditions, class struggle has always been the most important and effective means of resisting austerity measures and bourgeois attacks on workers' lives and livelihoods. History shows that class struggle is not merely an abstract idea or slogan, but a real, tangible, and organised force that has, at various times, been able to challenge the structures of capitalism. From widespread strikes and collective protests to diverse forms of independent workers' organisation, all have served as tools through which workers confront bourgeois attacks and austerity policies. Nevertheless, this struggle has always faced serious obstacles and challenges.

In recent years, workers' protests and strikes across the world have followed an increasingly upward trend, a development that has been particularly noticeable in the metropole countries. In these countries, the bourgeoisie – generally more far-sighted, experienced, and astute than its peripheral counterpart – resorts less frequently to direct repression. Instead, it seeks to contain and channel workers' struggles through its various institutions and instruments, including anti-worker trade unions and the left of capital. The aim of these policies is to confine protests to controlled forms, to dissipate workers' anger and discontent, and to prevent the emergence of an independent, radical struggle rooted in the material conditions of class conflict.

Although significant protests are taking place in sectors such as healthcare and education, as well as among pensioners and other groups of workers, labour protests in industries such as oil, gas, and petrochemicals are of particular importance. These industries, first, have a greater capacity to exert pressure on capitalism due to their key role in the economy; second, they are characterised by an experienced proletariat whose historical memory includes significant and notable struggles; and third, they naturally elicit greater sensitivity on the part of the bourgeoisie to control and contain workers' struggles.

For this reason, given the high potential of oil workers and the strategic importance of this industry for the bourgeoisie, the control and channelling of workers' struggles is of particular importance to the ruling class. On this basis, the peripheral Islamic bourgeoisie, despite its short-sightedness, superficiality, and structural immaturity, also seeks to draw upon the experiences and models of the metropole bourgeoisie in order to contain and control workers' struggles.

Within this framework, the present text, while referring to certain experiences and challenges faced by workers in different parts of the world, focuses primarily on the recent protests of workers in Iran's oil industry. Its aim is to demonstrate how the Islamic bourgeoisie seeks – by drawing upon experiences of controlling workers' struggles in

metropole capitalism – to prevent the expansion, deepening, and development of workers’ struggles in the oil industry, initially not through direct repression, but through reliance on its own institutions and instruments.

## **A Brief Overview of Working-Class Struggles in the Oil Industry**

Over the past hundred years, the oil industry has played a vital role in Iran's economy. For this reason, any disruption to oil production or exports has had a direct and immediate impact on the state's economic and political capacity. Oil workers, due to the high concentration of labour, their long history of activity, and their experience of struggle, are considered among the most conscious and experienced sections of Iran's working class.

Although the first strike in Iran's oil industry dates back to 1920, the most significant strike was that of the workers at the Abadan oil refinery in 1929, involving around 9,000 participants. At that time, Iran's oil industry was monopolised by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. The strike lasted for three days and was eventually suppressed through the intervention of the Iranian government, with the immediate assistance of the British Army's intelligence service.

This strike had terrified not only Iran's ruling class but also British officials, to the extent that the British consul requested the cruiser *Cyclamen* to patrol the area, so that it could reach Abadan if necessary.

Although workers' protests in the oil industry continued after that date, it was in 1978–1979 that the oil proletariat emerged as an effective social class in shaping broader social developments. The oil workers' protests that year began with livelihood demands, but in the context of the wider expansion of workers' struggles, these demands quickly took on a political character and became linked with the broader public's demands against the Pahlavi regime.

From the summer, and especially in the autumn of 1978, strikes intensified in key oil centres and in the oil-rich southern regions. In October and November of that year, widespread strikes caused a significant decline in production and almost brought oil exports to a

complete halt. This situation dealt a serious blow to the Pahlavi government and played a decisive role in weakening the regime's economic and political capacity.

During this period, oil workers not only halted production for export, producing only for domestic needs, but also, through direct control of the facilities, prevented sabotage and the use of oil by the government to serve its own interests. One of the most important achievements of the oil workers' struggles in 1978–1979 was the formation of the cores of workers' councils. These councils:

- Took responsibility for decisions regarding the continuation or suspension of production,
- Stopped oil exports to South Africa and Israel, contrary to the wishes of the ruling class,
- At one point, produced solely for domestic consumption,
- Maintained order and workflow without official management,
- Demonstrated that workers were capable of managing production units without capitalists or state managers.

This experience stands as a prominent example of the organised power of the working class and of the possibility for production to be managed directly by the workers themselves.

The Shah's government initially attempted to break the strikes through threats, bribery, and the deployment of military forces, but was unsuccessful due to the scale of the strikes and the prevailing social conditions. The oil workers' strikes of 1978–1979 are of historical significance, as they demonstrated that the working class – particularly in strategic industries – can play a decisive role in political developments. The oil industry strikes were one of the key factors in the fall of the Shah regime and left an important legacy in terms of class struggle, general strikes, and workers' self-organisation.

However, with the rise of the Islamic bourgeoisie, the newly empowered ruling class sought to undo these achievements through the

suppression of workers' councils and the bloody repression of the labour movement. Following this violent crackdown, although protests and strikes continued in the oil industry, they were sporadic and confined to specific sectors rather than the industry as a whole.

In recent decades, the Islamic bourgeoisie has pursued a policy aimed at weakening workers' unity in one of the country's key industries by outsourcing various parts of the oil sector to contracting companies and creating multiple employers. These contracting companies have played a major role in imposing exploitative contracts with insecure employment and low benefits, and in recent decades, a significant proportion of oil and gas workers have been employed under such arrangements.

After the workers' protests of 1977–1980, for the first time in the summer of 2020, coordinated and widespread workers' protests and strikes occurred in the oil and petrochemical industries across several regions. These strikes spread to various cities and sectors of the oil and petrochemical industries, with workers and employees from the Abadan Refinery, Qeshm Heavy Oil Refinery, Parsian Refinery, Lamerd Petrochemical Plant, South Pars Phases 22 and 24 Petrochemical Plants, and other industrial centres joining in.

The strikers' demands included the timely payment of wages, the termination of contracts with contractors, wage increases – particularly the abolition of temporary contracts – and the improvement of working conditions. This movement was of particular significance, as workers in a strategic industry, after years of repression, pressure, and defeat, once again stood up and courageously expressed their grievances.

During the strikes of 2020, workers not only failed to achieve their demands, but their living conditions also worsened. This situation created the material conditions for a new wave of strikes and workers' protests in the oil and petrochemical industries.

With the onset of summer 2021, thousands of contract oil workers in refineries, petrochemical plants, and power stations went on strike.

This wave of strikes quickly spread and became nationwide, with protests extending from west to east and from north to south of the country. More than fifty refineries, oil facilities, oil rigs, oil terminals, and petrochemical plants participated in the strikes.

The strikers' demands were, in practice, the same as those of the previous year: job security, the termination of contracts with contractors, workplace safety, improved working conditions, wage increases, and better shift arrangements.

Since 2021, the oil industry has almost continuously faced protests and strikes. The ruling class is fully aware of the strength and potential of the oil proletariat, as well as the strategic importance of this industry for itself. Consequently, controlling workers' anger and discontent, and directing it towards channels monitored by the ruling class, has become particularly important for preserving its power and interests.

## **The Composition of the Workforce in the Oil Industry**

In recent decades, the Islamic bourgeoisie has pursued a deliberate policy of outsourcing various sectors – particularly the oil industry – to contracting companies and expanding diverse forms of employment, such as temporary contracts, third-party employment, corporate labour, and contract-based workers. The aim of this policy is to absolve itself of direct responsibility, transfer accountability to multiple employers, and weaken or destroy the solidarity and unity of workers. By fragmenting the workforce and splintering employment relations, this policy has created conditions for broader control and easier exploitation of workers by different employers.

Contracting companies and various forms of temporary, third-party, and contract-based employment play a central role in imposing exploitative, quasi-slave contracts with insecure employment and minimal benefits. In recent decades, a significant proportion of oil and gas industry workers have been employed under such arrangements. Compared to the permanent staff of the Ministry of Oil, these workers receive lower wages and enjoy far fewer welfare provisions and benefits.

To understand the conditions of the oil industry and to identify the factors that have given rise to workers' protests and strikes, as well as to examine which sections of the oil workforce have played a more active role in these protests and which have acted more cautiously, analysing the composition of the workforce in this industry is of fundamental importance.

It is important to emphasise that examining the workers employed in the oil industry does not imply dividing the working class into separate sections. Rather, it is undertaken to understand the different segments and layers of a single social class – layers that have been shaped by the policies and mechanisms imposed by the ruling class.

## **Permanent Staff**

Personnel who have been recruited on a permanent basis into the Ministry of Oil or its affiliated companies through formal recruitment exams or official procedures have a permanent employment relationship with the Ministry of Oil. These personnel are subject to the Ministry's duties and authorities and to the specific employment regulations of the oil industry; they are not governed by the Labour Law<sup>1</sup> and enjoy an independent administrative and employment system. Compared with other workers in the oil industry, this group benefits from a higher level of job security and receives better wages and benefits. Furthermore, they constitute the core, specialised, and managerial workforce of the oil industry.

## **Fixed-Term or Temporary Contract (Direct Contract)**

Workers who have a direct contract with the Ministry of Oil or its affiliated companies but are not considered permanent employees. These contracts are usually one-year or multi-year and renewable, but they do not guarantee permanent employment and are subject to the specific regulations of the Ministry of Oil (not those of contractors). Job security for this group is at a medium level; their wages are lower than those of permanent staff but higher than those of third-party workers, and some benefits have been reduced or removed. Importantly, in the past, this group served as a pathway to permanent employment, but in practice, this route is now effectively closed.

## **Third-Party Workers**

Third-party workers include those employed in permanent and continuous positions within the oil industry, but whose contracts are signed with manpower supply contracting companies. Their workplaces are fixed, and they operate in refineries, complexes, headquarters, or operational areas. The contractor is responsible solely for paying their

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<sup>1</sup> Those not covered by the Labour Law (exceptions to the Labour Law).

wages and does not play any role in the actual management of the workforce. These workers are employed on short-term, precarious contracts and, despite performing permanent work, have low job security. Severe discrimination compared with permanent and direct-contract staff, and minimal benefits despite a high workload, are defining characteristics of this group.

### **Contract-Based (Project/Operational) Workers**

Workers who have contracts with operational contracting companies in areas such as drilling, maintenance, construction, and operations, and are responsible for carrying out a specific project or task. In this type of contract, the contractor is responsible for the technical execution of the work, the management of the workforce, and the achievement of the project's objectives. The workers report directly to the contractor and have no employment relationship with the Ministry of Oil. This group has the lowest level of job security, and their employment is entirely dependent on the duration of the project or contract. Benefits are limited and often minimal. Crucially, matters such as the removal of the contractor or conversion to permanent employment do not apply to this category of workers.

### **Private Company Workers (Outside the Oil Sector)**

Workers employed by private companies who have no organisational or employment relationship with the Ministry of Oil or its affiliated companies. These companies are primarily service-oriented and operate outside oil sites, including component manufacturers or subcontractors. These workers are subject to the Labour Law but do not enjoy any of the special benefits associated with the oil industry. Their job security is entirely dependent on the status of the company they work for, and they are generally at the lowest level of protection, remaining outside all plans and initiatives related to the oil industry.

### **In Terms of Benefits and Job Security**

The chart below illustrates the status of benefits and job security, showing that as we move from left to right, both benefits and job security decline. Private company workers generally receive wages and benefits similar to those of contract-based workers but have lower job security and face issues such as delayed salary payments, a lack of stable welfare provisions, and complete dependence on the intermediary company.

Permanent ➡ Direct Contract ➡ Third-Party ➡ Private Company ➡ Project/Operational

### **In Terms of Work Intensity and Operational Load**

The chart shows that, as we move from left to right, work intensity and operational load decrease. In practice, many private company workers perform the same heavy operational tasks as project/contract-based workers but without additional allowances or protective coverage. Therefore, the true extent of discrimination stems less from the “type of work” and more from the nature of the contract.

Project/Operational ≈ Private Company ➡ Third-Part ➡ Direct Contract ➡ Permanent

The reality is that the broadest and most militant segment of the workforce in the oil and gas industry consists of project/contract-based, third-party, private company, and direct-contract workers. These sections of the working class, due to job insecurity, low wages, and limited benefits, are exposed to severe economic and social pressures, which has led to a significant increase in their struggles and protests in recent years. In contrast, permanent staff, benefiting from relative job security and guaranteed minimum wages, have adopted a more cautious approach and generally refrain from directly engaging in large-scale protests. This disparity in conditions and attitudes among different sections of the working class has made it difficult to build solidarity and unity, thereby assisting employers and management in exploiting and controlling the workforce. The various aspects of this issue will be examined in the following sections.

## **The Expansion of Workers' Dissatisfaction**

The reality is that the crisis of the capitalist system and the war-economy policies of the ruling class – both in metropolitan and peripheral capitalism – have resulted in widespread and organised attacks on the living standards of the working class worldwide. In such circumstances, the working class is compelled to struggle to maintain minimum standards of living and social achievements, and to defend its economic and social rights.

This assault by the bourgeoisie on workers' living standards – and the subsequent resistance and struggle of the working class to defend their livelihoods – has extended from metropolitan capitalism to peripheral capitalism; from Iran to Britain, from South Africa to the United States, and from South Korea to Argentina and beyond. Yet in peripheral capitalism, the consequences of the crisis and the severity of these attacks are far more destructive and devastating.

Runaway, astronomical inflation in crisis-stricken peripheral capitalist economies erodes workers' household budgets day by day. Wages, already at exploitative levels, have effectively become a tool for the humiliation of the workforce. Any modest wage increases are devoured by inflation before they even reach the worker, rendering them worthless. The catastrophe is compounded by the fact that even these meagre wages are often paid months late – a delay that, in an inflationary economy, amounts to outright theft from the workers' already diminished livelihoods.

Under the current circumstances, the working class and the lower strata of society are not speaking of life, but of mere survival. The costs of housing, food, healthcare, and education have risen at a dizzying pace, while workers' wages continue to decline every day. Millions of workers and their families have been pushed below the absolute poverty line and are, in the literal sense of the word, struggling for their very survival.

Workers under the brutal capitalist system, particularly in crisis-stricken peripheral capitalism, bear the cost of this system while simultaneously producing astronomical surplus value. Meanwhile, a tiny minority, in a stealthy and luxurious manner, has created a terrestrial paradise for themselves from the fruits of the working class's labour. Relentless pressure, job insecurity, delayed wage payments, and the removal of even the most basic social protections have driven the workforce to the brink of exhaustion and despair. This situation is the direct result of a system whose sole objective is profit – a profit extracted from the bodies of workers and from the depths of unbridled exploitation.

The hellish conditions of wage slavery have compelled workers to protest against their oppressive circumstances. They object to meagre wages, delayed salary payments, and the vast disparities between the pay of permanent and contract-based workers. Dissatisfaction is not limited to those currently employed; retirees in the oil industry have also staged protests and demonstrations against the non-payment of full benefits and inequalities within the pension system.

In response to these conditions, workers have explicitly stated that living in fear and enduring this situation is far more burdensome and destructive than existing under hellish conditions. In such circumstances, the struggle to improve living conditions is not merely a choice but an unavoidable necessity – a necessity that renders fear meaningless and retreat impossible.

As previously explained, the majority of labour protests and strikes in the oil industry have been carried out by contract-based, third-party, and private company workers – those who endure the greatest pressures of exploitation, job insecurity, and lack of rights. The persistent struggles and protests of this segment of the workforce have grown significantly in recent years, and these wage slaves, increasingly aware, have taken to the field of protest and resistance to end job insecurity and improve their humiliating working and living conditions.

Following the widespread protests and strikes in the summer of 2021, the ruling class became fully aware of the protest potential of this section of the working class and its implications for the strategic oil and gas industry. In response, and with the aim of containing and controlling the spread of protests – particularly among private company workers – the Islamic bourgeois parliament in 2022 drafted a plan entitled “Regularisation of Private Company Workers.” This plan went back and forth multiple times between parliament, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Discernment Council, undergoing numerous amendments, but ultimately it produced no tangible or practical benefits for private company workers.

“Regularisation” generally refers to ending the employment of private company workers through contracting firms and replacing it with a direct employment relationship with the ultimate employer, whether a private company, a government agency, or the relevant state-owned company. However, despite repeated promises to pass the plan, draft the regulations, and remove contractors, the government and parliament merely created the impression that regularisation was definite and about to be implemented, without bringing about any real change in the status of these workers.

With the exposure of repeated contradictions, delays, and retreats, it became clear that these promises were less an expression of any genuine intention to resolve the issue of company-employed workers than a tool for controlling the protest climate and keeping workers away from the path of struggle and resistance. In practice, such promises created a state of expectation and suspension among workers, without leading to any tangible improvement in their employment conditions or livelihoods.

In an attempt to pacify company-employed workers, efforts were made to have their wages paid directly into the workers’ own bank accounts – so-called “direct payment” – without the money passing through the contracting companies. However, the employment

relationship itself remained contractual. Under this arrangement, the contractor is not eliminated and the worker's employment status does not change; only the channel through which wages are paid is altered. For this reason, workers do not regard this method as a genuine solution and consider only the full implementation of the plan to eliminate contractors and establish stable job security to be acceptable. It was for this reason that company-employed workers across the country issued a joint statement, in which they stated, in part:

“If this plan is not finalised by the end of the current year through *direct contracts* and the *complete removal of intermediary companies*, then expect a harsh, nationwide response from the great army of contract workers. We have nothing to lose, but you have a great deal to lose.

Our rights are in the pockets of the contractors, and we will wrench them from the dragon's jaws. Await the storm of anger from contract workers: rights are taken, not given, and from today we no longer *ask* – we *take back!*

From: the wounded and exasperated army of contract workers across the country.”

## **Trade Unions: Instruments of Repression and Control of the Working-Class Struggle**

In the period when the capitalist mode of production had not yet encompassed the entire world, and the bourgeoisie still played a progressive role in society, a distinction existed between political struggle and economic struggle. Trade unions were regarded primarily as economic organisations, while political struggle was the responsibility of the party, carried out largely through parliament. The unions functioned as schools of struggle, and struggle itself was considered a school for communism. In this period, reforms offered the working class an opportunity to achieve relative improvements in its living conditions within capitalist society. As a result, capitalist society could, through everyday struggles, take on a more humane character.

However, the separation of political struggle from economic struggle gradually paved the way for the integration of trade unions into the structure of the capitalist state. With the outbreak of the First World War and capitalism entering its period of decay, the social-democratic parties joined the camp of capital, and the trade unions became instruments for providing services and mobilising workers on behalf of the capitalist state. The mobilisation of workers by the unions for imperialist wars clearly demonstrated that trade unions were no longer independent working-class organisations, but rather integral components of the capitalist state within the workplace.

During the German Revolution – as part of the global revolution – the trade unions revealed their role in suppressing workers’ struggles, a bloody chapter that left unforgettable lessons for the working class. In November 1918, the German trade unions, by forming a counter-revolutionary guard in support of Ebert and by spreading illusions about a “workers’ government,” directly repressed the workers.

The permanent integration of trade unions into the capitalist state has always held particular significance for the bourgeoisie. On the one hand, it facilitates the penetration of bourgeois ideology among the working class; on the other, through the close connection between the lower ranks of the union and workers in the workplace, it serves as a tool for controlling and restraining them. Acting as a policing force – providing individual services on one hand and suppressing workers on the other – has become an inseparable part of the unions' functions.

The bourgeoisie is aware of the combative potential of the working class and, for this reason, makes use of the manoeuvres of trade unions and labour syndicates to channel protests. The aim of these mechanisms is to vent the latent anger and discontent of workers and to prevent the emergence of independent workers' strikes and struggles.

By organising workers into separate trades and sectors, unions and syndicates resort to controlled, limited, and localised strikes. Their primary objective is to position themselves at the head of workers' struggles and to seize control of the initiative, thereby preventing the dynamism of the struggle and the formation of workers' general assemblies – assemblies in which workers can collectively discuss and deliberate on the course of the struggle and themselves assume its leadership.

In acute situations, unions sometimes adopt a radical posture and even resort to measures such as a general strike. However, these general strikes often lead to passivity, confinement to the home, and the atomisation of workers, rather than to their conscious self-organisation through general assemblies and collective decision-making regarding the continuation and expansion of the struggle.

In this way, by creating controlled channels for the release of workers' anger and discontent, unions play a key role in containing the radical potential of the labour movement. These mechanisms prevent protests from developing into an independent struggle outside official frameworks and from advancing into a movement against the structural

crisis of the capitalist system. In other words, by managing and restraining the protest energy of workers, unions prevent the intensification of class struggle and dissipate this energy in controlled forms.

We will begin by examining, in concrete terms, several examples of the practices of trade unions in the capitalist metropolises, and will then go on to analyse the role of unions within the structure of peripheral capitalism. This approach allows us to gain a clearer understanding of the functioning of unions in both metropolitan and peripheral capitalist contexts, and of how, overall, they exert a similar influence on labour–capital relations in both structures.

There was widespread discontent among Canadian railway workers, and the possibility existed for the emergence of an independent proletarian struggle that would have been dangerous for the ruling class, since the Canadian bourgeoisie was well aware of the capacity and potential of the working class. The Teamsters trade union carried out manoeuvres to channel workers’ protests, with the aim of neutralising their latent anger and discontent and preventing the formation of independent strikes and spontaneous workers’ struggles.

The Teamsters union excluded workers from the protest process and shifted the struggle from the workplace and the streets to the courtroom, where it was no longer workers collectively who confronted the state, but lawyers and judges facing one another. Although the binding arbitration ruling of the Canada Industrial Relations Board was due to come into effect on 29 August 2024, workers were forced to return to work from 26 August, thanks to the union’s services to the bourgeois state. Once again, workers were confronted with a new round of disillusionment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> [The Widespread Dissatisfaction of Canadian Railway Workers and the Union’s Maneuver to Vent the Workers’ Discontent.](#)

The same issue applies to the widespread discontent among public service workers in Canada. The Canadian Union of Public Employees, by directing the protests of education workers in Edmonton and Fort McMurray, contained these protests within legal frameworks and prevented their escalation to more radical levels. While workers' anger over austerity policies and low wages could have provided fertile ground for the emergence of a radical anti-capitalist movement, the union channelled that anger and protest into manageable paths through tactics such as protracted negotiations, wearing workers down, issuing legal strike notices, and organising rotating and tightly controlled strikes.<sup>3</sup>

When the locomotive drivers in Stockholm, Sweden, concluded that the union would take no action and, on account of working conditions and the safety of themselves and passengers rather than for higher wages, engaged in a wildcat strike, the union acted as a strikebreaker. If unions are *organization* of the working class, why are wildcat strikes taking place? Why do workers leave their union? When the Swedish Union for Service and Communications Employees (SEKO) became aware of the drivers' plans for this strike, these false defenders of workers, while declaring the strike illegal, advised their own members to report for work and, in effect, acted as strikebreakers, stating:

*“We have noted that an illegal strike is being planned and called for on the commuter trains in Stockholm. We assume that all our members will go to work.”<sup>4</sup>*

Another example of trade unions and syndicates channeling workers' struggles and exhausting the working class concerns the labour protests in Belgium in 2024 and 2025, following the announcement of government plans. The unions were able to present a radical image and

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<sup>3</sup> [The Widespread Dissatisfaction Among Public Service Workers in Canada and the Union's Maneuver to Vent the Workers' Discontent.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [The Union for Service and Communications Employees.](#)

position themselves at the forefront of the struggle, but by implementing a passive general strike and obstructing workers' general assemblies, they drove workers into despair and prevented the protests from developing into an independent workers' movement.<sup>5</sup>

Some leftists claim that trade unions in the capitalist metropolises are reformist, while in peripheral capitalist countries they can still serve as instruments of the working-class struggle. What prevents them from serving workers' struggles is the global transformation of capital and, above all, the form and structure of the unions themselves. In fact, taking control of a union from within is as significant and legitimate as taking control of the capitalist state. To assess the validity of this claim, we examine the issue in one of the peripheral countries with close ties to the West, namely Turkey.

Before continuing the discussion, it is necessary to emphasise an important point: an undeniable reality is that, in major class uprisings, trade unions are the first strongholds that the working class will seize. Workers' anger and resentment towards unions in class struggles are, at the very least, as intense as their anger towards employers. One illustrative example is the protests in Turkey's metal industries: after the trade unions suppressed these workers' actions, the workers explicitly declared that, before confronting their employer, they must first settle scores with the union:

*“The wildcat strike by metalworkers at the Çimsaşat factory in Mersin in January 2022, which was suppressed with the help of trade unions. These workers' struggles could have become a model for others, but the trade unions intervened to suppress them. In the absence of an independent committee, union officials such as Mehmet Kurt managed to wrest control from the workers and place it firmly in the hands of the union. After the union*

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<sup>5</sup> [Continuing workers' resistance despite the manoeuvres of the unions](#)

*successfully crushed the workers' protests, the workers themselves said they had to settle accounts with the union before they could face their employer.”<sup>6</sup>*

One of the most notable struggles took place in 2015, when workers rose up against both employers and trade unions. The wildcat strike by automotive workers in factories across Turkey, which disrupted the production of European car manufacturers, stands out as a prime example of these struggles. The strike began in the industrial city of Bursa at the Renault factory. On May 14th, after a full shift vote, the workers decided to strike and formed a strike committee. They set up tents on the factory grounds, with food and water sent in from outside. This strike spread to the Ford automobile factory in Eskişehir and other suppliers of car parts. These struggles were so significant and influential that they later became the subject of academic theses aimed at exploring their causes. The abstract of one such thesis states:

*“With the increasing poverty and rising social injustice in Turkey, the working class' grievances have recently become more visible in the public. In this sense, Turkish society witnessed one of the most disruptive and crowded labor strikes during the neoliberal capitalist era in 2015. During these strikes, metal workers mainly targeted the hegemonic partnership of employers and pro-employer trade union, Turkish Metal Union (TM). Both the rising poverty in the social and economic conditions of workers and the untenable forms of practices by the hegemonic partners led workers to rely on their own power and go on a wildcat strike.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> [Neither Erdoğan nor İmamoğlu – Class Struggle is the Only Path Forward!](#)

<sup>7</sup>BEYOND LIMITS: THE MOBILIZATION OF A WILDCAT STRIKE IN TURKEY- ALĖCAN ÇAĖRI GÖKÇEK- BOĖAZĖÇĖ UNIVERSITY-2019

These are the very trade unions whose messages and symbolic gestures of solidarity – or the letters their leaders send to officials of the Islamic Republic, which form part of Western countries’ strategy to pressure the Islamic bourgeoisie – are presented as expressions of European or global workers’ solidarity with the Iranian working class. Yet this prevents genuine solidarity from developing between the different units of the working class. These are the same unions that compile blacklists of militant workers, mourn the death of Queen Elizabeth, and cancel workers’ strikes. Contrary to the populist illusions of the left of capital, the strongest solidarity between different units of the working class is forged through shared struggle in the class fight itself.

In Iran, a trade union or workers’ syndicate in the true sense of the term – possessing the definition, functions, and specific characteristics of a union or syndicate – does not exist. Furthermore, the prohibition of trade unions and workers’ syndicates in Iran effectively legitimises any organisation that emerges under a dictatorship, allowing such bodies to adopt titles such as “union” or “syndicate” for themselves. The greatest role in creating this ambiguity is played by the left of capital, which seeks to confer legitimacy and a proletarian character on these organisations, whether genuine or merely nominal.

If we wish to define a union very briefly – and this will, of course, be incomplete – a union is an organisation that operates within the existing system and organises workers in order to negotiate with employers or the state over wages, working conditions, working hours, and job security. Where necessary, the union organises lawful protests or strikes. Workers pay monthly membership dues and have a representative in the workplace. A union has a clearly defined hierarchical structure, including a president, a board of directors, and a general assembly.

A syndicate is essentially a specific type of trade union that focuses on a particular trade or profession.

For the moment, let us set aside the fact that unions have been integrated into the capitalist state. In light of the points outlined above, organisations bearing names such as the “Free Union of Iranian Workers” are not genuine unions but rather anti-worker organisations with a leftist orientation that have adopted the label of “union” for themselves. The “Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Workers’ Syndicate” exists only on paper, and the “Metal and Mechanical Workers’ Syndicate” has likewise been established merely on paper by an individual seeking to create confusion among workers. Other organisations bearing similar names are in the same situation.

The only organisation operating under the name “Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company Workers’ Syndicate” still retains a certain working-class spirit and can more accurately be regarded as a workers’ committee rather than a fully developed syndicate with clearly defined functions. This organisation has submitted a formal request for legal recognition – that is, to become an official and lawful syndicate – but has received a negative response. This dual situation cannot continue indefinitely: it must either become an official, legal syndicate and be fully integrated into the structure of the capitalist state, or continue its activities as a workers’ committee and carry out its functions accordingly.

In the following pages, the specific conditions in Iran will be examined, both from the perspective of how workers confront these problems and from that of how the ruling class creates its own preferred organisations in order to contain and control workers.

## **Organisation in the wake of bloody repression**

As previously noted, with the rise to power of the Islamic bourgeoisie, the newly established ruling class could not tolerate the struggles and gains of the working class, particularly those of oil industry workers. As a result, through bloody repression, it succeeded in eliminating the gains achieved through the heroic struggles of workers, especially those in the oil sector. Following this repression, although protests and strikes did occur within the oil industry, these actions were largely limited, fragmented, and episodic.

The bourgeoisie was fully aware of the capacity and power of the working class; it therefore saw the need to establish control over the workplace through its own affiliated organs, while simultaneously ensuring the continuity and expansion of production. Under conditions of a war economy, strict supervision of the workplace and the prevention of any strike activity were regarded as vital necessities. In this context, in January 1985, the “Law on Islamic Labour Councils” was passed by the parliament of the Islamic bourgeoisie.

Islamic Labour Councils were—and remain—organisations composed of forces affiliated with the ruling power within workplaces. Despite their name, they have had no function other than controlling the workplace, cooperating with security institutions, propagating the ruling ideology, and reporting even the slightest signs of workers’ discontent. For this reason, from the very moment of their formation, Islamic Labour Councils were met with deep hostility and distrust from workers, and their members were regarded in the workplace as collaborators of the security apparatus.

Given the deep unpopularity of the Islamic Labour Councils, and the fact that a significant number of them had in practice already ceased to exist, the Islamic bourgeoisie sought, on the other hand, to present itself as an “acceptable” and legitimate force within the International Labour Organization and other international capitalist institutions. In

such conditions, the historical usefulness of the Islamic Labour Councils was effectively coming to an end. Moreover, the control and containment of workers' struggles was becoming increasingly vital for the Islamic bourgeoisie.

It was in this context that the Islamic bourgeois labour law, passed in 1990, formally recognised three types of authorised organisations:

- Islamic Labour Councils
- Guild Associations
- Workers' Representatives

It now became necessary to create another type of organisation within workplaces and labour centres that could control and contain workers' strikes and struggles. In this context, the replacement of Islamic Labour Councils with Guild Associations became relevant. Although, in appearance, a Guild Association is a basic organisation formed at a local or occupational level and bears a formal resemblance to a workplace union unit, in practice its general assemblies and elections are not legally valid without the presence, supervision, and approval of a representative of the Ministry of Labour.

The 1990s can be seen as the beginning of the formation of Guild Associations, but in practice it was during the 2000s that these associations were established in certain workplaces and labour centres. In the 2010s, the Supreme Council of Guild Associations was also formed. This body is a higher-level, national organisation composed of representatives of the various Guild Associations.

The International Labour Organization effectively recognises Guild Associations as equivalent to trade unions, and representatives of the Supreme Council of Guild Associations are presented and recorded as trade union representatives within this organisation. In this way, the functions of the Islamic Labour Councils were updated in line with changing political and economic conditions. These functions—namely the control and containment of workers' struggles and the channeling of

workers' anger and discontent within legal frameworks—were thus modernised and more efficiently transferred to Guild Associations and the Supreme Council of Guild Associations.

Undoubtedly, the emergence of workers' protests and strikes in the oil and gas industries is not possible without a certain form of organisation. This organisation is primarily carried out through workers' committees and workers' circles—structures which, under the prevailing conditions of peripheral capitalism and a dictatorial environment, are inevitably forced to operate in a fragmented, covert, and mutually disconnected manner. Nevertheless, despite the absence of organised links between them, these committees and circles are able, at moments of protest, to coordinate in practice around common demands and specific objectives, and to play an effective role in advancing strikes and protests. This decentralised form of organisation is, on the one hand, a response to repression and security control, and on the other, it enables the continuity, flexibility, and reproduction of workers' struggle—something clearly observable in the experience of workers' protests in the oil and gas industries.

The critique advanced by the left of capital against Guild Associations is that these organisations are directly dependent on the state, and that their relationship with security and governmental institutions is the basis of their objection. In other words, if such an organisation were formed without the direct intervention of the Ministry of Labour, the House of Labour, and other state bodies, and if it truly functioned as a trade union, it would be accepted and endorsed by them.

It is not without significance that every year, during the general conferences of the International Labour Organization (ILO), the left of capital organise protests to demonstrate that the Iranian delegates are not genuine representatives of workers. Apparently, however, the delegates from other countries are regarded as genuine representatives of workers, and the International Labour Organization is seen not as a bourgeois institution, but as a global organisation centred on workers. One can hardly go further in throwing dust in the eyes of the working class.

## **Guild Associations and the Control of Workers’ Struggle in the Oil and Gas Industry**

According to the regulations governing the elections of Islamic Labour Councils, issued in 1985, the formation of Islamic Labour Councils under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs was foreseen in workplaces with at least 35 workers. However, in practice, until 202, the formation of Islamic Labour Councils—and in particular Guild Associations—in the oil and gas industries had not been realised. The question of why such organisations had not emerged during these years, and why conditions for their formation became possible in 2021, requires an explanation that sheds light on a number of important issues and challenges within the oil and gas industries.

As previously explained, following the workers’ protests of 1977–1980, a coordinated and widespread wave of workers’ protests and strikes in the oil and petrochemical industries emerged for the first time in the summer of 2020, spreading across different cities and sectors of these industries. These protests were once again continued in the summer of 2021. The ruling class is fully aware of the capacity and potential of the oil industry proletariat, and of the strategic importance of this sector for its own interests. For this reason, the Islamic bourgeoisie seeks to draw on the experience of controlling workers’ struggles in the metropolitan capitalist countries and initially, rather than relying on direct repression, attempts to use its own instruments and institutions to channel workers’ anger and discontent into controlled avenues, thereby preventing the expansion, deepening, and development of workers’ struggles in the oil industry.

In line with this approach, the process of forming workers’ Guild Associations in the oil and gas industries began. The Guild Association of Workers of the South Pars Gas Complex was established following the workers’ strike in the summer of 2021. This body was set up in

cooperation with the House of Labour and under the supervision of the Ministry of Labour. In March 2022, it was announced that Guild Associations of contract workers had been formed in 11 refineries in the Kangan and Asaluyeh region. It was also stated that the Council of Guild Associations, as the higher-level body of these organisations, represented the demands of approximately 13,000 contract workers in the country's gas industry.

Afterwards, this project was pursued with greater determination. The aim of establishing Guild Associations was to channel the accumulated anger and discontent of workers, to contain workers' struggles and strikes, and to limit workers' demands to a framework acceptable to the government and to organisations approved by the Ministry of Labour. In this context, on 14 September 2021, the head of the Labour and Social Welfare Office of Asaluyeh, coinciding with the establishment of the Guild Association of workers at Refinery No. 3, explicitly stated that the purpose of creating Guild Associations was to direct workers' demands into official and legal channels:

*“In the course of this election, emphasis was placed on the attention to the legitimate and lawful demands of the working classes employed in the major industrial projects of South Pars, and on directing these demands through official and legal channels. The programme of the department regarding the formation of similar associations in other refineries of the South Pars Gas Complex has also been fully outlined.”<sup>8</sup>*

As previously noted, Islamic Labour Councils were deeply unpopular among workers, and their members were widely regarded with hostility. In contrast, activists within Guild Associations present themselves as representatives of the workers' movement and, in order to

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<sup>8</sup> The elections for the workers' Guild Association at Refinery No. 3 of the South Pars Gas Complex were held.

project a radical and demand-oriented image, occasionally face obstacles and pressure from judicial and security institutions; in some cases, their gatherings are prevented, or they are even arrested and subjected to legal proceedings.

As an example, judicial and security authorities in Bushehr Province opposed the third request by the Guild Association of Contract Workers of the South Pars Gas Complex to hold a gathering on 20 February 2023 in front of the headquarters of the complex. Security and police forces also intervened at the site of the planned gathering and forcibly dispersed the small group of workers who intended to participate.

In addition, five activists of the workers' Guild Associations were arrested. In this regard, the following account is given:

*“Alireza Mirghafari, head of the Guild Association of Workers of the South Pars Gas Complex, and Hojjat Rezaei, workers' representative at Refinery No. 6 of the South Pars Gas Complex, were arrested on Sunday night prior to the planned Guild Association gathering. Zabiollah Mirzaei, inspector of the Guild Association of Workers of the South Pars Gas Complex, was also arrested yesterday morning after being summoned to the Police Intelligence Office. Behdad Gholami, a member of the Guild Association of Refinery No. 6 and one of the workers affiliated with the Guild Association of Refinery No. 5, was also arrested yesterday at the site of the gathering.”<sup>9</sup>*

It is necessary to note an important point regarding Guild Associations. Unlike Islamic Labour Councils, whose members were generally directly in the service of security institutions and whose role was evident to a large section of workers, the situation in Guild

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<sup>9</sup> [SedayeOstan](#).

Associations is not the same. In Guild Associations, a portion of the membership consists of workers who, as in the experience of trade unions in other countries, have joined these associations with trade-based and demand-oriented motivations, and often under the illusion that it is possible to advance their rights through such bodies.

For this reason, a distinction must be made between the activists within Guild Associations who play a guiding and managerial role, and the workers who support these organisations under the illusion of their true nature and function. What is essential is the structural nature and anti-working-class character of Guild Associations, and their function within the broader policies aimed at containing, controlling, and channelling the class struggle of workers. A more detailed examination of this nature and the concrete role of Guild Associations in containing workers' struggles will be analysed in detail in the following pages.

## **Manoeuvres to Contain the Class Struggle**

As previously stated, in Iran—unlike the metropolitan capitalist countries and even some peripheral capitalist countries such as Turkey—there are no trade unions that perform the real function of a trade union. However, a number of sections of the left of capital attempt to present the formation of trade unions, even at the level found in Turkey, as representing a nationwide and class-based organisation of workers. These currents create ambiguity in this regard, generating a fog of confusion and, in practice, obstructing the emergence of independent workers’ struggle.

In contrast to these approaches, the actual experience of workers’ struggles in Iran has shown that other forms of organisation can play an effective role. For example, during the oil workers’ protests and strikes in 2022, general assemblies played an important role in organising, decision-making, and advancing workers’ struggles.

Therefore, the focus of this section is not the examination of attempts to form conventional trade unions in order to contain class struggle at a level comparable to peripheral capitalism in countries such as Turkey. Rather, it is the examination of another type of organisation that has played an important role in containing workers’ struggles in Iran in recent years: Guild Associations.

As previously noted, the International Labour Organization recognises these associations as workers’ organisations, and in English translations they are also referred to as “unions”. For this reason, the Islamic bourgeoisie likewise presents them as trade unions in international forums. From the standpoint of function, however, there is no fundamental difference between these associations and other forms of unionism under discussion. Nevertheless, Guild Associations can be understood as a specific response of the Islamic bourgeoisie to the particular political, social, and class conditions of contemporary Iran.

A concrete examination will show that Guild Associations, like trade unions, function in a manner oriented towards the containment of the class struggle. As previously emphasised, in recent years the oil and gas industry has witnessed numerous protests and strikes. Given the strategic importance of this sector and its workforce for the Islamic bourgeoisie, the control of workers' anger and discontent, the channeling of protests into manageable avenues, and ultimately the containment of the class struggle acquire heightened significance.

In such conditions, the Council of Guild Associations of Workers of the Refineries of Bushehr Province has assumed an important role. These associations seek to channel workers' discontent and anger into controlled and manageable forms in order to prevent the expansion of protests and the formation of an independent workers' movement. In pursuit of these objectives, the Council of Guild Associations organised and followed up a series of protests in three stages.

### **Stage One of the Protests**

In the first stage, the Guild Associations called for workers' gatherings inside the refineries on 28 October 2025. Following this call, separate gatherings were held at the twelve South Pars refineries, with a number of workers taking part in these short-lived assemblies. The Guild Associations sought to ensure that the gatherings remained entirely controlled, orderly, and peaceful, so that the protests would not extend beyond the prescribed limits. At the conclusion of the gatherings, they announced that, should the workers' demands remain unanswered, a second stage of protests would be launched.

### **Stage Two of the Protests**

As the workers' demands were not met—and could not have been met within the framework of this method of protest—the Guild Associations called for a gathering in front of the headquarters of the South Pars Gas Complex on 11 November 2025. On that day,

approximately 3,000 workers from the twelve South Pars refineries and the Fajr Jam Gas Refinery gathered in protest outside the headquarters of the South Pars Gas Complex. The gathering ended after a short time, and the workers returned to their workplaces. The Guild Associations succeeded in keeping the protest within the limits and procedures they had established, preventing it from extending beyond its predetermined boundaries. In this way, the workers' anger and discontent were channelled into a controlled outlet—a result that was entirely satisfactory for the Guild Associations.

Following this gathering, the Guild Associations of Refineries Nos. 7, 9, and 12 issued separate statements praising the workers' "dignified and assertive participation", describing it as a sign of "sectional maturity" and "devotion to work and the nation". For any worker conscious of their class interests, however, such an assessment raises fundamental questions. What is meant by "sectional maturity"? Can the confinement of workers' protests within pre-established and controlled channels, and their inability to move beyond these limits, really be regarded as a sign of maturity?

On the contrary, it is only when workers are able to break through these mechanisms of control and pursue their demands from an independent class standpoint that they begin to develop their class identity and emerge in social struggles as a distinct social class.

This also raises the question of what is meant by "devotion to work" and "devotion to the nation". Can a worker, whose means of subsistence are steadily diminishing, possibly have the same relationship to work, or the same interests, as the bourgeoisie, whose capital is continuously enlarged through the surplus value produced by those very workers? From this standpoint, speaking of a shared devotion to work or of common interests between labour and capital serves only to conceal the real class antagonisms.

### **Stage Three of the Protests**

The Guild Associations were unable to contain and dissipate the workers' anger and discontent through their previous protest initiatives. In particular, these protests had failed to bring about even the slightest improvement in the living conditions of the wage slaves, while the level of discontent remained extremely high. Consequently, the Guild Associations were compelled to resort to more effective methods of channelling and managing the protests in order to direct them into legal and controlled channels, keep them under their own control, and prevent the emergence of an independent workers' movement. To this end, they placed the organisation of a large workers' march to the Asaluyeh Governorate and a rally in front of its headquarters on their agenda.

In the run-up to the demonstration, the Council of Guild Associations of Workers of the Bushehr Gas Refineries formally notified the Asaluyeh Governorate and the Asaluyeh County Security Council that, in accordance with Article 27 of the Constitution, a protest gathering would be held at 7 a.m. on Tuesday, 9 December, in front of the Governorate building. This step was taken entirely within the official legal framework and demonstrated an effort to register and manage the protest through pre-defined institutional channels—channels that enabled the state authorities to retain control over, and direct, the course of the protest.

Prior to the demonstration, the Guild Associations, in addition to completing the necessary administrative procedures and coordinating with the relevant state authorities, also invited journalists from the state broadcaster (IRIB) to attend the gathering and report on the protest and the workers' demands. The stated purpose of this invitation was to ensure that the workers' lawful demands would be reflected in the national media and, in the words of the Guild Associations, would “strengthen public confidence and reduce the gap between the people and the authorities”.

In reality, by bringing the official media into the coverage of the demonstration, the Guild Associations sought both to keep the expression of the workers' demands within official and manageable channels and to enhance the perceived importance and legitimacy of the event. More importantly, however, they sought to foster confidence in the ruling class—or, in their own terminology, to “reduce the gap” between workers and the structures of state power. Put differently, the Guild Associations here reveal the essence of their objectives: to cultivate illusions among workers about the ruling class. Their emphasis on “reducing the gap” serves precisely this purpose: to foster confidence in the ruling class while creating confusion among workers about their own class interests.

The Guild Associations make use of Kargah Media as their media platform. Although this outlet presents itself as “the media of Iran’s workers”, in practice it operates in furtherance of the objectives of the Guild Associations, assuming the task of directing and containing workers’ discontent and anger. Kargah Media is a news and media platform which, in addition to operating on Telegram and Instagram, maintains an extensive official presence on domestic social media platforms operating under the supervision of the Iranian state, including Eitaa, Rubika, Bale, and Virasty, where it actively promotes its official accounts and channels. During the preparations for the protests under discussion, Kargah Media likewise promoted and covered the Guild Associations’ planned actions in various ways, effectively serving as their media and propaganda arm in mobilising and directing the protests.

Finally, in accordance with the plans drawn up by the Guild Associations, on 9 December 2025 approximately 5,000 South Pars workers marched towards the Asaluyeh Governorate building to hold a protest rally outside it. During the march, the police cooperated with the organisers, and the police were publicly thanked on several occasions along the route. The workers eventually held their protest gathering outside the Asaluyeh Governorate building.

A comparison between this gathering and the protests independently organised by oil workers reveals significant differences. In independent workers' protests, despite existing limitations and pressures, slogans with an explicit class content are raised. For example, in the protest gathering of contract workers demanding the removal of contractors, the slogan "Arkan-e Salis is awake, it rejects exploitation" expressed the class orientation of these protests.

By contrast, in the march organised by the Guild Associations, not only were such slogans absent, but slogans such as "Taking workers' rights is treason against the country", "18 million salary, 15 million rent", and "A defenceless driver, deprived of all welfare" were raised—slogans that remained fully within the framework of the demands and objectives defined by the Guild Associations.

At the same time, titles such as "workers' leader" and similar designations were used in reference to the officials of the Guild Associations. In particular, Alireza Mirghafari was introduced as the "head of the organising body of this movement" and delivered a speech at the gathering. In part of his remarks, he stated:

*"To reach our rights, we will go through whatever path is necessary, but we have proven that we are neither saboteurs nor troublemakers... After this gathering, we expect all officials at the county, provincial, and national levels—including the Ministry of Petroleum, the Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of Interior—to work hand in hand towards the realisation of the demands that have remained unresolved for years... We are now concluding our gathering, but if the previous course of action continues after today, we will certainly witness larger gatherings."*<sup>10</sup>

If the governorate, the Security Council, and the state broadcaster have all been pre-coordinated with a protest in advance, it can hardly be

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<sup>10</sup> Kargah Media.

described as an “independent workers’ protest”. In such a situation, the protest moves beyond the framework of an independent class action and becomes a managed spectacle—one in which workers’ anger and discontent are not directed towards the expansion of independent struggle, but are instead channelled and contained within pre-determined pathways.

In such a scenario, workers unwittingly become the extras in a performance whose script has been written by the institutions of capital and their approved intermediaries. The result is that workers’ class anger, instead of leading to independent organisation, the extension of strikes, and the development of class solidarity, is transformed into an instrument for legitimising the Guild Associations and, ultimately, the mechanisms through which the ruling class manages and controls the working class.

If this is the case, then a fundamental question arises: is this not precisely the function that Guild Associations fulfil from the standpoint of the communist left—that is, to direct, contain, and dissipate workers’ struggle within a framework that remains controllable and harmless to capital?

The Axis of Resistance Left<sup>11</sup>, including its organised currents operating in opposition, presented the Guild Associations as workers’ organisations and their officials as workers’ leaders or representatives. This current actively promoted the protests organised by the Guild Associations without making any reference to their objectives or function. In its assessments, these protests were portrayed as serving the class interests of the workers, and, following the demonstrations, reports and commentaries praising the mobilisation were widely circulated.

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<sup>11</sup> The Axis of Resistance Left refers to that segment of the left of capital which does not regard the Russia–Ukraine (NATO) war as imperialist, and instead defends the Russian side on the grounds that it will lead to the decline of the West’s position and, consequently, to the expansion of the class struggle. In the war between the United States and Israel on the one hand, and Iran on the other, it likewise characterises the conflict as just and defensive, and supports Iran’s war against the United States.

We have repeatedly emphasised that, from a class perspective, an independent workers' organisation means an organisation independent of capital and all its institutions, not merely one that is not affiliated with the ruling regime. Nevertheless, several organisations that describe themselves as "independent organisations", regardless of the extent to which they actually exist in reality or merely on paper, issued a joint statement in support of the 9 December 2025 protest. They described this gathering as a symbol of a strong workers' protest presence and declared their unequivocal support for it.

It is noteworthy that these organisations, despite emphasising the label "independent", made no reference to the role of the Guild Associations in organising the protests or to the objectives pursued by these associations. Nor did they mention the channelling of workers' protests within frameworks defined by the Guild Associations, or their direction into legal and official channels.

This is despite the fact that the organisers of the gathering, after the conclusion of the protest, explicitly emphasised the nature and framework of their action. Referring to the presence of images of the leader of the Islamic bourgeoisie, the reflection of his statements on workers' rights, and the full adherence of participants to pre-determined objectives, they stated that during the march and the gathering not a single slogan was raised outside the established framework. The organisers described the situation as follows:

*"The protest was held in a calm, family-like atmosphere, without violence, without damage to public property, and without a single subversive or irrelevant slogan. The banners were adorned with images of the Leader of the Revolution and slogans in support of workers' rights."*<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> [The criterion for orienting workers' protests.](#)

Nevertheless, these very “organisations”, which apparently also bear the label of “independent organisations”, in their joint statement not only made no reference to the role of the Guild Associations in organising the protests and their long-term objectives, but also expressed their support for these protests. While the organisation of these gatherings was carried out in line with the policies and long-term objectives of the Guild Associations, these organisations, without any criticism or acknowledgement of this fact, spoke of “the manifestation of unity and solidarity and the demonstration of a strong workers’ protest presence”. In their joint statement regarding the protests organised by the Guild Associations, they declared:

*“9 December was the day of the manifestation of unity and solidarity and the display of a strong workers’ protest presence in the South Pars region. Contract workers of the South Pars projects, refineries, and petrochemical industries, after travelling long distances and overcoming obstacles placed by the police and security and law enforcement forces to prevent their presence at the pre-designated location, arrived in front of the Asaluyeh Governorate with firm determination and resolute will, and created a memorable and historic protest... The protests and strikes in Asaluyeh have been a school that has taught workers valuable lessons of struggle. Contrary to the wishes of employers and official institutions, which harbour ambitions of workers’ obedience and the neutralisation of struggle, they have never been able to extinguish protest and strikes in the South Pars region or divert the course of struggle.”<sup>13</sup>*

The question is: what position did a faction of the left of capital, which employs the most radical rhetoric and slogans, take in relation to

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<sup>13</sup> Joint statement of independent organisations in support of South Pars workers.

these events? While speaking in an ostensibly radical register, it was in practice engaged in throwing dust in the eyes of workers and was cheering on the Guild Associations, i.e. the principal organisers of these protests.

For the left of capital with its radical discourse, the channeling of workers' protests into legal and state-approved frameworks was not presented as a means of controlling and containing workers' struggle, but rather as an expression of the "workers' surge". Within this framework, the organisers of these protests were not portrayed as those directing and managing workers' struggles along controlled channels, but rather as "workers' activists". For example, the head of the political bureau of the Hekmatist Party described this process of directing and containing workers' protests as a "workers' surge", referred to the organisers as "workers' activists", and engaged in such demagoguery:

*"The surge of contract workers on 9 December in Asaluyeh and South Pars, and the following day, 10 December, the large gathering of contract oil, gas, and electricity workers from various cities in front of the Islamic Parliament, were both significant and encouraging. Once again, attention turned to the decisive capacity and potential of the workers' movement. The rightful demands of the workers, foremost among them the 'abolition of contracting companies' and 'equal work, equal pay', were raised loudly and clearly. Salutations must be sent to the organisers and participants of these two major actions."*<sup>14</sup>

However, the head of the political bureau of the Hekmatist Party goes even further in his demagoguery, insisting that if the prevailing despotism and repression did not exist, workers' leaders and activists, by organising themselves into a communist party—which he apparently

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<sup>14</sup> [The surge of contract workers: a message to activists in the workers' movement.](#)

means the Hekmatist Party<sup>15</sup>; a party that has absolutely no relation to communism<sup>16</sup>—could lead mass workers’ organisations and bring revolutionary transformations to completion.

In this way, he presents the existing political constraints as the main reason for the non-realisation of such a perspective, while attempting, through the use of radical rhetoric, to conceal the role of his own current in supporting the Guild Associations. The radical leftist discourse thus effectively becomes an extra in the performance staged by the Guild Associations and, by extension, the Islamic bourgeoisie, playing a role in obscuring reality among workers, channelling workers’ protests, and dissipating their anger and discontent. Nevertheless, the head of the political bureau of the Hekmatist Party seeks to portray this role not as complicity in mechanisms of protest containment, but rather as evidence of the decisive role of his party in leading the workers’ movement and social transformation—albeit under conditions in which despotism does not exist:

*“The working class and the workers’ movement as a whole, and all its members taken together, do not assume a leadership role; this task belongs to conscious leaders and activists. If despotism and repression allowed it, in a normal balance of forces, the leaders, activists, and the advanced section of the workers’ movement, by organising themselves into a communist party and their own mass organisations, would bring the task of guiding and leading revolutionary transformation to completion.”<sup>17</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> At one time, Mansoor Hekmat claimed that his tendency would found the Communist International. However, worker-communism not only failed to establish that purported International, but also disintegrated into numerous factions and splits, to the extent that today a part of it has become what is described as the “left wing of NATO”. Exaggeration, the making of false claims, and the propagation of hallucinatory ideas can be regarded as part of the political culture and prevailing tradition within worker-communism.

<sup>16</sup> For further reading, the book *Worker-Communism Radical Conscience of the Left of Capital* is recommended.

<sup>17</sup> *The Surge of Contract Workers: A Message to Activists in the Workers’ Movement.*

The fundamental question is: in a situation where different currents of capital are, in various forms, generating ambiguity within the ranks of workers, what position should communists and internationalists adopt in relation to the most sensitive issues of the workers' movement? Is it not the duty of communists to defend the independent struggle of the working class? And if so, in what form should support for workers' struggles be expressed?

Support for workers' struggles, unlike that of leftists—whether the Axis of Resistance Left, those with radical rhetoric, or currents and organisations that describe themselves as “independent organisations”—must be based on exposing the concealed nature of the Guild Associations. It must also demonstrate how various tendencies of the left of capital, in different forms, have become extras in the performance staged by the Guild Associations, effectively acting in line with their objectives and thereby obstructing the formation of an independent workers' movement. These issues will be examined in the following section.

## **Independent Proletarian Struggle: a Response to Capitalist Barbarism**

If we temporarily set aside the specific conditions of the oil industry and consider the working class as a global class, one can observe signs of a gradual break from years of passivity, fragmentation, and the passive acceptance of capitalist assaults at the international level. This process is still in its early stages and is confronted with numerous limitations and contradictions. Large sections of the working class remain under the influence of the political and ideological mechanisms of the bourgeoisie, particularly trade unions and the forces of the left of capital.

For this reason, dominant forms of struggle—such as fragmented strikes, controlled demonstrations, occupational and professional divisions, and illusions in bourgeois democracy—continue to prevent workers' struggles from developing into an independent, unified, and class-based movement. As the capitalist crisis deepens and class antagonisms become more pronounced, the counter-revolutionary role of trade unions and currents of the left of capital, regardless of the apparent radicalism or political rhetoric they may display, will become increasingly evident. Therefore, defending the political and organisational independence of the working class and conducting an uncompromising struggle against all forms of bourgeois domination and mediation is a fundamental task for the communist left—a task that, in the present conditions, weighs more heavily upon it than ever before.

We believe that conditions of war, or even a permanent atmosphere of the threat of war, do not provide a suitable context for the growth and deepening of the class struggle. War, regardless of the ideological justifications used to advance it, mobilises the working class behind the fronts of the national bourgeoisie, pushes class consciousness to the margins, and obscures the contradiction between labour and capital by

reframing it as a conflict between nations. The real conditions for the expansion of the class struggle arise not from war hysteria and nationalist mobilisation, but from the deepening of capitalist crises, the intensification of social contradictions, and the growth of workers' class consciousness.

Similarly, unlike the left of capital, which presents “popular movements” as an expression of class struggle, from the perspective of the communist left these movements do not represent the independent interests of the working class. Experience has shown that whenever inter-class protests centred on general and democratic demands become the focal point of developments, workers' struggles, protests, and strikes are pushed to the margins. Conversely, when the working class enters the scene with its own independent demands and methods, and when widespread strikes and class struggles expand, inter-class and popular movements are relegated to a secondary position. From this standpoint, the advance of the class struggle does not lie in the absorption of atomised workers into popular movements, but in the political, organisational, and programmatic independence of the proletariat from all wings of the bourgeoisie and from the forces of the left of capital.<sup>18</sup>

In the specific case of Iran's oil industry, the same tendency can also be observed. First, during the predominance of inter-class

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<sup>18</sup> The Iranian case also largely confirms this claim. During the popular movements of 2017, 2019, and 2022, workers' struggles—particularly protests and strikes—noticeably receded and were overshadowed by inter-class movements. In contrast, in 2018, coinciding with the peak of widespread strikes and protests by workers, especially in Haft Tappeh, Ahvaz Steel, and other production centres, popular movements were pushed to the margins and the workers' struggle became the focal point of protest developments. From the perspective of the communist left, this simultaneity is not coincidental but rather reflects two distinct political dynamics. Popular movements, due to their inter-class character and the dominance of general and democratic demands, tend to obscure the fundamental contradiction between labour and capital and integrate the working class within the framework of shared objectives with other classes. In contrast, whenever the working class enters the scene with its own independent demands, forms of organisation, and political horizon, the class struggle becomes the central axis of social developments, and inter-class movements are relegated to the margins.

democratic movements in 2024, and then with the intensification of a warlike atmosphere and nationalist mobilisation, workers' struggles noticeably receded. However, in recent weeks, and concurrently with a relative reduction in military tensions and a more favourable environment for the articulation of economic and class demands, signs of a resumption of workers' protests have emerged.

This process must be analysed within the context of the general crisis of capitalism, rather than merely on the basis of day-to-day political developments. The historical crisis of capitalism continuously leads to declining living standards, intensified job insecurity, inflation, austerity, the expansion of temporary contracts, and increased exploitation. Capital, both in Iran and globally, is compelled to shift the costs of its crisis onto the working class, and it is precisely this reality that creates the material basis for the expansion of resistance and class struggle.

At the same time, over recent decades the bourgeoisie of the Islamic Republic has pursued a deliberate policy aimed at fragmenting and dispersing the workforce in order to prevent the formation of a unified working-class power. The expansion of contracting companies and the outsourcing of various sectors of industry—particularly in the oil industry—is not merely a managerial or economic method, but a political instrument for weakening workers' class solidarity. This mechanism, on the one hand, distances the main employer from direct responsibility towards workers and, on the other, by dividing workers among dozens of contracting companies, different contracts, and unequal employment conditions, prevents the formation of unity, organisation, and collective action.

As noted earlier, with the deepening of the economic crisis and the relative easing of the warlike atmosphere, there is a possibility that workers' protests and strikes, particularly in the oil industry, may once again enter an upward trajectory. Such a development would represent a serious warning sign for the Iranian bourgeoisie, regardless of its various factions, since the oil industry—due to the concentration of labour power

and its strategic position in the circuit of capital accumulation—has always been one of the most sensitive arenas of class struggle.

The Iranian bourgeoisie, whether in the form of the ignominious Islamic bourgeoisie as the ruling class or in the form of the bourgeois opposition, despite the characteristics of a peripheral bourgeoisie and its historical and political limitations, seeks to draw upon the experience of the bourgeoisie in the advanced capitalist countries in containing the workers' movement and to adapt that experience to the specific conditions of Iran, particularly those of the oil industry. The historical experience of capitalism has shown that the survival of the capitalist order does not rest solely upon naked repression. In many cases, the control, containment, and integration of workers' struggles into legal and institutional mechanisms have proved more effective and less costly than direct violence.

For this reason, it can be expected that, alongside the expansion of workers' struggles, tendencies such as the Guild Associations, trade unionism, syndicalism, and other forms of organisation supported by the various currents of the left of capital will be strengthened further. Among these, the Guild Associations are likely to play an increasingly prominent role in containing and directing workers' protests and, for that very reason, will receive even greater direct and indirect support from the ruling class.

The Axis of Resistance Left, as in the past, will continue to defend the Guild Associations and present their activities as an expression of the class struggle. By contrast, a section of the left of capital with radical rhetoric, without directly referring to the Guild Associations, in practice portrays the organised activities of these bodies as a "workers' surge", a "workers' protest", or similar forms of the independent struggle of the working class. For example, it is sufficient to examine the statements and positions adopted by this current in relation to the protests organised by the Guild Associations in December 2025 to see how these activities are

promoted as expressions of workers' struggle, without any criticism whatsoever of the role or nature of the Guild Associations.

In this way, the left of capital with radical rhetoric effectively becomes an extra in the performance staged by the Guild Associations, serving as their political and propaganda apparatus and contributing to their legitimisation among workers. As workers' struggles expand, this role is likely to become even more pronounced, and we will once again witness leftists, employing radical rhetoric, helping to strengthen institutions whose primary function is to contain the independent struggle of the working class.

From the perspective of communist left, the differences between the various currents of the left of capital are less a matter of substance than of the manner in which they defend these organisations. Even the most radical of these currents generally limit their criticism to the Guild Associations' dependence on the state, rather than to their class nature. Yet the fundamental issue is not simply whether these organisations are legally dependent upon, or formally independent of, the state, but the position they occupy within capitalist social relations. The Guild Associations are institutions that regulate, contain, and manage workers' struggles within the framework of the capitalist order, thereby preventing them from developing into an independent, class-wide struggle.

One of the principal functions of the Guild Associations is to channel workers' protests and strikes into legal and state-controlled avenues and to facilitate the controlled dissipation of workers' class anger. When workers are directed, instead of extending their strikes, establishing general assemblies, forging links with other workplaces, and winning the solidarity of other sections of the working class, towards demonstrations outside parliament, government ministries, or other institutions of the capitalist state, their struggle is diverted from the path of class independence and confined within the legal and political framework of the bourgeoisie. Such a policy not only reinforces the illusion that the capitalist state can serve as the means through which

workers' demands may be addressed, but also prevents workers from relying on their own collective strength, expanding class solidarity, and advancing their demands as the independent demands of a social class confronting the capitalist system as a whole.

In response to the likely growth of workers' struggles, particularly in the oil industry, the more radical sections of the left of capital will also seek to channel these struggles into trade unionism, syndicalism, and other forms of organisation compatible with the capitalist order. The function of these organisations, regardless of the radical rhetoric they may employ, is to contain the independent struggle of the working class, to regulate workers' protests within the framework of the law, and to facilitate the controlled dissipation of class anger. This policy is not merely a temporary danger; it constitutes one of the principal historical obstacles to the advance of the independent workers' movement in general, and of the struggles of oil workers in particular.

At the same time, the left of capital will seek to reduce workers' struggles to fragmented, sectional protests lacking class unity. Strikes that remain isolated from one another, fail to establish links between different workplaces, and are unable to win the active solidarity of other sections of the working class may secure limited concessions, but they will not be capable of shifting the balance of class forces against capital. The real strength of the working class becomes apparent only when strikes spread from one workplace or production unit to others, transcend occupational and sectional divisions, and draw ever broader sections of the proletariat, together with workers' families, into the struggle. Only such a process can compel the ruling class to retreat.

In opposition to these policies of the left of capital, workers possess the valuable experience gained through the struggles of recent years. The experience of free and independent general assemblies has demonstrated that they constitute the most appropriate form of collective decision-making and the direct exercise of workers' collective will. In general assemblies, workers rely upon their own collective strength, determine

the course of the struggle, and assume direct responsibility for its direction.

Alongside the general assemblies, the formation of elected and accountable strike committees to implement the assemblies' decisions, organise the practical conduct of the struggle, and establish links with other workplaces is of decisive importance. Unlike the permanent and bureaucratic structures of trade unions, such committees are instruments of workers' direct self-organisation and can provide the basis for the development of genuine solidarity and class unity on a broader scale.

In our struggle, we can rely only on our own class strength and on the solidarity of other workers. No section of the bourgeoisie, no state, no political faction, and no intermediary institution can serve as an instrument of working-class emancipation. Only from an independent class standpoint is it possible to resist the assaults of capital.

Unlike democratic or anti-dictatorial movements, which confine their horizons to changing the form of government or replacing one faction of the bourgeoisie with another, the workers' struggle, by virtue of its direct confrontation with capitalist social relations, possesses an inherently international and anti-capitalist potential. It can transcend national borders, inspire the solidarity of the proletariat in other countries, and, in the course of its development, challenge the capitalist state as a whole.

The significance of the class struggle is not confined to its immediate economic or political gains. Its historical value lies in the process through which class consciousness, organisation, and solidarity are developed. In the course of collective struggle, workers expand solidarity beyond occupational, sectional, and national boundaries, and gradually free themselves from illusions in bourgeois institutions, thereby creating the material and political conditions necessary for the formation of revolutionary consciousness. It is only within such a process that the proletariat can come to understand that its own emancipation, and the emancipation of all humanity from exploitation, is not achievable

through the reform of capitalism, but only through the abolition of capitalist social relations, the destruction of the capitalist state, and the establishment of a communist society based on production for human need rather than the accumulation of profit. In this sense, the class struggle carries within itself the seeds of **social revolution**.

**Long live the independent workers' struggle!**  
**The future belongs to the class struggle!**

Internationalist Voice

1 July 2026

## **Basic Positions:**

- The First World War was an indication that the capitalism had been a decadent social system. It also proved that there were only two alternatives to this system: communist revolution or the destruction of humanity.
- In our epoch, the working class is the only revolutionary class. Furthermore, only this social class can deliver the communist revolution and end the barbarity of capitalism.
- Once capitalism entered its decadent period, unions all over the world were transformed into organs of the capital system. In turn, the main tasks of unions were to control the working class and mislead them about its class struggle.
- In the epoch of decadent capitalism, participating in the parliamentary circus and elections only strengthens the illusion of democracy. Capitalist democracy and capitalist dictatorship are two sides of the same coin, namely, the barbarity of capitalism.
- All national movements are counterrevolutionary, against the working class and the class struggle. Wars of national liberation are pawns in imperialist conflict.
- The reason for the failure of the October Revolution was the failure of the revolutionary wave, particularly the failure of the German Revolution, which resulted in the isolation of October Revolution and afterwards its degeneration.
- All left parties are reactionary: Stalinists, Maoists, Trotskyists and official anarchists etc. represent the political apparatus of capital.

- The regimes that arose in the USSR, Eastern Europe, China, Cuba etc., while being called “socialist” or “communist”, only offered a particularly brutal and barbaric form of capitalism: state capitalism.
- The revolutionary organization constitutes the avant-garde of the proletariat and is an active factor in the development and generalization of class consciousness. Revolutionary organizations may only take the form of revolutionary minorities, whose task neither is to organize the working class nor take power in its stead, without being a **political leadership**, or a political compass, where revolutionary organizations’ political clarity and influence on the working classes are **the fundamental elements for the implementation of a communist revolution.**

### **Political belongings:**

The current status, positions, views and activities of the proletarian political tendencies are the product of past experiences of the working class and the effectiveness of the lessons that political organizations of the working class have learned during the history of the proletariat. Therefore, Internationalist Voice can trace its own roots and origins back to the Communist League, the First International, the left wing of both the Second International and the Third International, and the fractions that defended proletarian and communist positions against the degenerating Third International, which was represented by Dutch-German fractions, and **particularly Italian Fraction of the Communist Left** and the defence of Communist Left traditions.

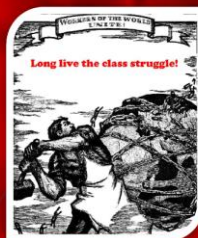
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Track		
06:26	X	Inställt
06:30	X	Inställt
06:36	X	Inställt
06:38	X	Inställt
06:39	X	Inställt
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06:41	X	Inställt
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