

Iranian teachers hold two-day sit-down strike against state repression of nationwide protests

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Teachers in Iran are in the midst of a two-day sit-down strike protest against the brutal state repression meted out against young people participating in anti-regime demonstrations over the past six weeks. The protests began following the death in police custody September 16 of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was detained by the Islamic Republic's morality police for "improperly" wearing the hijab.

The protests have been fuelled by a disastrous social and economic crisis, which is the product above all of the Western imperialist powers' imposition of crippling sanctions on Tehran. While they were initiated in areas of the country with Kurdish majorities, the ethnic group to which Amini belonged, the protests have involved people from all the country's ethnic and religious groups. The protests have been predominantly led by young people and have retained a heterogeneous social character. Initially, the protests were centred on university campuses, but in recent weeks high school students have joined them in significant numbers. The teachers' strike is the largest organised intervention of the working class in the anti-government protest movement to date, following a brief strike earlier this month by oil workers at a facility in southwestern Iran.

Iran's bourgeois-clerical regime has launched a vicious crackdown on the protests, with unofficial sources placing the death toll at around 200. According to Amnesty International, 23 of those deaths were children. The deputy to the commander-in-chief of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, Rear Admiral Ali Fadavi, commented, "The average age of most detainees is 15 years." The Iran-based *Asia* newspaper reported that 42 percent of detained protesters are under 20; 48 percent are aged between 20 and 35; and 10 percent are over 35.

In a statement announcing the teachers' strike, the Coordinating Council of Teachers Syndicates, a union independent of the regime-aligned *shoora* ("workers councils"), cited the brutal treatment of children and young people as its motivation for the job action.

The Coordinating Council emerged from the repeated strikes and protests teachers have mounted since 2018 against low-wages and poor working conditions. The statement declared, "We teachers will be present at schools but will refrain from being present in classes." It continued, "The rulers must know that ... Iran's teachers do not tolerate these atrocities and tyranny and proclaims that we are for the people, and these bullets and pellets you shoot at the people target our lives and souls."

It pledged to "continue our protest until the people's right to

protest is recognised, all pupils are unconditionally freed and return to schools, the system stops killing the people and children, and stops answering the people's rightful demands with bullets."

According to the Council, teachers in at least 15 cities, many of them in Kurdish-majority speaking areas, including Kermanshah, Sanandaj, Mahabad and Marivan participated in the strike. Teachers in Hamedan, in the north-west, Shiraz in the south-west, Lahijan and Bandar Anzali in the Caspian Sea province of Gilan, and Nayshapoor in the north-east also joined the sit-down strike. Media controlled by or close to the Iranian government appear to have blacked out all mention of the teacher protest.

The teachers' council posted pictures of teachers with hand-written protest signs on social media. Slogans included "Don't make schools into garrisons," "Prison is no place for students," and in Kurdish "Women, Life, Freedom." It also reported the arrest of several strike leaders, among them Pirouz Nami, its secretary-general in Khuzestan province.

Elements within the regime are increasingly concerned about the scope of the protest movement and its sustained character. According to Iranian lawmaker Ahmad Alirezabeigi, the hardline Basij state militia, which has played a leading role in suppressing protests, believes the country is "in jeopardy." He admitted that minors have been recruited to assist in the repression. According to one newspaper account, 17 Basij members and seven armed officers were killed during the first month of protests. In Tehran alone, over 800 Basij members have been injured, according to Iran's official IRNA news agency.

Solidarity protests have been held internationally. In one of the largest over the weekend, an estimated 80,000 people marched in the German capital of Berlin. The demonstration was dominated politically by Kurdish nationalist and Iranian exile groups who directed their appeals for "solidarity" to the German Foreign Ministry.

For their part, the imperialist powers are cynically seeking to exploit the protests for their own predatory ends, which are primarily to weaken, if not overthrow, the regime in Tehran and bring Iran more directly under the sway of Western imperialist domination. With breath-taking hypocrisy, the US and European imperialist powers seized over the past week on reports that Iran has dispatched drones and military personnel to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine to ratchet up pressure on Tehran.

The ambassadors to the United Nations from Germany, France, and Britain issued a joint letter, which Washington subsequently

supported, demanding that the UN conduct an investigation into allegations that Iranian-built drones have been used in Ukraine and that Iranian military trainers are active in Crimea. The letter asserted that the three European imperialist powers, which are de facto war parties in Ukraine, would “stand ready to support the Secretariat in conducting its technical and impartial investigation.”

Who are these imperialist warmongers to lecture anyone about sending weapons to a raging military conflict? Their governments not only deliberately provoked the Russian invasion in February 2022 but have sent tens of billions of dollars in high-powered weaponry to Ukraine and Eastern Europe in order to prolong the war and inflict a devastating defeat on Russia so it can be subjugated to the imperialist powers as a semi-colony. These weapons shipments have played the decisive role in producing tens of thousands of casualties on both sides of the conflict, giving the lie to the incessant proclamations by the imperialist warmongers of support for the “Ukrainian people.”

The blather about an “impartial” investigation, overseen by governments responsible for crashing the Iranian economy and creating much of the social and economic devastation driving the protest movement, is a smokescreen aimed at creating the conditions for the imperialist powers to bully the Iranian regime into making concessions to their predatory ambitions. Washington, Berlin, Paris, and London may seek in this way to break the logjam that has hit the talks on reviving the nuclear accord with Iran—the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action unilaterally abrogated by US President Donald Trump in 2018. But a supposedly “diplomatic” solution to the conflict is not the only possibility.

If the reports of Iranian involvement in supporting Russia’s reactionary war in Ukraine turn out to be true, it will open up yet another front in which the US-NATO war on Russia could escalate into a global conflagration. Preparations for an aggressive US-led strike on Iran are already well advanced, as shown most recently by President Biden’s July tour of the Middle East to rally a motley coalition consisting of the Saudi Arabian autocracy, the Gulf sheikhdoms, and Israel to confront Tehran’s economic, political, and military presence in the region.

The Iranian regime, riven by factional conflicts and increasingly backed into a corner by the sustained protests and growth of strikes, has no answer to the imperialist onslaught. A “reform” faction, which held the presidency from 2013 to 2021, advocates reaching a modus vivendi with the US and European imperialists to facilitate Iran’s integration into the world market, a perspective that suffered a devastating blow due to the fate of the nuclear accord. In particular, their hopes that the European imperialists would offer Tehran economic and financial support in the face of Washington’s blowing up of the deal proved to be a disastrous miscalculation.

The other faction, of which President Raisi is a proponent, proposes closer economic and security relations with the bankrupt Russian and Chinese capitalist regimes. This was the motivation behind Iran’s recent decision to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation security alliance as a full member. Such a course would prove no less devastating for the Iranian workers and rural toilers. With the US and its European allies determined to carve up

Russia and seize control of its natural resources and preparing openly for a catastrophic war with China over Taiwan, Iran would be drawn inexorably into a third world war that would be fought with nuclear weapons.

For Iranian teachers, other workers, and young people entering into struggle against the widely despised bourgeois-clerical regime, the urgent task is to fight for the political independence of the working class from all factions of the ruling elite. The struggle against the ruthless state repression of the protests triggered by Amini’s death is doomed to defeat if any confidence is placed in appeals to the imperialist powers and their institutions to protect “democracy” and “human rights,” as shown by the fate of numerous societies that have fallen victim to predatory imperialist wars on precisely such pretexts over the past three decades.

What is above all necessary is for workers to wage their struggle on the basis of the perspective of permanent revolution developed by Leon Trotsky and realised by the Russian working class, under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party, in October 1917. As Trotsky insisted, in countries of belated capitalist development the bourgeoisie is incapable of securing basic democratic rights. Freedom from imperialist oppression, the separation of church and state, civil equality, and the radical restructuring of agrarian relations in favour of the rural masses can and will only be realized through the struggle for workers’ power and socialism in opposition to all factions of the national bourgeoisie.

For Iranian workers, this poses the need of unifying their struggles with the upsurge of worker strikes and protests against the deepening social crisis and price rises across the Middle East and internationally and taking their place in the global fight to build a movement of the working class against imperialist war.



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