

Pay revolt in Iran

Wednesday 20 December 2023, by [KATZ Dan](#) (Date first published: 10 December 2023).

On 2 December 3,000 steel workers at the Isfahan Steel Company struck for better pay. According to the Free Union of Iranian Workers, following a march inside the plant, hundreds of workers in yellow safety helmets rallied outside company buildings chanting in support of their demands. The workers shouted, "Neither batons nor flattery will solve the problem of low and insignificant wages." All three shifts were involved. The results of the strike are not yet clear.

On 6 November 150 building workers from the Arme-No Petrochemical company in Baluchistan went on strike demanding unpaid wages dating back to June 2023.

The repression against strikers in Iran can be severe. In October, 17 workers at the National Steel company in Ahwaz were sentenced to 74 lashes each for protesting against unpaid salaries.

In the strategically important southern oil industry, protests and demonstrations have become more common during the last two months. On 7 December workers at the Abadan oil refinery protested about their status as short-term contract workers, poor pay and payment of unpaid wages. The day before a similar demonstration was held outside the offices of the Aghajari Oil and Gas Company.

Many Iranian National Oil Company units have been transferred to private companies in the past few years. Most work is done by contract workers with low pay and little job security. The contract duration is often between one and three months.

Often these new companies are run by regime cronies or quasi-state bodies.

Protests in the oil industry have mainly been demonstrations, rather than strikes, but recently they seem to have spread to include permanent - relatively privileged - staff as well as contract workers.

A new [report](#) from the Dutch NGO Volunteer Activists suggests that from April to June 2023, the number of workers' protests in Iran rose fourfold compared with the same period in 2022.

For the past four years inflation has run at above 50%. Food inflation hit 79% (IMF data) in April and reached 90% in mid-summer.

Every week pensioners from various professions demonstrate in cities across Iran for better pensions and access to adequate health care. Fixed pensions are being wiped out by inflation. Over the last two years the largest number of worker-protests have been organised by pensioners. Most have involved workers dependent on social security, however another large group were retired Telecom workers who are demanding that regulations from 2010 be implemented. Telecom pensioners lost out following the privatisation of the industry. Demonstrators have chanted, "'Injustice and oppression are enough, our tables have nothing on them."

Life is not so bad for members of the Iranian elite. The latest fraud case which shocked Iranians over the last week implicates officials in the central bank, customs and ministries of agriculture in a \$3.5bn embezzlement scandal at the Debsh Tea Company.

Transparency International ranks Iran as 147th of 180 states in its corruption index.

Corruption has got worse over the last ten years as Iran's ultra-religious hardliners have consolidated their control of the state and US-led sanctions have led to black markets. Recent cases include a \$21bn fraud at Mobarakeh Steel and a \$3bn fraud in Sarmayeh Bank.

Nurses House, an Iranian NGO, states that 3,000 nurses are leaving the country each year, with the health sector now short of 100,000 staff. "[Nurses are] moving to countries such as Germany where they can easily earn €2,500 a month instead of €200 here," (Financial Times, 20 November). 10,000 doctors have left Iran over the last two years.

Between the start of 2018 and March 2023, Iranian nationals formed the largest group reaching the UK after crossing the Channel from mainland Europe in small boats. According to Oxford University's Migration Observatory, 18,000 Iranians made the crossing, or 21 percent of the total.

The 16 September 2022 murder of 22-year-old Mahsa Jina Amini by Iran's so-called Guidance Patrol (or "morality police") provoked a mass upsurge of street protest against the regime, demanding the abolition of the mandatory hijab law for women and often shouting general anti-regime slogans such as "Death to the dictator [the religious leader, 84-year-old "supreme leader," Ali Khamenei, in power since 1989]".

In 2023 the Islamic regime has managed to regain some political control by the extensive use of arrests, state-organised terror, violence and torture, sackings, college expulsions, executions and jailings. At least 22,000 people were arrested for taking action; over 550 were killed and at least eight protesters have been executed.

Jina Amini's father was detained by the regime's Revolutionary Guards on the anniversary of her killing, 16 September 2023, in an effort to stop renewed protests. Last week Jina's parents and brother were stopped from boarding a flight to France where they were due to be presented with the European Union's Sakharov Prize on Tuesday 13 December. The Sakharov Prize is awarded to human rights activists and dissidents, and this year the award is to be awarded posthumously to Jina.

EU President Roberta Metsola demanded that Jina's family be allowed to travel and said, "The European Parliament proudly stands with the brave and defiant who continue to fight for equality, dignity and freedom in Iran."

Recently Iran has ramped up the number of executions carried out. At least 127 prisoners were executed in October and November 2023.

Ethnic minorities, particularly the Sunni Muslim Baluchis of impoverished south east Iran, are overrepresented in execution numbers. Despite being a small minority (less than 5% of the Iranian population) at least 274 Baluch people have been executed on drug-related charges since 2021, 40% of all drug executions.

Five French trade union organisations, including the CFDT, CGT, FSU and Solidarity have denounced the increasing number of executions and repression in Iran. Their declaration also states that, "Women are the first victims of the authoritarian and patriarchal regime."

In a new initiative aimed at intimidating women who refuse to cover their hair Hijab Guards are now patrolling the Tehran metro. Lines of regime-organised women dressed in black chadors and wearing green sashes now line the tube passageways forming "tunnels of horror". Their role is to photograph and confront the many women who now regularly break the Iranian state's misogynistic

dress codes.

Dan Katz

[*Click here*](#) to subscribe to *ESSF* newsletters in English and or French.

P.S.

Workers' Liberty

<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2023-12-10/pay-revolt-iran>