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Privatization of the Economy with the new wave of Terror and Oppression

((From the Internet Site of Tudeh Party of Iran, Dec 21st 2010)

With the launch of the economic reform plan and elimination of government subsidies, we are witnessing a new wave of arrests, executions and an atmosphere of terror in the society.

Soon after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced the launch of the grand economic surgery, security forces arrested and imprisoned a number of political and social activists and journalists in Tehran and other cities.

In the morning of Dec 19th, eleven security officers stormed the residence of Fariborz Raeis Dana, and arrested this member of Writers Guild of Iran. The reason for the arrest has not been announced by either the security forces, or judiciary officials.

The same day, the [pro- Green] internet site *Kalameh* reported that four journalists and social and cultural activists were summoned by the Ministry of Intelligence and detained. Meanwhile, the Judiciary branch, in complete collaboration and coordination with the security-military agencies, and in order to create an atmosphere of intimidation in the society on the eve of launching the elimination of subsidies and rise of prices, has put a number of journalists and trade union activists on trial and sentenced them to prison and firing from work. Lotfollah Meisami, executive director of Iran's Cheshm Andaz ("Iran's Outlook") magazine, and Mohammad Sadegh Javadi Hesar, editor in chief of the banned daily Quds, were put on trial in Tehran and Mashhad, respectively, and were found "guilty". Also, with the decision of Administrative Justice Court, Ali Nejati, the ex-president of the Executive Board of the Haft Tapeh Neyshekar (Sugarcane) union, was expelled from work. Reza Shahabi, a member of Syndica Vahed [union of Tehran Transit employees], was sentenced a second time while in prison, and Jafar Panahi, the popular film maker, was sentenced to 6 years discretionary imprisonment. In addition, he was also banned for 20 years from making or directing any movies, writing any scripts, conducting any interviews and leaving the country.

In continuing with the intimidation, threatening and detentions, and in an act of revenge and hate, eleven detainees were executed in Zahedan prison by the order of the Islamic Revolutionary Court.

Resorting to detention, trail and execution at the launch of the "grand

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economic surgery", which is only and only implemented as prescribed by the World Bank and the IMF and will sharply reduce the buying power of the working people, reflects the fear of coup perpetrators from people and the inability of the theocratic Supreme Leadership to fulfill the society's urgent needs.

Our party categorically condemns the new wave of arrests, unjust trials, and vicious and vindictive executions in Zahedan prison, and calls for immediate release of all the political prisoners including recent detainees, and for revoking inhumane death sentences.

The following pieces are taken from "Nameh Mardom", Central Organ of the Tudeh Party of Iran No. 858, 20th December 2010

Unjust Court Rulings against the Trade Unionists

The trade union of the Haft Tapeh Neyshekar [Sugarcane] workers has strongly condemned, in a statement, the pressures exerted on its members and labour activists, and has demanded an end to unjust rulings by the Islamic Courts. The Ahvaz (city in southern Iran) 13th District Appeals Court sentenced Reza Rakhshan, a member and Interim Chair of the Board of Directors of Haft Tapeh Trade Union, to six months jail time for manufactured and unsubstantiated charge of "propagating lies and false statements".

In the eyes of the Islamic Revolution court, the prime charge against this trade union activist is diligently carrying out his union responsibilities and attempting to organize the workers. The statement released by the Haft Tapeh union reads: "the Ahvaz 13th District Appeals Court has finally sentenced Reza Rakhshan, Chair of our union's Board of Directors to six months in jail on charges of propagating lies…After Ali Nejati, Reza Rakhshan is the second Chair that has received a prison sentence. Before that, other Board members, i.e. Fereydoun Nikou-Fard, Qurban Alipour, Mohammad Heidari-Mehr and Jalil Ahmadi, have each spent six months in prison due to union activities. We consider the court's ruling as harsh and unjust. Once again we reiterate our legal right to defend our lives, our families and the legitimate rights of the workers of the Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Company. Our trade union is the elected organization of the Haft Tapeh workers and considers itself responsible to carry out the duties that the workers have bestowed upon it."

Issuing unjust sentences, intensifying the pressure on labour activists and creating a suppressive environment in the industrial-labour center s is a known policy of the reactionary ruling regime and the coup perpetrators to counteract the protest struggles of the working people. This policy will be pursued more vigorously than in the past for two specific reasons: (a) carrying out the economic reform plan and the elimination of subsidies, and (b) amending the labor law in the context of the "grand economic surgery". Putting pressure on the working people, in fact aims at silencing their voice in seeking their rights, and casting an atmosphere of

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fear and despair on the trade union movement.

The current state of Reza Shahabi, a labour activist and a member of the Syndica Vahed, in prison exemplifies the policy of increasing the pressures. He had embarked on a hunger strike to protest this situation. Prosecuting and persecuting members of Syndica Vahed, Haft Tapeh Union, and Mechanic and Metal Workers' Union are directly in line with this strategy.

Such oppressive conducts will undoubtedly not waiver the workers' resolve. The struggle of the trade union movement will continue.

Protest Statement by Writers Guild of Iran

Writers Guild of Iran has issued a statement to protest the action of security forces in thwarting the ceremonies to remember Mohammad Mokhtari and Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh, two writers who were killed in serial killings known as "chain murders". The statement reads: "This year, too, right from the time when the participants entered the cemetery, they were confronted with a barrage of pressure and threats by the suppressive forces. Nevertheless, a minute of silence was observed in memory of those who gave their lives for freedom and to fight oppression, and the Guild's statement was read. After the crowd was dispersed, here and there some participants were harassed, banners and some cell phones were seized….As in the past, the Guild demands the identification and prosecution of those who masterminded and executed the chain murders. It also recognizes as its inalienable right to freely commemorate those who gave their lives for freedom, anywhere in Iran."

Previously, mercenaries of the dark-minded regime had thwarted similar ceremonies to commemorate Daryoush and Parvaneh Forouhar [leader of the nationalist Peoples Party of Iran and his wife; other victims of "chain murders", who were assassinated in November 1998] by their family and friends.

Despite the measures of the reactionaries, the memory of the victims of "chain murders" is and will be living. The atrocity of the regime in this unforgettable incident is an undeniable testimony to the systematic and planned criminal actions of the security and military ("Sepah" corps) elements of the theocratic regime of Iran.

Our Party honors the memory of the victims of "chain murders", including Dariush and Parvaneh Forouhar, Mokhtari and Pouyandeh, and vehemently condemns the pressure exerted against their families and the Writers Guild, and the barring to freely commemorate them.

The Rising Cost of Medical Care amid the Elimination of Subsidies

The Deputy Head of the Iranian Society of General Physicians has warned that executing the law of "targeted subsidies" will increase the cost of medical care, and expressed concerns that many people will be deprived of

seeing physicians and access to medication. This will face the health of the society with great challenges. On November 27th, Aftab internet news outlet reported that "the Deputy Head of the Iranian Society of General Physicians emphasized that if the health care is not managed well during the implementation of the law of 'targeted the subsidies', illnesses will remain undiagnosed and untreated and the treatment costs over the next three years will become astronomical, leading to 4% of the population falling under the poverty line…As a result of 'targeted subsidies', the private medical centers, where many patients visit, will undoubtedly raise the prices of their services to stay in business because the price of energy (oil, gas, electricity, …) is set to increase…If subsidies are not managed in health care, many of our citizens who are not economically in good shape and situation, will face numerous problems in medical treatment, and 3-4% of our population will fall under the poverty line just with one simple surgery…"

Meanwhile, the officials of the Medical Council of I.R. of Iran have recently stated that they were witnessing an annual increase of 80,000 cancer patients in the country. As reported by ILNA (Iran Labor News Agency) on November 18th, "The deputy director of the Medical Council said that unfortunately, half of these 80,000 cancer patients may die prematurely because the of the advance of the illness…even though there are 61 cancer treatment hubs in the country, despite the efforts that are made for subsidized coverage of cancer patients, the subsidies are not enough for these patients."

With the "targeted subsidies" and the privatized economy as prescribed by the IMF and the World Bank, what will be the future of the people of our country?

The Crisis of Air Pollution and non-Standard Petrol

Due to the continuing extreme air pollution in Tehran and the declaration of a state of emergency, many government offices, schools and universities were closed on and off which caused heavy losses.

On December 5th, ISNA (Iran Student News Agency) quoted the Interior Minister of Ahmadi-Nejad's anti-national government as saying that he would be presenting to the government a special report on Tehran's air pollution in order to make particular decisions. The government and the Tehran city council have so far taken only two actions: sprinkling water in the skies which was just a public relations gimmick, and dividing Tehran's vehicle traffic into vehicles with license plates ending in odd or even digit allowed on the roads in alternate days. According to ISNA's December 5th report, air pollution has increased the concentration of all ozone pollutants and suspending particles less than 10 microns in size, and has reduced the concentration of pollutants such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and suspended particles less than two and a half microns in size. Therefore, the concentration of suspending particles smaller than 2.5 microns exceeded the

acceptable level, taking the air quality index during the last two weeks to warning levels. Such conditions have not only caused massive economic loses, already estimated at more than 10 billion dollars, but have also severely threatened the health of the residents of the Greater Tehran. There is talk of increases in different types of cancer, as well as respiratory and skin ailments.

The regime's propaganda apparatus has been trying to attribute the air pollution to climate changes, drought, less rainfall, and alike. Obviously, all of these factors contributed to Tehran's air pollution and cannot be ruled out. The vital matter here is the role and responsibilities of the national and local governments in preventing, confronting and reducing the capital's air pollution. Ten years ago, a comprehensive plan to reduce Tehran's air pollution was adopted. This plan ended last year, and it was to be replaced with a new plan in partnership with the national government. To date, the coup government has not taken the smallest step to develop this comprehensive plan to reduce pollution. The Head of the Tehran City Council's Environment Committee has criticized the government and stated the government's lack of accountability as one of the reasons for the warning situation in Tehran. ILNA reported on November 29th that "Tehran's air quality crisis is due to the fact that the government did not properly implement the comprehensive plan to deal with air pollution…If that plan was diligently and precisely followed and the appropriate agencies had checked it regularly, today we would have not been witnessing this air crisis and emergency situation…"

On December 7th, the [pro-Green] internet site *Kalameh* exposed the fact that one of the major factors in Tehran's air pollution has been the production and distribution of non-standard petrol from Iran's petrochemical plants by the order of Ahmadi-Nejad's government. *Kalameh* wrote: "The most obvious consequences of Tehran's air pollution have been an increase in the death rate and the hospital intensive care units running at full capacity. The high air pollution in Tehran is due to the production of non-standard petrol by the Ahmadi-Nejad government in domestic plants as a public relation gesture and propaganda and to claim fight against sanctions. This product is known to be carcinogen and the main contributor to Tehran's air pollution. Mohsen Nariman, member of parliament from Babol, has also exposed the link between the non-standard petrol and air pollution, which has been exacerbating at an unusually rapid pace…"

There is no aspect of life that the anti-national Ahmadinejad government has not impacted in a devastating manner.

The Executive Order on Article 44 and the Operation of Foreign Insurance Companies

The parliamentary debates about the government bill for the fifth development plan was accompanied by the high pitch efforts of the coup government for implementing the

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executive order of the Supreme Leader on the Article 44 [of constitution] for the privatization of banks, the primary and strategic industries and insurance companies. The government has also been pushing for the passage of laws to enable presence of foreign-based insurance companies in the domestic market.

During the discussions about section 97 of the fifth plan bill in relation to trade activities and path to join the World Trade Organization, a group of parliament members, especially supporters of the government, drew attention to the "orders" of the Supreme Leader with regards to article 44. When the time came to debate section 106 of the bill, these same members based their argument on the same executive order to allow foreign insurance companies presence in, and access to the domestic markets. On November 20th, ISNA reported that "this enactment by parliament allows foreign insurance companies to open offices in the country…The objective is to encourage foreign insurance companies to partner with domestic ones, primarily the private sector, to establish joint venture companies in Iran, to attract foreign capital by private insurance companies, and also to allow the opening of branches and offices of foreign insurance companies [in Iran]…"

It was brought up during the debates that although the Constitution absolutely forbids granting of licenses to foreign industrial, agricultural and mining companies, but the Supreme religious Leader has resolved this legal problem by decreeing article 44.

ILNA reported on November 22nd that the parliament member from Varamin stated that "section 106 (establishment and operation of private and foreign insurance companies) has created a bigger capacity to attract foreign investment." The parliament's Deputy Speaker, emphasizing the importance of privatization based on article 44, stated that "the Guardian Council did not find any conflict between Article 81 and the law to allow registration of foreign companies. Therefore, there would be no obstacle for the legal presence of foreign insurance companies."

Privatization of the primary and strategic industries, banks and insurance companies fits in the plan of the Islamic Republic to join the World Trade Organization. Even though the requirement to join the WTO by the end of the second year of this five-year development plan was discarded so that the government would not have to develop and prepare the economic foundations of the country for joining, it does not mean that the theocratic regime is not mindful of the prescriptions dictated by this organization. All of the Islamic Republic's economic and social policies and strategies are based on the models presented by the WTO, and the prescriptions of the IMF and the World Bank. Meanwhile, the rights of the overwhelming majority of the people, and first and foremost the working people, are ignored and trampled, and the improvement and blossoming of the national economy is forgotten●

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