

Bus Driver Union Leader Reza Shahabi's Speech at the Congress of the General Confederation of Labour in Dijon/France, Mai 13 2019

Comrades and Friends,

I am Reza Shahabi. I am a member of the board of directors of the Syndicate of Bus Drivers. First, I must say that I am honoured to participate in the fifty-second congress of your syndicate, and congratulate you on organizing your congress on behalf of our syndicate. Comrades! While I am glad to be here in your company, I cannot hide my worries from you. At this moment I am deeply concerned about my friend and fellow syndicate member Hassan Saeedi, who was arrested a few days ago, and is still in prison. I am deeply concerned about other friends, workers and students, who were arrested only for participating in the peaceful assemblies on International Labor Day.

Comrades, last year, according to official figures, 1,700 protests and strikes by workers took place in Iran. That means more than four protests and strikes a day. Strikes at Haft Tapeh, Arak, and Ahwaz have echoed throughout Iran, and enjoyed the solidarity of teachers, retirees, and other sectors of the labour movement.

Today, having independent labour organizations in Iran has become urgent and has attracted the attention of the workers' leaders, but the Iranian regime is suppressing any attempt toward organizing workers. Our bus drivers syndicate, as one of the oldest syndicates in Iran, has fought with all its strength and paid a heavy price for that struggle. As a case in point, Ibrahim Madadi and Dawud Razavi, have each been sentenced to five years. Hassan Saeedi, Nasser Moharamzadeh, Hossein Karimi and Mrs Farahnaz Shiri have been fired for more than ten years due to their efforts to establish a syndicate and workers' rights. I myself have been in prison for more than six years of my life, in the worst circumstances, and have been fired for more than ten years because of union activities.



Reza Shahbi and Philippe Martinez (CGT)

It may seem incredible, but in Iran and just a few days ago, we were arrested and beaten for holding the May Day commemoration with more than thirty other workers and their adult children who were students. I was in jail until five days ago, when I was temporarily released on heavy bail. It is also necessary to point out that two of the detainees in the recent protests of the Haft Tapeh workers in southern Iran, including Mr. Ismail Bakhshi and Ms. Sepideh Gholiyan, are still being held in appalling conditions.

Comrades and Friends! Your syndicate is a familiar name to Iranian labour and union movements. Your syndicate has also been proactive and effective in international solidarity efforts. French trade unions have worked hard to defend Iranian trade union activists including myself. This collective and the way in which it supports Iranian Syndicates has become a model for others. We need this solidarity in other countries.

At the end of my speech, I would also like to comment on global and regional issues: we are opposed to the wars the capitalist governments impose across the world, especially in the Middle East. Military threats and sanctions have no real impact but make life worse for workers in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and so on. We do not have illusions about the support of any of the capitalist blocs for the workers, what we need is the solidarity of the workers across the world. And, finally, I wish that this Congress and its results would have a useful role in your struggle.

Long live the international solidarity of the working class

Thank you