



London Retired Members Branch

Solidarity with Esmail Abdi and the Iranian Teachers!

Education International (EI) has again drawn attention to the treatment of teachers' leader Esmail Abdi by the Iranian regime. In November 2016 EI called for member organisations to protest against the six year prison sentence imposed on Esmail. The account accompanying EI's appeal vividly highlights the class character of recent regime actions and their context. It also draws attention to the labour movement core of opposition to those actions internationally:

"Education International... has informed the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the charges, including one for 'assembling and colluding against national security', are unjust and contravene various human right conventions, including those protecting freedom of expression and association, as well as the right of unions to be consulted on education policies. Abdi, along with three other Iranian teacher unionists, had already been unfairly detained in July 2015 to prevent them from attending the 7th EI World Congress in Ottawa, Canada. A hunger strike by Abdi and massive solidarity campaigns launched in Iran and by unions across the world resulted in his release in May 2016."

Iranian education workers and students are facing a sustained state offensive over issues familiar enough to ourselves in recent years. Notable among these is privatisation of swathes of public education provision. Unlike in Britain thus far, however, the typical *modus operandi* of the Iranian regime is at once essentially and overtly coercive, and consistently so. Both the nature of the charges and the severity of sentencing in Esmail's case permit no other interpretation. As far as the labour movement is concerned, police and security methods are as central to the strategy of the clerical regime as they were to that of the Shah who preceded them. Such methods are inseparable from the refusal of the right to independent association for Esmail and others in the front line that the regime has created.

The treatment of non-compliant teachers, however, is part of a broader picture. For all the anti-American rhetoric of the regime, its economic policies are firmly within the parameters of international ruling class neoliberal perspectives. They are broadly what global capital wants and expects. The ongoing hounding of Esmail and other trade unionists is central to this repressive and reactionary strategy. Moreover the parallel with state victimisation of the leadership of the Bahrain Teachers Association is striking. It is important that we oppose both foci of reaction and repression equally, supporting working class struggle against them when and as we are able.

Proposed actions:

- first, that the branch sends a collective letter of protest to the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- second, that as individual branch members we support the LabourStart petition calling for release of Esmail. As at the time of writing the petition has 8014 supporters. If you have not done so already, please sign and help push the total towards 10,000. Urge friends and contacts, including members of other unions, to do the same;
- third, that we encourage expression of class solidarity with Iranian teachers more broadly

throughout UCU, initially at regional level, as well as further afield within the labour movement;

- fourth, that as a branch we seek to collaborate with the International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran. The IASWI is a consistent supporter of Esmail Abdi and other workers in struggle within the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Some links:

EI's November statement on Esmail Abdi:

https://www.ei-ie.org/en/news/news_details/4161

An earlier UCU London Retired Members branch report on Iran and state victimisation of teachers and other organised workers there:

<http://www.ucu-retired-london.org.uk/pdf/Release-teacher-union-leader-Esmail-Abdi.pdf>

Recent report from NASUWT on Esmail Abdi:

<https://www.nasuwt.org.uk/article-listing/calls-for-freedom-for-jailed-head-of-itta.html>

International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran website homepage:

<http://www.workers-iran.org/index.php?lang=en>

The LabourStart petition can be signed at:

https://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=3223

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