

# LETTER FROM IRANIAN WORKERS

(1991)

*This open letter to South African workers is by Yadollah Khosrovshahi, who was on the executive committee of the Iranian National Oil Workers' Union that led the oil strike which was the backbone of the struggle to overthrow the shah in 1979. He is a member of the Association of Iranian Refugee Workers, Britain. The letter was written after considering the developing situation in South Africa.*

Comrades, brothers and sisters, first of all we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for your recent magnificent general strike and, at the same time, pay tribute to those workers who lost their lives for it. [This refers to the two-day strike of 4.5 million workers three weeks before, called by the COSATU trade union federation, which opposed a new VAT tax.]

We are anxiously following your struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa. We are aware that apartheid is not simply racial discrimination, which is based on the colour of the skin to deny you your democratic rights, encouraging contempt and social degradation. Rather, alongside that, the apartheid regime is meant to deprive you of your equal share of the social product, of which you are the main producer, and of your social needs.

Apartheid's ugly face can be seen by the imposition upon you of the harshest conditions of exploitation — mass unemployment, lack

of decent accommodation, poor health service, no proper education, wage and job discrimination, lack of work-safety, shanty towns, etc.

Over ten years ago, we in Iran rose up against the capitalist regime in the hope of emancipating ourselves from the same sufferings as yours. In the course of our revolution, in order to show our class solidarity with you, we turned off the oil taps to the apartheid regime in South Africa.

During the revolution, a whole spectrum of political currents — ranging from liberal through reformist to Islamic — arose with the aim of stifling the revolution. These political currents had already started to strike deals with the different governments of the late shah and their international allies before the revolution. The very same army, as brutal as the one in South Africa, which every day was ruthlessly killing workers and other citizens, they described as our brothers.

However, despite their sinister wishes, the revolution swept away the shah's regime, and inflicted a very severe blow to the oppressive machine of the capitalist government. Even before the revolution, workers' councils mushroomed all over the country.

But a section of the capitalist class, using Islamic ideology, which was supported directly and indirectly by all the right and left political currents, crept into power. Their goal was to reharness the working class and crush the revolution. We were not class conscious, and as a result we lost ground.

At the beginning of the revolution, we were strong and the enemy was weak. The leadership of the Islamic regime flattered us. They shouted that they supported the deprived masses nationally and internationally. Ayatollah Khomeini hypocritically told us that he would kiss the rough hands of workers and that God himself was a worker.

But at the very same time the Islamic regime ordered its *Pasdaran* [Revolutionary Guards] to attack, arrest and kill the homeless workers and masses who were squatting in homes left by the capitalists who had run away. They fired and killed the marching, unemployed workers. During these attacks, we were told: 'Do not go on strike, withdraw your demands. Strikes, marching for wages,

job security, unemployment benefit and so on will weaken the government in the face of imperialism.'

Today, we understand with much regret that the only genuine struggle against imperialism is the unconditional struggle in support of our demands.

The Islamic regime cleverly exploited our ignorance and swiftly established itself in office.

During the uprising, we had taken over the army garrisons, captured the weapons and handed them over. Then we found that we were being punished because we had dared to challenge the sacred state of the bourgeoisie.

Using religion and our illusions, before our unbelieving eyes, they sacked, arrested and executed communists and militant workers from factory councils because they were not Muslims. Our tragedy was complete when the regime restored the battered state of the shah.

Today, under the Islamic regime, the working class is even deprived of the basic rights to strike and to have independent organisations — the same as it was under the shah. Now millions are unemployed, working hours are very long, and the average wage is less than £1 per day. In short, the capitalists are exploiting us. While we grapple with all the problems of deprivation, the Islamic regime and the capitalists are overjoyed.

Comrades, brothers and sisters, the bitter experience of workers in Iran shows that in South Africa, too, the African National Congress leadership and Nelson Mandela are playing the same role as the Islamic regime did in Iran.

We believe that the ANC is a bourgeois current. Now that apartheid is dying away, it aims to maintain the old order by generating illusions among the workers and getting some concessions for the black capitalists. The ANC intends to get rid of some of the features of apartheid, but keep in place the real capitalist exploitation of the workers. It is this strategy that all bourgeois currents, whether religious or non-religious, carry out nationally and internationally. They support such cosmetic changes in apartheid.

Comrades, brothers and sisters, our emancipation from the misery of the wage-labour exploitation of capitalism is solely our own task. We, the world working class, have no option but to put our lives and souls together in unity, as the capitalists have already done.

Let us hope that you will organise your ranks independently of all non-working-class currents and, by raising immediate welfare, democratic and economic demands, ensure the most favourable conditions to march towards the socialist revolution.

Workers of the world unite!