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Iran

**"It's not a protest movement,
it's an uprising: we don't
expect anything from the
regime"**

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Soheyla, an activist of Socialist Solidarity with Workers in Iran (SSTI - France based), answered our questions during the demonstration in solidarity with the Iranian people, on Sunday 9 October in Paris. Interview by Antoine Larrache.

What are the origins of this mobilization?

There have been so many things before. To get to the point, there are the poor living and working conditions, the lack of individual and collective freedoms, a very serious economic crisis which has been going on for a very long time and which is getting worse day by day. This goes hand in hand with an increasingly brutal repression of any protests. It all came together to help spark the present struggle; all it took was one drop to overflow, and it's come to this.

The question of women is of course primordial. The way in which the Islamic Republic treats women and in particular the dress code it imposes on them, particularly wearing the hijab, galvanizes all the issues around them. It's something very striking, it was a significant trigger.

Is the mobilization carried out by women or is it broader?

It's much broader now, it concerns all layers of society, all age groups. Of course, it started with women and young people, but now it is spreading, although the core remains made up of university and high school students. The whole population is now contributing to this movement. It has spread to the most popular social strata. Yesterday, in the poor neighbourhoods of Tehran, very important movements broke out.

What demands are people fighting for?

I take the liberty of saying that this is not a protest movement, it is an uprising: nothing is expected from the regime. The slogans relate to the overthrow of the regime: "down with the dictatorship", "down with the supreme guide." The political regime is directly targeted, the people aspire to overthrow it.

Are there any links to the Arab uprisings?

Definitely. Some of the roots of the discontent that is the same. It's the same everywhere: poor living conditions, poor economic and social conditions, social injustice, political and social repression and so on. All of this contributes to the emergence of popular movements.

But there are also "Iranian specificities": we are dealing with a theocratic regime, an Islamic dictatorship that imposes Sharia law on women and men citizens. This attacks collective and individual freedoms, particularly those of women. The regime in place tries to make women half of men. It represses women's rights to the point of controlling their dress, and forces them to wear the Islamic veil in public. And it is not by chance that the last straw was the murder of a young girl while in the custody of the morality police. All this explains why the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" has become a central motto of the movement.

Are there self- processes of self-organization?

"It's not a protest movement, it's an uprising: we don't expect anything from the regime"

Absolutely. It is both sporadic and more or less organized, as in universities, by student associations for example. In the street, people gather, chant slogans, discuss, but the forces of repression intervene. Demonstrations are organized simultaneously in several parts of a city, which helps to disperse and disorganize the repressive forces.

Is the mainstream labour movement involved?

The leaders of the main organizations have been imprisoned for six months. They were involved in the mobilizations that took place at that time in all the small and medium-sized towns, where there were demonstrations, especially by teachers. It shook the country, with demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes. Bus drivers in Tehran, for example, were mobilized. Imprisoning leaders makes them invisible on the streets, but the political connections exist.

What role does solidarity play here?

It is very important. Fortunately the solidarity movement is extremely widespread, all over the world and in all countries, including Western ones. I would like the radical left to be more present, because there is a kind of recuperation of the movement by right-wing groups and royalists. The presence of the radical left is important to help combat this orientation.

Breaking news (12 October): Since Monday 11 October, workers at the Asalouyeh petrochemical complex and refinery in southern Iran have gone on strike and blocked the main road. The strike is in support of the ongoing uprising. In 1979, the general strike, particularly that of oil workers, was an important element in making the revolution possible and bringing down the Pahlavi dynasty.

9 October 2022

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