



Colour revolutions, imperialism and Iran

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The character of the current movement, the role of imperialism in the crisis and Leninist-Trotskyist strategy for the Iranian Revolution.

Some have argued that the protest movement in Iran is similar to the 'colour revolutions' that happened in Ukraine, Georgia and Serbia.

Whilst nothing is certain in such complex situations, even for people living in Iran, it is clear that the protests, no matter the original cause of the protests, took on a life of their own and become a genuine mass democratic movement. This is the starting point for a socialist intervention into the struggles currently taking place.

Colour revolutions

So is this protest movement a nefarious, Washington-funded army of stooges, marshalled on behalf of imperialist business interests?

President Obama appears lukewarm about the protests, no doubt a pragmatic response to the reality that, whichever side wins, he has to deal with them, so a resounding declaration for a candidate who loses does not endear Obama to the victor. Another factor is that he knows that publicly backing Mousavi as a more 'reasonable' leader would seriously undermine his supporters in a country with a strong anti-imperialist, anti-US political mood.

Imperialism certainly does have a vested interest in ensuring regime change in Iran, it is a crucial country economically (oil), politically (hardline Islamist regime) and geographically (Middle East, bordering on Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan). If an imperialist power could get its hands on Iran, either through a more friendly regime or the direct installation of a some kind of puppet government, that would be a massive gain.

The protest movements in the 'colour revolutions', such as in Ukraine or Georgia, had strong similarities with each other and threads linking them back to Washington. For instance, the National Endowment for Democracy, a shadowy imperialist NGO which spends its time funding US-controlled 'opposition' movements across the world, has no clear, public and direct connection with today's protests. The websites that have received funding from such organisations as the NED were actually totally undermined by taking the 30 pieces of silver from the US over the last five years, and certainly do not have the resources or implantation to organise mass movements on this scale.

Compared to the colour revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, where protesters were well financed, often in uniforms (common coloured T-shirts) with a well produced and slick media marketing campaign to back them up, this is certainly not in the same league. Often the protesters in those 'democracy movements' came from a single political party with a unified command structure. But this movement slipped out of the hands of Mousavi and moved rapidly into a confrontation with the state that propelled him to try and come to the head of it (in order to control it).

However, things may not be what they seem. Of course, everyone knows that the Obama administration leaned on Twitter, the social networking website, to reschedule important maintenance during the height of the early stages of protest mobilisation so that would have disrupted the activists' organisation.

In 2005, there was a meeting in Dubai for Iranian political dissidents at which a 'skills sharing workshop' was held by

?a mixture of Los Angeles-based, exiled Iranians, Americans... and three Serbs who said they belonged to the Otpor democratic movement that overthrew the late Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic in 2000? (Asia Times March 14 2006). This is a clear connection to the colour revolutions, but what is not clear is how many of these activists there are and how many are in the Reformist party and its periphery.

There is also every reason to believe that there are CIA agents inside Iran, agitating and whipping up discontent. There is evidence pointing to US Special Forces activity in Iran since 2005, as US agents were sent across the border from Iraq. But the dynamic that is at work from Washington is a deeply opportunist one. It would certainly be naïve to think that the US would allow such a turbulent political event to go by without using it to their maximum advantage, although not because they want genuine reform, democracy or a popular revolutionary movement, such a prospect is a nightmare for the imperialists. They may well opportunistically use Mousavi's supporters simply to bring down the current regime in order to install someone new, who may turn out to be more pliable. The inverse of the old phrase ?better the devil you know? ? for the US, Mousavi may be a slightly less fiery devil.

Mousavi, for his part, has largely stayed quiet about the West. His track record is mixed; his anti imperialist credentials are blotted by instances of collusion with the US, as is the case for nearly every Iranian leader. As prime minister during the 1980s, he was directly involved in the Iran-Contra scandal (receiving weapons in exchange for US hostages). Maybe the west thinks they can do business with him? But he has made it clear that he intends to pursue the development of nuclear power in Iran, something the US would resolutely oppose. But Mousavi has his own connections, by varying degrees of separation, to powerful people in Washington. The one most frequently cited is Manuchehr Ghorbanifar, a self confessed ?exile? from the regime and a key Iran-Contra go-between. He is not only one of Mousavi's closest friends, but also a close friend of some pretty unsavoury neo-liberals in the US.

Judge a man by his friends, indeed, and workers and youth should have no illusions in Mousavi's class credentials or about his history. He may well be a future candidate for a colour revolution, or this may even be a colour revolution that has got out of control, become too militant and radical. The crucial argument now is to expose Mousavi as the fake prophet of change and to develop and deepen a left wing, progressive wing of the movement that can take steps to establish a genuine revolutionary force in Iran.

Reza's crocodile tears

The US media carried images on 22 June of Reza Pahlavi, the son of the ex Dictator of Iran, crying as he spoke about the demonstrators who had been shot. Pulling out a picture of Neda Agha Soltan, the 26 year old philosophy student who was shot dead by Basiji militiamen, he wiped tears from his eyes, calling her ?his daughter? and expressing regret for the thousands who had died or ?disappeared? in Iran since 1979. Pahlavi either suffers from amnesia or is a disgusting hypocrite. Thousands of people were tortured and killed under his father?s US backed regime whose secret police showed no mercy for political opponents. Pahlavi senior was even a chosen favourite of arch-imperialist Henry Kissinger. Of course, the current regime in Iran learnt a lot from his methods and techniques of controlling the population.

There should be no mistake, the US is poised in the wings, waiting for an opportunity to strike. Back in the days of the Bush administration, the US government passed a bill, the Iran Freedom and Support Act of 2004, which made explicit their desire for regime change. The Act provided \$1.5 million for ?educational, humanitarian, and non-governmental organizations and individuals inside Iran to support the advancement of democracy and human rights in Iran.?

Obama may reflect a slightly differently strategy, ostensibly based more on dialogue than conflict, but this only covers the ultimate goal on which all of the US ruling class is united. Iran must become pro-west, in other words, pro neoliberal, free market invasion and the opening up its oil to the needs of European and US markets. The only debate they have is over how to get there.

The working class must take steps to ensure that the imperialists cannot use this political crisis to gain a foothold in Iran. Anti-imperialism is a key political line to hammer home, again and again; there can be no compromise with the west, no compromise with Obama, or the EU or any of those predatory imperialist forces.

How to free Iran from imperialism

Despite the claims of the Islamists to be anti imperialist fighters, in reality, they are not. Islamists in power are more than happy to work with the US and European imperialists, as the Taliban did in the mid 90s, as the Saudi royal family does now and as Ahmadinejad has done over US foreign policy in the Middle East and central Asia since 2001.

This is because as long as capitalism rules in a country, even if the economy has an Islamist colouration, it will be tied to, and subordinated by, imperialist capital. Imperialism is not just a military or a political dimension, it is also economic. As long as the world markets can penetrate into the Iranian economy, no matter how tightly the regime seeks to control it, Iran will be left dominated by western powers. Its regime must always seek to balance the two competing forces, the desire of the Iranian people for freedom from imperialist control and the world order that is dominated by imperialism. That is why its regime is so brutal; it must crush genuine revolutionary movements and act as a go-between with the world powers, whilst trying to pursue its own interests.

The strategy of permanent revolution, as outlined by the Russian revolutionary Trotsky, is the only way to both create genuine mass democracy and free Iran from imperialism. Turning the fight for democracy into a fight for workers' power would progressively undermine capitalism in Iran. The Iranian bourgeoisie and its ruling elite, the Mullahs, cannot lead a genuine anti imperialist fight. Clearly, if US and European armed forces invaded Iran tomorrow, then they would mount some kind of defence, but the Iranian capitalist class would prefer to make some kind of deal with US imperialism than die defending their nation. Mousavi and Rafsanjani, in a kind of oblique way, represent this wing of the ruling class.

Workers can take the lead in fighting back against capitalism. In 1979, workers' shoras (councils) were created which coordinated the strike whilst also beginning to organise distribution of some goods and services and even in some place organising production, in other words they functioned as an alternative source of power.

A planned economy, under direct, democratic control by the working class, would remove Iran from the imperialists totally. It would be able to use Iran's great oil wealth to massively improve the life of ordinary Iranians, many of whom live in abject poverty, with heroin addiction and prostitution rates amongst the highest in the world.

Only a working class struggle for power, then, can defeat the state, develop a consistent anti-imperialist programme and build an economy that is beyond the control of the capitalists and the imperialists. If the working class remains on the sidelines for much longer then the moment will be lost to smash the Iranian clerical dictatorship off the face of the earth. If this opportunity is missed then how long the Iranian workers, women and youth will have to wait for another chance is a question that nobody can answer.

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