

For freedom from the regime and freedom from imperialism ? a Letter to Iran

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The increasingly public divisions within Iran's dictatorial regime have prompted a new wave of demonstrations.

International press agencies describe these as 'spontaneous' but, as Trotsky said of the 1917 February Revolution in Russia, that only means that they do not know who organised them. In towns and cities across the country, activists are mobilising thousands around the demands for democracy and an end to the dictatorship. It is to those activists and their supporters that we write this letter.

The Iranian regime is the enemy of the Iranian people. It preaches Islamic morality whilst it grows fat on the profits from the oil and other resources of the country. The working class toils under a police state, supervised and controlled by armed guards. The regime uses the thugs of the Pasdaran and the Basiji to beat protesters and crush dissent. Young people are criminalised for wanting more freedoms. Political activists are arrested and imprisoned, tortured and killed. Iranians are treated not as citizens, as 'the sovereign people' but as unreliable children in need of constant guardianship by the clergy, the velayet-e faqih. But the clergy itself is subjected to the guidance of a Supreme Leader, appointed for life.

This is a mockery of a Republic or of democracy. Even so, the pressure of the people makes itself felt even in the highest and most privileged circles. Now it is plain that the clerical ruling caste is deeply divided as to who should rule. Khamenei is seeking to strengthen the dictatorship while Rafsanjani and Mousavi believe the Islamic Republic must be reformed to save it from ultimate collapse.

The Iranian people need and demand democracy ? but 'rule by the people' must be more than the right to vote for candidates already selected by the senior clerics. The hold of the clerical caste must be broken and the will of the sovereign people expressed by equal, direct and secret ballot, with all candidates and parties who wish to stand free to do so. The people need no self-appointed guardians.

But even such free and fair elections, enormously important as they are, would not guarantee the people's needs. Millions of workers in the richest countries in the world have the right to vote for whoever they like but face a future of unemployment, homelessness and soup kitchens because they have no control over their countries' economies.

Moreover, a democratic Iran would still face the economic and military power of the imperialist states. Waiting to take advantage of the troubles in Iran are the CIA and the other imperialist agencies, preparing to place another Shah on the throne, backed up by US troops. The western powers are no friends of the Iranian masses ? they look at Iran's oil and gas reserves with jealous eyes, desperate to control them. The

imperialists and their organisations like the UN and IMF must be rejected ? no illusions and no support for these thieves!

The immediate mass protests after the stolen election failed to break the regime. What is needed is nothing less than a revolution, the overthrow of the entire system. Lenin said that those who make half a revolution do not make any revolution, but they dig their own graves ? this lesson must be learnt in Iran. The working class, the key social force that could overthrow the regime, the force that toppled the Shah, did not mobilise during the recent protests in an organised way. Why should they? If the demand of the movement is simply to allow Mousavi another chance at being elected ? what would the workers gain? They remember what he did to the socialists in the 1980s, he is no friend of the working people.

The pre-condition for success is independence from all wings of the regime; whatever the factional differences between the Khamenei/Ahmedinejad and the Rafsanjani/Mousavi cliques, both wish to preserve the clerical guardianship over the people, both stand for a capitalist Iran, both stand for privatisation of state assets. Heidari Kord-Zangeneh, Ahmadinejad's deputy finance minister and head of the Iran Privatisation Organisation, made a pre-election promise, ?If I am here for the next two years, between 80 and 90 percent of the government will be sold?. (Iran Daily, 2/12/08).

Only demands which activate the class struggle in Iran can hope to bring down the regime and end capitalism ? the system that exploits and impoverishes the great majority of Iranians but is supported by all wings of the regime.

The revolutionary struggle must certainly start from the fight for democracy, but must gather its strength by widening and deepening its support amongst wider layers, drawing the working class into the fight. This means also raising the most important demands of the workers over pay, working conditions, trade union rights, jobs. Using militant methods of class struggle; mass mobilisations, strikes, occupations, the working class can become the driving force of the struggle, the key fighter in the battle against the government.

These struggles will raise the question of who runs society? Who rules? Who has the power? At this point, a concerted and serious push for power by the working class can win over wavering sections of the middle classes, drawing in more of the rural poor and breaking a section of the army away as people see that a serious fight is on for the future of Iran. The question of the state forces can be resolved only in one way; the Iranian state must be smashed in the act of revolution.

The demand for a constituent assembly must be made popular across Iran. A general strike by workers to demand its convening would break the regime. Shoras should be built at every level from the local to the national to co-ordinate this fight. Only they can be trusted to bring about genuinely free elections to create an assembly that is genuinely representative of the majority. The task of the constituent assembly would be to totally rewrite the Iranian constitution. Within this process, workers and revolutionaries would fight for the abolition of capitalism and the creation of socialism.

The Shoras would form an excellent base from which to create such a government, one that is really democratic and responsive to the needs of the people. This would be nothing less than a revolution, placing the control of society in the hands of the workers, peasants and youth. A workers' and peasants' government, based on the Shoras and defended by workers' and peasants' militia, must be created. Its economic aim should be the complete expropriation of industry, finance and transport from the hands of the Iranian ruling class and the democratic planning of the economy.

There is absolutely no doubt that workers, youth and peasants would have to fight to make this happen, no class ever gives up power voluntarily, without a fight. But a revolution in Iran against Islamic reaction and

the misery of capitalism would also undoubtedly have powerful allies. It would set the whole region on fire, helping the masses to overthrow the treacherous regimes in countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

This goal may sound almost impossible ? but it is not. The start of the revolution is contained in the protests and demonstrations in Iran ? that is why the regime fears and hates the democracy movement so much. It is why Mousavi works behind the scenes to stop it from growing out of control.

What would be impossible would be for such a revolution to happen spontaneously. Those who want to see such a revolution have to organise themselves to intervene in the existing movement, to lead it in that direction. In other words, what is needed is a revolutionary party, conscious of its role and prepared to take the right action. This party must be built now ? otherwise the movement will falter, lose momentum and allow reaction to regain the initiative, all that was gained will be lost.

Obviously in the current situation security is crucial. Covert meetings must be held across the country ? activists must organise and go to the working class with a programme of economic, democratic and revolutionary demands. A conference must be held and a revolutionary party organised ? without it no fundamental social change is possible. The alternative is that every decade a new generation of student activists will take to the streets, face the bullets and batons of the regime, and be defeated. An underground revolutionary party, prepared and built now, can change the balance of forces favourably towards the workers, peasants and radical youth.

We would propose as the key elements of such a party's action programme:

Neither Khamenei and Ahmadinejad nor Mousavi, Rafsanjani and Khatami!

The workers? and democracy movement must not fight for the interests of any faction of the ruling class. It must fight for its own democratic and social goals.

Free all political prisoners and trade union militants.

For the right to demonstrate and assemble.

For freedom of the press and the electronic media

Dissolve the basij militia and bring to popular justice the murderers and torturers of the people.

Full trade union rights for all workers.

No to the privatisation of public enterprises! No to price liberalisations and cuts in food subsidies,

Build defence forces in every factory and place of struggle!

Full equality and emancipation for all women!

For free sexuality and an end to sexual oppression by the regime.

Establish shoras to co-ordinate the resistance against the regime.

For a nationwide general strike.

For a revolutionary constituent assembly.

Self determination for the national minorities in Iran.

For a massive programme of public works, paid for by taxing the rich, to give work to the unemployed, transform the slum conditions of millions in the major cities and bring modern services to the countryside.

Expropriation of the big landowners ? land to those who work on it.

Build a revolutionary party, as part of a revolutionary, fifth international .

For a workers? and peasants? government.

For international working class solidarity with the Iranian democracy movement

For protest actions in front of Iranian embassies! For material aid to the Iranian workers? movement! The international workers? movement must fight alongside the Iranian democracy movement against imperialist attempts to regain their influence in Iran as it was under the Shah! No new Western puppet! For unconditional solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle and the resistance in Lebanon and Iraq! A workers? and peasants? government would not use material support as a tactical tool to increase the influence of the Iranian state ? as the reactionary Ahmadinejad regime is doing. Instead, it would see this support as part of the strategy of internationalising the revolution.

For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!

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