



# Iran protests need a new direction ? general strike now!

Simon Hardy Tue, 23/06/2009 - 21:41

Simon Hardy

Simon Hardy argues that the street demonstrations need a new strategy to win

This article is also available in Farsi [here](#) [1]

Natarsid! Natarsid! Mah hameh bah ham hastim! - don't be scared don't be scared we are all together (chant on the streets in Iran)

Over the past two weeks hundreds of thousands of protesters have braved the Iranian state to fight for democratic rights. The bravery of the young people on the streets has reverberated around the world, the violence of the police and Basiji thugs has shocked in equal measure. The protests have a deeper motive than the belief that the results of the presidential elections have been rigged. Whether or not this is true the protesters and millions behind them are protesting against a system which treats Iran's citizens as children ? permanently under the guardianship of an elite of senior clergymen, who chose the Supreme Leader, who vet all parties and candidates for the parliament and the presidency, so that no real opponents of the system can emerge.

Iran is not a republic - Islamic or otherwise. The demonstrators have come to realise this and that is what they are protesting about, not simply which faction of their clerical rulers will get the upper hand.

But after two weeks of mass protests on the streets, the democracy movement faces a fork in the road. Which road it takes will decide the future of Iran and the Middle East.

One is the road of reform, with more protests demanding a recount, or fresh elections, but tied to a wing of the state around Mousavi and Rafsanjani. Facing increasing police repression and eventually the full might of the state and its revolutionary guards, but with no revolutionary strategy for power. This is a road that will lead to defeat.

The second road - the road of revolution - can and must be taken. It starts from the fight for democratic rights but, by raising the social and economic needs of the masses to the fore, it can mobilise increasing numbers of workers and peasants in a direct challenge to the regime. The workers can play the same role that they did in 1979, paralysing the government with strike action, reaching out to the soldiers and helping to win them to the side of revolution. This path is a difficult one, but there is no other option if the fight for democracy is to succeed.

It is clear that the 'defeated' presidential candidate Mirhossein Mousavi, who initiated the protests, will never break his ties to the ruling elite, and he has repeatedly yielded to pressure to call off demonstrations. The 'hardline' vs 'softline' labels of the western journalists mean little or nothing. Mousavi and Khatami, having failed to shift the balance of forces within the elite by factional manoeuvres have sought to use the masses to pressure it instead. But if the movement gets out of hand they will certainly call on it to cease This is what happened in 1999 when the students were left to rot in prison when Khatami and the others got cold feet, leaving them to face the batons and bullets of the police alone. The 'reformists' are worthless, indeed dangerous, leaders and the masses should put no faith in them.

What has been made clear by the last few weeks is that the faction around Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and incumbent President Ahmadinejad will not give up power without a fight. Khamenei has now completely identified his fate with that of the President. They will drown in blood any attempt to change their dictatorial regime. The reality that the state is ultimately bodies of armed men defending the interests of the ruling class, as Marx and Engels pointed

out, becomes crystal clear at the high point of a revolutionary crisis.

But the first, albeit still weak, signs of a social force potentially more powerful than the revolutionary guards, the secret police and the fascist thugs of the Basaji are appearing. Hospital workers struck in protest against the violence after demonstrators were brought into them with gun shot wounds. The militant bus workers of Iran, whose leaders have been repeatedly imprisoned, stated that their union "places itself alongside all those who are offering themselves in the struggle to build a free and independent civic society" and called for "labor union and social rights."

The car workers union at the Khodro plant in Tehran, which took strike action last year, issued a statement saying: "We the workers of Iran Khodro...in each working shift will stop working for half an hour to protest the suppression of students, workers, women and the Constitution and declare our solidarity with the movement of the people of Iran." The Workers Communist Party of Iran has published a 6 point action programme dealing with basic democratic demands. The Tudeh party, who so spectacularly failed the 1979 revolution, have also been heavily involved in the protests, declaring "the Supreme Leader and the coup d'état perpetrators under his leadership must be defeated."

The street protests run the danger of wearing themselves out against the might of the revolutionary guards and the police. It will be difficult to sustain them unless the working class throws its full social weight behind the demands for democracy, launching a general strike, culminating in a mass insurrectionary struggle. Workers must arm themselves as best they can so when the revolutionary guard and the Basiji thugs come to break their picket lines and their heads they can effectively resist.

At the moment the struggle seems almost entirely spontaneous - small groups, at most networks of courageous activists are mobilising by word of mouth and text messaging. The lull in the mass mobilisations should be used by activists to rally around an action programme that unites the democratic aspirations of the popular masses with demands and slogans which can bring the workers too into the struggle. It must contain at its core a strategy for working class revolution ending in the establishment of working class power. In the fire of the struggle a new revolutionary party, capable of surviving illegality and repression, must be forged. The main axes of its programme must be the following.

Workers and youth should form shoras (councils) of struggle in the factories, universities, in the shantytowns and villages to co-ordinate their resistance

There must be a general strike across the country. Arm the workers and youth, go to the barracks and make contact with the soldiers, tell them that the fight for democracy and a decent life is their fight as well

Down with the Islamic Republic, the Supreme Leader and Presidential office

For a Constituent Assembly to tear up the "Islamic" constitution, give workers the freedom to form trade unions, free women from compulsory veiling, gender separation and all the repressions of the morality police, and land to the poor peasants.

Self-determination up to and including the right to secession for all the national minorities in Iran, the Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, etc.

A massive programme of public works to employ those without work and improve life in the shanty towns, paid for by taxing the rich. A living wage and for all and provision of pensions to the elderly

For a workers and peasants government in Iran

*Tomorrow we publish an article analysing the role of US imperialism and the debate over the nature of the revolution, is it a 'colour revolution', as some are claiming?*

**Links:**

[1] <https://fifthinternational.org/http>