



Solidarity with the movement in Iran! No to imperialist interference!

Martin Suchanek, Gruppe ArbeiterInnenmacht, Berlin Tue, 09/01/2018 - 11:14

Martin Suchanek, Gruppe ArbeiterInnenmacht, Berlin

"Bread, work, freedom!" Since December 28, a new movement of workers, the poor, the youth and impoverished sections of the petty bourgeoisie has been gathering in Iran against the dictatorship of the Mullahs. Starting from Mashhad, the country's second largest city, thousands of people in more and more of the country's cities have repeatedly taken to the streets despite bloody repression, more than 400 people arrested and 21 dead so far.

Even if the regime succeeds in silencing this emerging movement with violence, intimidation and staged demonstrations and forcing it underground, it has already shaken the dictatorship of the Islamists. Their rule, however totalitarian it may be and however much it has infiltrated the whole of society, can be shaken, even overthrown. Resistance is not futile.

In contrast to the movement of 2009, the masses have so far mainly demanded measures to combat the constant deterioration of living conditions. Even according to official figures, unemployment stands at 11.3 percent. Real figures are far higher, and around half of young people are unemployed or underemployed. Wages and pensions are often not paid or only paid after months. At the same time, inflation, the abolition of subsidies and corruption, are driving up the cost of living.

Iranian capitalism and the despotic regime of the mullahs are clearly not a success story for those who work in the factories, oil fields and offices. Even large parts of the petty bourgeoisie are at risk of collapsing. While the Iranian gross domestic product grew by 12.52 percent in 2016 and 3.46 percent in 2017, after a period of stagnation, the market economy offers the masses above all super-exploitation, deprivation of rights and declining incomes.

Even in 'God's state', the real ruler is capital. God's blessing only pays off for those who dictatorially secure capitalist exploitation and the interests of a regional power against the working class, the oppressed nations, women and any democratic opposition. While the population is becoming impoverished and humiliated, the major entrepreneurs, the religious elite and their apparatus are enriching themselves.

Anger and despair are the forces that drove the hundreds and thousands of people out onto the streets for days, despite brutal repression, arrests and numerous deaths.

The other driving force is obviously disillusionment with all wings of the clerical regime, be it the conservative hardliners or the reformers around President Rouhani. The first protests are reported to have been initiated by conservatives. In the beginning, both wings demagogically tried to make use of the movement for their own interests. Whatever triggered the movement, it has grown in such a short space of time that it has become a danger to the entire ruling class and all wings of the regime.

Political forces

It would be difficult to overestimate the international significance of the movement in a region marked by deep internal contradictions. Iran is wrestling with other arch-reactionary states such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey for influence and the entire region is at the heart of the struggle for the redivision of the world between the USA, Russia and other

imperialist powers. Undoubtedly, Trump, Netanyahu and the Saudi monarchy are trying to use the movement for their own purposes in order to suppress Iran's influence in the Arab world and, at best, to force a regime change in Iran. Conversely, Russia is defending its allies, while China, France, Germany and the EU are calling for "moderation on all sides".

There is undoubtedly a danger that the movement, or parts of it, like any spontaneous mass movement, will be used for the reactionary purposes of Western powers or rival regional powers, just as it may come under the political leadership and control of reactionary forces such as monarchists or the People's Mujahideen.

However, this danger is no reason to refuse the movement solidarity or to passively wait until the masses produce the right leadership and orientation. Even less is it a reason to defend the regime and cheer on its staged mobilisations as some Stalinists and so-called "anti-imperialists" do. On the contrary, all internationalists, anti-capitalists, trade unionists and workers around the world must defend the movement against repression, support their social demands and fight against the regime.

The movement in Iran is neither a "conspiracy", nor a movement ?organised? from outside and the best way to ensure that it becomes a genuinely revolutionary movement against the Islamic dictatorship and against capitalism is to support the workers and the Iranian internationalist left.

Within the movement itself, there is a spontaneous struggle over its political orientation. Opposing class forces fight for leadership and hegemony but this struggle must be consciously fought. Its outcome will be of crucial importance for further perspective of the movement and the working class.

The protests are currently at a crossroads. They have shocked the regime and brought its internal contradictions into the light. But it is far from being beaten. Rather, the question arises of how to break a regime that has massive repressive powers and penetrates society with reactionary organisations including fascist organisations.

Closely connected with this are the questions of self-defence and defence of demonstrations against the police and clerical-fascist militias of the Iranian state and the breaking of the regime's control over the army. Rouhani's promises to respect the right to demonstrate and assemble have already turned out to be empty words, "reformist" background music while the movement is suppressed and defamed.

The question of how the movement can expand, sink deep roots in the workplaces, in the cities as well as in the countryside, among both Iranians and nationally oppressed masses, inevitably raises the question of its political goals and perspectives. Under the Islamic dictatorship, which does not allow legal room for manoeuvre for the working class, oppressed nations such as Kurds and Arabs, the fight against unemployment, poverty and price increases raises the political question of democratic rights. Even if the movement has begun as a social, economic movement, it automatically comes up against the question of the struggle against the entire regime and is faced with the question of the political goal. This is also shown by the slogans on the demonstrations.

The question of political perspective reveals the limits of a spontaneous movement. Even though the masses have so far resisted the attempts of reaction and imperialism to gain control of them, there is a struggle over orientation of the movement.

Not only Trump and Netanyahu express their doubtful "support". From exile and in the country, reactionary, bourgeois and pro-imperialist forces; monarchists, liberal "reformers" or pseudo-leftists such as the People's Mujahideen, are naturally also fighting for leadership over the movement.

One way of gaining a hearing for such forces could be through criticism of the regime for wasting too much money on "foreign" forces. Criticism of reactionary policy in Syria and Iraq is right, but the call for a different foreign policy is by no means limited to that. For example, criticism of support for the Palestinian struggle from a social-chauvinist, racist and thus pro-imperialist perspective is entirely reactionary. These tendencies must be combated aggressively and there must be clear demarcation from reactionary groups in the opposition and the solidarity movement.

This makes it all the more important to ask how the numerically weak socialist and progressive parts of the movement can become its leadership. As small as they may be, the influence of leftist groupings among the students in Tehran, as well as statements by independent trade unions and workers' organisations, show that there is such a left-wing current that wants to make the working class a leading force, which places its demands at the centre of attention and at the same time rejects any reactionary solution and any pro-Western "regime change".

Numerous demonstrations have shown solidarity with strikes by workers who are fighting for higher wages and better conditions. For example, workers at Haft Tapeh, the country's largest sugar factory, went on strike on 7 January. In this sector, work stoppages to enforce the payment of wages have been repeated over and over again in the course of 2017. The Federation of Free Iranian Trade Unions, the Electricity and Metal Workers' Union of Kermanshah, the Painters' Union/ Province of Alborz and the Association of Workers' Rights' Advocates, demand a nationwide strike:

"All political prisoners must be freed. The exploiters and those who oppress us, regardless of their position of power, must be brought to justice. The people's stolen capital must be returned to them. The minimum wage of workers in the public and private sectors must increase fivefold. The rulers must not get any more horrendous salaries. Full trade union and association freedom, complete freedom of opinion, freedom of the press and freedom of the parties must be implemented immediately."

All this shows that we are not just dealing with demonstrations by hundreds or thousands of people. The unionised workers who have learned to fight under the conditions of illegality or semi-legality could lift the movement to a new, higher level, making a general strike against the regime a real possibility.

The working class in Iran can build on a revolutionary tradition, the Shoras (councils), which arose in the revolution against the Shah and at that time enforced workers' control or management of companies. Such bodies could now be used to organise the fighting in the factories and in the towns and become organs of a general strike.

This would have to be combined with an action programme that combines the current demands for minimum wages, an end to corruption, full democratic rights and expropriation of the large companies under workers' control, with the struggle for power, the establishment of a workers' government.

The councils, which emerge as organs of coordination for broadening and leading a general strike, could become the organs of workers' power, the instrument for overthrowing the Islamist dictatorship, of breaking its repression and oppression. Such a power would not be based on the state apparatus of the mullahs, but would break it up and replace it with the rule of the working class, which, in addition to the councils, would have to rely on popular self-defence organisations and on soldiers' councils.

Such a movement will only be possible if the Iranian left and the trade union movement are quickly able to create a revolutionary workers' party with a programme that combines democratic and social demands with the overthrow of capitalism, which can work under conditions of repression and at the same time work amongst the masses.

Solidarity and support for the movement in Iran! No to repression, no concessions to pro-Western or monarchist powers!

Source URL: <https://fifthinternational.org/content/solidarity-movement-iran-no-imperialist-interference>