



Iran; latest repression reflects a regime in crisis

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There is hope in Iran that the days of the regime are numbered. On the streets the protests are met with violence from the police and the Islamist militias. But in the government the ruling powers are split - what is the way forward?

The continuing protests in Iran show that the fire of freedom is still burning brightly, despite the beatings, rapes and killings carried out by the security forces. The movement reignited at the funeral of a leading 'reformist' cleric Grand Ayatollah Hoseyn Ali Montazeri on 21 December, turning into mass anti-government demonstrations.

Protests erupted one week later, during the commemoration of the Shia holy day of Ashoura, December 27. This, as usual, was met with repression from the murderous Basiji militia. At least eight people were killed including the nephew of opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi. After this at least 40 opposition figures have been arrested.

The shooting of protesters, now a common occurrence, indicates that those out on the streets know the risks but are willing to give their lives in the struggle for democratic rights.

On the world stage Iran maintains its role as chief bogeyman for the western imperialists. Usually the west attacks Iran for its lack of democratic rights, but this just shows their hypocrisy - after all what would happen to pro-democracy demonstrators in Saudi Arabia? Also it was claimed by British media that a recently released British hostage who was held in Iraq for three years had been abducted by an Iranian special operations unit operating in Baghdad.

The US government is mobilising as much diplomatic muscle as possible to isolate Iran and force it to end its nuclear programme. This in turn allows the Iranian regime to earn credibility as an anti-imperialist power.

The coming years are nevertheless full of danger for the Iranian ruling class. Facing growing opposition from below, pressured from outside its borders, sections of the ruling class are clearly worried about the regime of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. They run the risk of a social explosion that will bring down the whole clerical regime. But which direction this will come from is critical.

Clearly regime change from below is something to be welcomed, but regime change from above, through an invasion, would only strengthen the US imperialists and place the Iranian people in double chains. Any new government they brought in would face civil war and suffer from the same endemic corruption as Ahmed Karzai in Afghanistan.

The Iranian regime is suffering from widening splits. That is why Ahmadinejad and his clique are forced to purge and imprison oppositionists from within the clerical caste. The paranoia of the regime means that no one is safe. Tension was growing in Tehran throughout the last half of 2009 as the police rounded up Mousavi supporters and aides under orders of one wing of the regime, only to have to let several go after serious pressure was brought to bear by the other side.

Now the pro government forces are upping the ante, openly calling for Mousavi to be arrested and executed. Several leading clerics labelled him and his followers as mohareb, meaning someone who is an enemy of God, which in Iran is punished by the death penalty. Mousavi, the nominal figurehead of the opposition movement, in as much as he is the highest ranking politician to identify with it, has recently declared that he is willing to die for the cause of reform. His

comments came after the death of his nephew, shot in the back by police.

The vicious repression is a testimony to the growing social isolation of the bonapartist regime of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The split in the hierarchy is not just along the lines of the conservatives and reformists; after all many of the reformist leaders are former conservatives; but between the majority of the clerics and the Revolutionary Guard, the Pasdaran. Increasingly over the last decade it is these, supported the fascistic Basiji, that hold the real power. They also have developed an enormous and corrupt hold on the country's economy.

Khameini is not even a Grand Ayatollah, which causes rumblings of discontent amongst many clerics. Iran is increasingly a state controlled directly by the bodies of armed men and the ruling class is dislocated from its own power machinery. The Kings are afraid of their own guards. This is the political basis for Mousavi's campaign, he is a man who was a high-ranking member of the Iranian ruling elite in the 1980s and wants to move Iranian government back to the principles and methods of the 1980s.

Clearly the people on the street want democracy, but what this means can range from 'fair elections' within an Islamic Regime (a hopeless utopia) to a liberal democratic model based on western style capitalism. This too is a utopia since it would put Iran back under the heel of the United States. What this would mean can be seen from the horrific conditions that US intervention has created in neighbouring Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. On the other hand some within the movement want a return to the days of 1978-79 when workers took control of their factories and the left was a powerful force in the insurrection which overthrew the Shah. Here the lessons of the wrong strategy taken by the left in those years will have to be learned. There is a fight going on for the heart and soul in the democracy movement. The task is to win the youth to revolutionary socialism as the only credible solution.

Of course this will mean that as an absolute priority the working class in Iran must be won to the a strategy of an uninterrupted revolution from the fullest democratic rights, won by revolutionary means and the achievement of working class power, which can build a socialist society. Currently the movement still suffers from the same weakness that it did in 2009 when it emerged. The working class is sympathetic but not active within it yet, at least not in an organised sense. It was the Iranian oil workers strike in 1979 that brought down the dictatorship of the Shah, a lesson that the current ruling class has not forgotten, which is why they hold the industrial workers in an iron grip.

During the protests in 2009 The League for the Fifth International worked with radical oppositionists to produce an action programme which was translated into Farsi and reported in the magazine Xyaban. It has not lost any of its relevancy and we urge anyone in Iran who wishes to fight for revolutionary change and socialism to read it.

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