

Iranian government cracks down on student protests

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A recent wave of government crackdowns on student political activity in Iran culminated on Tuesday, December 4, when government security forces violently intervened at a rally of left-wing students at Tehran University commemorating “Students Day.” Masked police stormed the campus, dragging targeted student leaders into waiting vehicles.

A total of 28 students have been arrested, including many arrested at their homes in the days leading up to the demonstration. Incarcerated students face the very real threat of torture and murder while in prison.

Iran’s politically charged universities have traditionally been considered off-limits for the government security forces, so political arrests in the university itself are extremely provocative. The rally’s principal speaker, Roozbeh Safshekan, was arrested immediately after the demonstration, along with his wife (who was released several hours later). Infuriated students surrounded the security forces as they attempted to make the arrests, allowing the escape of two other student leaders. Many students subsequently went into hiding, changed clothes, and attempted to leave the campus later that evening.

Iranian students hold Students Day to commemorate the deaths of three students who were murdered by the newly installed regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi on December 4, 1953, when they protested the visit of then US vice-president Richard Nixon. Last year’s Students Day rally at the University of Tehran exploded when as many as 3,000 students wrecked the fences separating the university from the rest of the city, allowing workers, youth, and students from other universities to join the rally.

It is significant that the Iranian government chose to carry out the crackdown on Students Day, which after all commemorates student resistance to government

oppression. This choice exposes the fact that the Iranian regime of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is in no better position than the government of the Shah to address the students’ real social grievances.

On December 4, in the face of a significant campaign of government intimidation and mounting arrests, 600 students marched at Tehran University with banners reading, “The university is not a garrison!” “No war!” “Free our classmates!” “There is an alternative!” and “Freedom! Equality!” Students also raised a banner that read, “Imperialist hands off the people of Iran.”

A leaflet of the “Students for Freedom and Equality,” which organized the demonstration, raised legitimate criticisms of both the Ahmadinejad regime and the ostensible political opposition, the “reformers,” led by former President Mohammad Khatami. No faction of the Iranian political establishment is capable of addressing the concerns of the population.

The leaflet concluded, “Considering the internal conditions and international situation of Iran, progressive movements such as the student movement have a huge responsibility to resist government encroachment on the most basic political and social rights of students.

“The autocratic attacks on the rights of students, arrests, torture, imprisonment, the outlawing of student organizations, the banning of their publications, depriving the students of the right to continue their studies [referring to recent political expulsions] all underscore the necessity of a political struggle against both the government and the opportunist reformers.”

The students also demanded the release of their classmates already behind bars. Last year, when Ahmadinejad addressed students at Polytechnic (Amir Kabir) University, students disrupted his speech and denounced his policies. The security forces with the

help of Basij militia set a frame-up and arrested a dozen of the students in the following weeks. Most of the students were tortured into confessions of illegal conduct before they were released; one was raped. Three of these students, although initially confessing under torture, later maintained their innocence and received onerous three-year prison terms.

The announcement of these prison terms sparked widespread protests on Iran's campuses. On September 24 of this year, around 800 students gathered at the Polytechnic University to demand the release of these students. A rally of 1,000 students at Allameh University issued similar demands on October 28. Other protests have taken place in the cities of Isfahan, Mashad, and Ahwaz.

The government has met the increasing politicization of Iran's campuses with more and more draconian measures. Security cameras have been installed in many universities to monitor students' activities, walls and fences have been constructed around universities, and the number of guards has been steadily increased. Guards at many universities are instructed not to allow students from other universities to enter.

Any movement of workers or students in Iran must confront direct government repression. However, the repression is not carried out from a position of strength. The Ahmadinejad regime is in an extremely precarious situation, as no section of the Iranian bourgeoisie, including the official opposition parties, is currently in a position to address the deep social discontent of the population by means of economic reform. Instead, the government is compelled to employ repressive measures associated with police states.

Some figures both in the Ahmadinejad government and among the reformers are voicing concern about the growth of socialist ideas among students. Reformers, including the US-inclined liberals who sought to manipulate the campuses in their election campaigns during the past years, are now watching as their own student organizations are becoming marginalized by left-wing student groups.

Iran's oil and national gas resources are currently caught up in an increasingly hostile tug-of-war between competing centers of imperialist power, including the US, Europe, Russia and China. The Ahmadinejad regime has attempted to use mounting threats of a US invasion and crippling economic sanctions to try to

whip up an atmosphere of nationalist xenophobia inside its borders.

Meanwhile, the US government, through its overseas propaganda arm Voice of America, never fails to use the crackdowns on dissenting students' protests in Iran as an excuse to denounce the government to push its own interests. The interests of Iranian students and workers are directly opposed to the interests of the ruling elites of both Iran and the US.

The WSWs demands the immediate release of the arrested students. The fight against the repression of Iranian students and the danger of imperialist intervention in Iran requires the mobilization of Iranian students and workers on the basis of an international socialist perspective. This is the perspective of the Socialist Equality Party, and its student organization, the International Students for Social Equality.

To find out more about the International Students for Social Equality, click here



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