

ISSE demonstration to free Iranian students calls for international unity of workers

Our reporter
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On February 16, the International Students for Social Equality (ISSE) held a demonstration in New York City to demand that the Iranian government immediately release and drop all charges against more than 40 left-wing students. In addition to calling attention to the plight of these students, the demonstration focused on the necessary political basis for a struggle against war, inequality, and oppression.

ISSE members and supporters, together with a group of Iranian students attending university in the US, rallied outside the Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations in midtown Manhattan. Demonstrators emphasized the need for an international socialist movement of students and workers. Basing itself on the history and perspective of the Trotskyist movement, the ISSE rejects any support for national bourgeois governments, including the Iranian regime. The ISSE is the student organization of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

Joe Kay, a member of the ISSE Steering Committee, read a letter to the Iranian government opposing the arrest of the students, who are members of the group Azady Barabary (Students for Freedom and Equality). (See “ISSE demonstrates in New York to demand release of jailed Iranian students”)

The first wave of arrests occurred in December, when the group organized a demonstration to denounce US war plans. The students declared their opposition to all factions of the Iranian government, including the Reformists grouped around former president Mohammad Khatami. Kay said that the students involved in this demonstration had reached a crucial insight. “A movement against war and imperialism cannot be subordinated to the national bourgeoisie or national governments of Iran or any other country,” he

said.

Kay emphasized that the ISSE was completely opposed to the American ruling class and its ambitions in the Middle East. “We oppose any US action against Iran, we oppose plans for ‘regime change,’ we do not support the plans of American imperialism,” he said. “However, our opposition to American imperialism is not rooted in any support for the reactionary, antidemocratic bourgeois governments of Iran or any other country. The struggle against war requires the independent mobilization of workers and students against all of these governments, against the nation-state system.”

Kay also read sections from the statement passed by the ISSE/SEP Emergency Conference Against War held on March 31-April 1, 2007. The statement denounced the Iraq war and plans for military action against Iran, noting that the eruption of American imperialism endangers the population of the entire world. “The threat of a new world war can be answered only by the unified global struggle of the international working class, directed toward the establishment of a democratic and egalitarian world socialist society,” it declared.

In laying out a perspective for the independent mobilization of the working class, the statement explicitly rejected a nationalist perspective. “In economically less-developed countries, such as Iran, China and India, the ruling elites have their own interest and ambitions that are completely antagonistic to the interests of the working class and have nothing to do with principled opposition to imperialism. Opposition to wars against these countries in no way implies support for their governments or the capitalist interests that these governments represent. The defeat of imperialism will not take place through the

acquisition of nuclear or other weapons by these states, but through the mobilization of the international working class on the basis of a socialist program.”

The working class is “the only genuinely international class,” the statement emphasized, “whose social interests transcend the confines of the capitalist system of competing nation-states.” (See “End the occupation of Iraq! No to war against Iran! For an international socialist movement against war!”)

Kay said that the arrest of the Iranian students confirmed this perspective. It demonstrated that the Iranian government, when faced with opposition to its right-wing policies, could only respond with repression. He ended by calling on Iranian students to join hands with students and workers all over the world in a common struggle against war and for an egalitarian, socialist society.

Several of those attending also emphasized the role of internationalism. Andre Damon, a student at the University of Delaware and a member of the ISSE Steering Committee, commented, “The problems facing students and workers in the United States are the same as those facing Iranian students and workers and workers all over the world.”

Damon noted that workers and students in the US have huge amounts of debt. “Over the past decades, wages have been stagnant and falling in the US, while the cost of living has increased. Students have to borrow in some cases 10, 20, 30 or even 50 thousand dollars a year just to pay for tuition, for expenses and housing.” Economic conditions are likely to decline further as the US slides into recession, Damon said.

Damon said that the entire world is confronted by the danger of war. “None of these problems can be solved on a national basis or even on a student basis. Students have to turn to the working class, to the international working class, and that is the perspective that the ISSE fights for.”

Julia, a freshman at Wagner College in Staten Island, said that the attack on left-wing students in Iran was “an international cause.” She said she hoped that the demonstration would show students in Iran that they are “being backed not only by students in Iran, but by students in the United States.”

Many of those joining the demonstration attended a meeting afterward to discuss the political issues facing workers in Iran and the US.

Bill Van Auken, the Socialist Equality Party’s 2006 candidate for US Senate from New York, placed the growing signs of social tensions internationally within the context of the economic crisis of world capitalism. It is the objective contradictions of world capitalism, he said, that form the basis for the growth of an international socialist movement.

Discussion focused on the history of Iran and the experiences of the working class in the twentieth century. Throughout this period, the Trotskyist movement, represented today by the ICFI, has fought for an international orientation against all forms of nationalism and reformism.

One participant noted the ICFI’s consistent opposition to Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and other forms of bourgeois nationalism in Latin America, while Chavez has been lauded by many groups calling themselves socialist. Chavez has developed close ties to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, even as the Iranian government has carried out repressive attacks on students and workers in Iran.



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