

The Nation magazine and the Iranian election

Joe Kishore
16 June 2009

The *Nation* magazine, the voice of left-liberal supporters of Obama, has quickly weighed in to support charges of vote-rigging and a “coup d’état” in Iran. The magazine has also given its full support to the candidacy of Mirhossein Mousavi, the principal rival of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In doing so, the *Nation* is joining hands with the rest of the American media, which has abandoned any pretense of journalistic objectivity in reporting the election. The allegations of fraud have been repeated without any independent investigation.

Robert Dreyfuss, the *Nation*’s chief commentator on foreign policy and national security, posted a blog entry under the headline, “Iran’s Ex-Foreign Minister Yazdi: It’s A Coup.” The article is dated June 13 and is time stamped at 7:24 AM—that is, about half a day after Iranian authorities released preliminary results from the election.

Mousavi had already declared the official results, showing a lopsided victory for Ahmadinejad, to be a fraud. Dreyfuss obviously accepted this claim uncritically. He could not possibly have conducted any independent investigation before he posted his blog. Nevertheless, the prominent link to Dreyfuss’ entry on the front page of the *Nation*’s web site is categorical, declaring, “A Rigged Election.”

In his opening paragraph, Dreyfuss writes, “It’s Saturday afternoon in Tehran, and the streets are generally quiet. But the aftermath of Iran’s rigged election, in which radical-right President Ahmadinejad and his paramilitary backers were kept in office, has left Iran’s capital steeped in anger, despair, and bitterness.”

The reference to the “radical-right” president is intended to give the impression to *Nation* readers that somehow Mousavi is a “left” figure. In fact, Mousavi’s main position on economic policy was to denounce Ahmadinejad’s limited handouts to poor and rural Iranians. Like Ahmadinejad, Mousavi is part of the Iranian establishment, representing a faction of the ruling elite that favors closer relations with the United States, free market policies and an opening of Iran to foreign investment, and reductions in state subsidies to the poor.

Dreyfuss’ uncritical backing for the Mousavi camp is summed up when he writes that he went to see Ibrahim Yazdi “to get some perspective on the crisis.”

He then provides the text of an interview with Yazdi, a major

figure in the so-called “reformist” movement in Iran and the country’s foreign minister in the first few months after the 1979 revolution. Yazdi resigned to protest the taking of US hostages after the revolution, and he favored a general amnesty for members of the Shah’s regime. He is presently the head of the Freedom Movement of Iran, which the Iranian regime has banned for alleged links to the CIA.

Yazdi states that “the election was rigged,” citing the existence of many mobile polling places and the control of the Interior Ministry over the counting process. From this, the former foreign minister declares, “A coup d’état? They’ve already made one!”

Exposing his class and political loyalties, Yazdi goes on to regret the fact that former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani—the richest man in Iran, who is widely seen as extremely corrupt—has been losing influence. Rafsanjani is one of the major backers of Mousavi.

“In years past, [Rafsanjani] was influential, perhaps even more influential than the leader [Ayatollah Ali Khamenei],” Yazdi sates. “Now, with the slogans being used at Ahmadinejad’s rallies, things like ‘Death to Hashemi!’, they have created a deep rift.”

Yazdi concludes by emphasizing his conservative positions, positions shared by Mousavi. He declares, “We are not after subversion. We do not want to change the Constitution. We do want to create a viable political force that can exert its influence.”

The promotion by the American media of Mousavi has been closely linked to the foreign policy interests of the Obama administration, which the *Nation* magazine has consistently supported. This is documented in the writings of Dreyfuss himself over the past week and a half, beginning with a June 4 article written from Cairo entitled, “Obama Hits a Home Run.”

The “home run” refers to Obama’s speech that day in the Egyptian capital. The main aim of the speech was to provide a new face for American imperialism, one that would be better able to advance US interests in the Middle East. Dreyfuss declares, “Based on early returns from a decidedly unrepresentative sample of Arab public opinion, Obama hit a home run. I agree.”

On June 5, as he headed for Tehran, Dreyfuss penned another piece under the headline “Three Tests for Obama after ‘The Speech.’” The three tests were the Lebanese elections (held on

June 7, which led to the victory of a US-backed coalition), the Iranian elections, and the future of Hamas and the Israel-Palestinian dispute.

On June 8 (“Iran’s Green Wave”), Dreyfuss openly solidarized himself with the development of a “color” revolution in Iran, a reference to the various US-backed movements in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that have been aimed—sometimes successfully, sometimes not—at installing governments more amenable to US interests.

“For years, the hardline clergy and their allies, including Ahmadinejad, have feared nothing more than an Iranian-style ‘color-revolution,’” Dreyfuss wrote. “Now, Mousavi—with solid establishment credentials, an Islamic revolutionary pedigree second to none, and an outspoken pro-reform message—finds himself at the head of a green parade.”

On June 9, the *Nation* followed its promotion of the “Green Wave” with an article on “Ahmadinejad’s Red Tide.” Dreyfuss wrote of “the red-armband-wearing, virtual fascist movement in support of reelecting President Ahmadinejad.” The reference to imminent fascism in Iran echoes the theory of “Islamofascism,” used by sections of liberals to justify their support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and US intervention in the Middle East.

The article reports on a rally for Ahmadinejad attended by what Dreyfuss estimates at “tens of thousands” of people. Other media reports put the figure at perhaps half a million. Dreyfuss nevertheless acknowledges the deep social divide in Iran, noting that after the rally, demonstrations by Ahmadinejad supporters brought the entire city of Tehran to a standstill for several hours.

In a passage that reveals more about the social outlook of Dreyfuss than it does about Ahmadinejad’s supporters, dripping with contempt for the working class, Dreyfuss compares the participants at Ahmadinejad’s rally to those he found much more likeable at a rally held by Mousavi:

“Instead of ‘Death to America!’ the green-clad Mousavi supporters chant: ‘Death to potatoes!’ ridiculing Ahmadinejad’s practice of giving out sacks of potatoes to his poor supporters. The women at the Mousavi rally are sheathed in scarves, but their stylish hair is visible underneath, they wear attractive makeup and pink lipstick, and below their short outer garments are visible jeans and, in many cases, high heels. At the Ahmadinejad rally, the women—in the thousands—are segregated from the men, and they are dressed head to toe in all-covering black.”

In the days leading up to the election, Dreyfuss penned several other columns favoring the candidate of choice for the “high-heeled.” These included one on June 10 (“Iran’s Vote, Obama’s Challenge”) in which he praised the “powerful and wily” former president Rafsanjani and his “blistering letter attacking Ahmadinejad”; one on June 11 (“Iran’s Election Tension”), in which he declared, “There’s no denying the political and social movement that is building against the

president, mostly around Mousavi’s brilliant campaign”; and a final article on June 12 (“Iranians Poised for Change”).

In this last article on the election itself, Dreyfuss contradicted his previous account of Ahmadinejad’s “Red Tide” by declaring that he was now seemingly unable to find a single supporter of Ahmadinejad anywhere in Tehran. “I went off in search of Ahmadinejad voters today in Tehran. They are not easy to find.”

This shift—from masses of “red-armband-wearing virtual fascists” to a complete absence of support—helps explain the post-election analysis. If everyone supported Mousavi, his defeat, *ipso facto*, was a fraud and a coup.

There are certain parallels between the social milieu for which Dreyfuss speaks in the US and the main social base of support for Mousavi. Through the vehicle of the Obama administration, a layer of the complacent middle class around the *Nation* has made its peace with American imperialism.

Individuals such as Dreyfuss are working actively to promote the foreign policy interests of the American government, now with its new face. Through the promotion of illusions in Obama, the *Nation* and similar publications have facilitated the carrying out of extremely right-wing policies, including the continuation of the Iraq war, the expansion of the war in Afghanistan, and the multi-trillion dollar bailouts to the banks.

Similarly, Mousavi’s main base of support—as the American media itself has been compelled to recognize—comes from the upper-middle classes of the urban centers. Their opposition to Ahmadinejad is centered largely on cultural or lifestyle issues. To the extent that they have economic differences with the clerical regime, they are of a fundamentally reactionary character, hostile to the working class.

To recognize this fact is not to give any support to Ahmadinejad or the clerical establishment. There is widespread and justified hatred of the regime, particularly among Iranian youth. However, a progressive solution to the crisis in Iran will not come from the social forces represented by Mousavi. It can come only through the independent intervention of the Iranian working class on the basis of its own, socialist, program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact