

# For a socialist, not a “color” revolution in Iran

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The protests in Tehran over the weekend have served to highlight the limited social base of the political opponents of the dominant faction of the Iranian clerical regime. The opposition movement has not only failed to draw in broader layers of working people, but has markedly weakened.

From the outset, the color-coded campaign to replace incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with Mir Hossein Mousavi has been a highly orchestrated political operation backed by the US and managed by dissident elements of the ruling elite—in particular, former president and billionaire businessman Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani—for their own ends.

There is nothing progressive in their aims. Insofar as they have differences with their erstwhile associates, Mousavi and his supporters are seeking to shift policies further to the right through a more rapid accommodation with the US and a drastic acceleration of the program of market reform. They make no appeal to working people, for whom such a program can only mean economic devastation, and base themselves on sections of the bourgeoisie and more privileged and frankly selfish layers of the urban middle classes.

Having lost the election, Mousavi has flatly rejected anything less than the annulment of the results and a re-run. The opposition camp has provided no evidence that the poll was rigged and is seeking to leverage its international support in the media and among Western governments into what is tantamount to a palace coup. They may even be seeking a confrontation with the state apparatus that would then be used as another lever in the internecine struggle against their factional

opponents.

Undoubtedly, many students, young people and others support Mousavi in the naïve belief that he will bring about democratic reform. They ignore the fact, however, that Mousavi is a longstanding member of the regime who also has blood on his hands. The twentieth century is littered with examples, not least of all in Iran, of movements that have been subordinated to one or other “progressive” faction of the capitalist class and betrayed. The whole history of Iran demonstrates the organic incapacity of any section of the bourgeoisie to establish basic democratic rights, let alone provide working people with an adequate standard of living.

The rise of the Islamist movement in Iran was a direct product of decades of betrayal by the Stalinist Tudeh Party, which opposed the independent mobilization of the working class against the Shah and instead channeled working class opposition behind dissident factions of the Iranian bourgeoisie. In doing so, the Tudeh Party ceded influence in the growing movement against the Shah to the Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers, and paved the way for its own destruction. The political upheavals that led to the ousting of the Shah in 1979 swept over the heads of the Stalinists. The new clerical regime quickly repressed the Tudeh Party and other left-wing organisations. As prime minister throughout most of the 1980s, Mousavi was directly responsible for killing thousands of leftists and imprisoning many more.

The political lessons have to be drawn. The establishment of genuine democratic rights is impossible outside the fight for socialism against all factions of the bourgeoisie. The working class is the

only social force capable of leading such a revolutionary struggle for the refashioning of society as a whole to meet the needs of the vast majority, rather than the profits of the wealthy few. Any attempt to sidestep the difficult task of constructing the necessary revolutionary leadership in the working class leads to dangerous adventurism and political disaster.

It is worth recalling, 20 years on, the outcome of the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the absence of a socialist alternative rooted in the lessons of the struggle of the international Trotskyist movement against Stalinism, the most grasping elements of the bureaucratic elites, backed by the US and Western powers, were able to politically prevail. Their promises about democratic rights and the great prospects of the capitalist market rapidly evaporated as corrupt new bourgeois regimes sought to integrate their economies into global capitalism as quickly as possible, resulting in an unprecedented regression in the living standards of ordinary people.

The formal dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 ushered in a series of “color revolutions” that bore no relationship to any real popular movement for democratic rights. The “Bulldozer Revolution” of 2000 that toppled the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic was the forerunner to the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia in 2003 that brought Mikhail Saakashvili to power, the “Orange Revolution” in the Ukraine in 2004 and the pink and yellow “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in 2005.

The characteristics of all these “revolutions” were similar. Dissident pro-Western sections of the ruling elites mounted a carefully-managed and well-financed campaign to topple their rivals that drew in frustrated sections of the middle classes and youth. Various non-government organisations, in some cases with direct connections to American think tanks and foundations, prepared the ground, establishing connections with student groups, trade unions, the local media and other groups and laying out the marketing plan. In every case, the opposition parties lost an election, which then became the pretext for a frenzied bid for power on the basis of unsubstantiated ballot rigging—all with the

backing of the international media.

The outcome has been pro-US regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union that are no more democratic than their predecessors. The guiding principle of these “revolutions” has not been the needs and aspirations of working people, but the aims of US imperialism to extend its domination, particularly in the former Soviet republics in the energy-rich Caucasus and Central Asia. Reestablishing a dominant influence in Iran, which lies at the intersection of these regions with the Middle East, has been a longstanding American ambition.

The Obama administration’s objectives are no less predatory than those of its predecessors. In fact, a major factor in significant sections of the American political establishment throwing their weight behind Obama’s election campaign was that the Bush administration’s reckless and criminal wars in Iraq and Afghanistan generated broad anti-US sentiment around the globe, undermining Washington’s diplomatic and political leverage. Over the past three years, more color revolutions failed—for instance, in Azerbaijan and Belarus—than were successful. A new face was needed to mask reactionary aims.

Those who claim that the current “Green Revolution” in Iran is any different are either deluding themselves or have ulterior motives. The central political task is the fight for an independent political movement for a workers’ and farmers’ government and a socialist Iran as part of a United Socialist States of the Middle East and internationally. That requires the construction of a revolutionary party of the working class armed with a scientific socialist program based on all the strategic experiences of the twentieth century.

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