

Once again: Iran, imperialism and the “left”

Barry Grey
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The June 12 Iranian election has become the occasion for virtually the entire milieu of “progressive” and “left” organizations in the US and internationally to line up behind their own governments in support of the opposition movement headed by the defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Moussavi.

These groups have not only uncritically embraced Moussavi’s claims that the election was stolen, they have ignored the right-wing economic and foreign policies of the opposition, the bourgeois character of its leadership, and the fact that its main social base consists of better-off sections of the middle class. That the mass of Iranian workers abstained from the protests that followed the election, and that imperialist governments in the US and Europe have uniformly rallied behind the opposition, evokes no second thoughts about the Moussavi movement’s supposedly democratic and progressive character.

A broad-based political phenomenon such as that which has unfolded in response to the events in Iran is indicative of sharp shifts in the political orientation of definite social layers. In this case, it reflects the movement of middle-class layers that once dominated left-wing public opinion into the camp of the political right.

The *Nation* magazine, the flagship of “progressive” liberal opinion, has distinguished itself as one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Iranian opposition. The magazine has entrusted its coverage of the events in Iran to Robert Dreyfuss, a contributing editor.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has pointed out Dreyfuss’s curious credentials as a supposed proponent of democracy in Iran. A former member of the fascistic organization led by Lyndon LaRouche, Dreyfuss was “Middle East intelligence director” of its magazine *Executive Intelligence Review*. In 1981, Dreyfuss published a book—*Hostage to Khomeini*—calling for the Reagan administration to organize the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and denouncing President Jimmy Carter for having betrayed the Shah.

The current issue of the *Nation* features a lengthy article by Dreyfuss entitled “Iran’s Green Wave.” What is remarkable about this article is its frank characterization of the forces that dominate the Iranian opposition and the reactionary and anti-working class policies upon which it is based.

Dreyfuss writes as an ally of what he calls “a kind of counter-

establishment” that includes “relatively moderate, pragmatic conservatives and the wealthy business elite, typified by the behind-the-scenes role of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the wily billionaire mullah and wheeler-dealer who was president in the 1990s.” The coalition also embraces “many hardline conservatives.”

He interviews businessmen, mullahs, former officials of the Islamic Republic and a longtime American diplomat. He cites conversations with student protesters.

He interviews no workers. Indeed, he makes no mention of the working class or the rural poor, except for a reference to south Tehran as a “gritty, working-class section of the city.”

As for Moussavi’s democratic credentials, he notes in passing that initially, “Secular liberals, leftists and more militant reformists looked askance at Moussavi’s premiership [Moussavi was prime minister during the 1980s], since it was during his tenure that some of the worst human rights abuses, including mass executions, were carried out.”

Dreyfuss stresses that Obama’s offer of talks with Iran has struck a powerful chord with Iranian business interests that desire an end to sanctions and closer relations with the United States.

He touts the support of the Iranian business elite for the opposition: “To get a sense of what the business community thinks,” he writes, “during election week I attended a forum packed with executives at the offices of *Etelaat*, a liberal newspaper, where eight former ministers of oil, industry and mining slammed the government over its incompetence.... Later, at Moussavi’s campaign office, one of them, Mohammed Reza Nematzadeh, who was minister of industry under Khatami, told me..., ‘I’m a businessman, and I’ve been reluctant to get into politics.... It’s the desire of most of us in the business community to rebuild relations with the United States.’”

It should be noted that the newspaper that hosted the business forum, *Etelaat*, supported the Shah.

A major concern of the opposition, Dreyfuss notes, is that Ahmadinejad has “squandered the country’s oil wealth” and “forced Iran into a crippling regime of sanctions that have walled it off from the technology and foreign investment it desperately needs.” Needless to say, in return for an end to sanctions and American investment, the opposition would be prepared to adopt policies more favorable to US imperialist

interests in the region, including its prosecution of colonialist wars in three countries bordering Iran—Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Dreyfuss then proceeds to the next bastion of support for the opposition: “Besides reformists, students, women and businessmen, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad are losing their core constituency: the clergy.” He claims that more than half the ayatollahs, “including many grand ayatollahs,” have joined the opposition.

As in previous articles, Dreyfuss, at several points, approvingly quotes Ibrahim Yazdi, foreign minister in the early days of the Islamic Republic and since 1995 the head of the Freedom Movement of Iran. In his book, *Hostage to Khomeini*, Dreyfuss identified Yazdi as part of a “coterie of experienced, Western-trained intelligence agents.” Elsewhere in the book, he referred to Yazdi as “Mossad-tainted.”

There is other evidence of ties between Yazdi’s Freedom Movement of Iran and Washington. The founder of the movement, Mehdi Bazargan, was the prime minister of the provisional government that was formed after the overthrow of the Shah in February of 1979. In November of that year he met secretly with then-US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in Algeria.

Neither Dreyfuss nor the *Nation* is embarrassed by such connections. If anything, they seem to take pride in being included in such rarified circles. Toward the end of his article, Dreyfuss quotes “Tom” Pickering, whom he identifies as “a veteran US diplomat who’s been involved in unofficial talks with Iranian counterparts.”

Thomas Pickering is a long-time US State Department operative who served as US ambassador to El Salvador in the 1980s and was implicated in the Reagan administration’s Iran-Contra scheme to illegally fund the US proxy war against the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. He later served as US ambassador to Israel, US ambassador to the United Nations and, under Clinton, as US ambassador to Russia.

Pickering sits on the board of directors for the American-Iranian Council. This organization was granted permission by the US government to open an office in Iran, making it, according to Wikipedia, “the only US-based peace and conflict resolution non-governmental organization operating in Iran.”

There can be little doubt about the character of Pickering’s “unofficial talks with Iranian counterparts.”

Dreyfuss concludes his survey of the “Green Wave” with advice to the Obama administration about how best to utilize the opposition to advance US imperialist interests in Iran. He writes, “Obama’s earlier outreach undercut the hardliners and gave a psychological boost to Iran’s reformists and to millions of Iranians who saw Moussavi as a vehicle through which to improve US-Iranian relations. If Obama wants to support the opposition, the best thing he can do is to continue to extend his open hand to Iran.”

There you have, in its own words, the “reform” movement

that the *Nation* so enthusiastically supports: a coalition of the business elite and dissident factions of the clerical establishment, backed by the CIA and the US State Department, which has mobilized sections of students and the middle class behind a program of pro-market economics and an accommodation with US imperialism.

Dreyfuss’s article testifies to the stampede of middle-class liberal and “left” forces into the camp of imperialism. It reflects a political polarization that is taking place in line with the social polarization of class forces that has long been underway, and is being intensified by the world economic crisis.

It is the culmination of a protracted period in which “left” opportunist groups oriented to protest politics increasingly relegated class to the background in favor of various forms of identity politics. This reflected their growing alienation from the working class and integration into the trade union bureaucracy and the liberal establishment. They could continue to posture as opponents of imperialism under Bush, but with the election of an African-American president, their movement to the right has taken the form of open support for a right-wing government and its imperialist policies.

The privileged and complacent social forces for which the *Nation* and a host of ostensibly more “left” publications speak have found in the Obama administration the realization of their narrow and socially egotistical aims. They are drawn to the Iranian opposition not *despite* its lack of working class support, but *because* of it. They agree with the opposition’s hostility to even minimal populist measures that detract from the wealth of the elite, and identify with its demand for capitalist market policies.

Genuine opposition to imperialism is concentrated in the working class. The social force that will spearhead a movement against imperialism and in defense of democratic rights is the international working class, fighting under the banner of socialist revolution.

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