Once again, on the ex-left and Iran

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The Obama administration, along with the European powers, has initiated a propaganda campaign designed to ratchet up pressure on Iran. The campaign, which recalls that carried out by the Bush administration in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, is, in part, calculated to bolster the "green" opposition movement in Iran.

In fact, the sudden escalation of threats against Iran strongly suggests a policy turn that was prepared well in advance, of which the furor over the "stolen election" and the promotion of the movement headed by opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi was a central component. The aim was to destabilize and delegitimize the current Iranian regime in order to strengthen international support for crushing sanctions, leading to regime change either from within or with the aid of external military force.

On Sunday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates pointed to "fissures in Iran that we have not seen before, not in the 30 years since the revolution." He expressed the hope that these divisions, combined with the new allegations over Iran's nuclear program, would compel Iran "to change their policy in a way that is satisfactory to the great powers." If not, he threatened severe sanctions and left open the possibility of military action.

The latest orchestrated provocation against Iran has further exposed the social and political character of the Iranian "green" movement, as well as its international supporters. In the wake of the Iranian elections in June, the entire fraternity of middle-class ex-left and "socialist" organizations jumped to support the campaign led by US-backed opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi.

From the *Nation* magazine, whose correspondent in Tehran, Robert Dreyfuss, reported breathlessly about lipsticked and high-heeled protesters, to the French *Nouveau Partie Anti-Capitaliste*, recently formed by the ex-Trotskyist LCR, to the empty-headed blowhard and darling of petty-bourgeois academics Slavoj Zizek—all quickly fell behind what they claimed was a great struggle for freedom and democracy. Zizek went so far as to declare that Mousavi's name "stands for the genuine resuscitation of the popular dream which sustained the Khomeini revolution."

In a series of articles, the *World Socialist Web Site* insisted on the politically right-wing character of the "green revolution." While making clear our opposition to the government of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, we explained that Mousavi represented a faction of the ruling establishment that favored a sharper attack on the working class and a foreign policy more in line with American imperialism. (See, for example, "For a socialist, not a 'color' revolution in Iran).

Developments since the election have entirely confirmed this analysis. Shortly before President Obama, Prime Minister Brown and French President Sarkozy issued new ultimatums and threats against Iran last week, the opposition movement organized demonstrations in Tehran on an openly pro-imperialist basis, with slogans intended to signal support for the US and Israel such as "No to Gaza and Lebanon, I will give my life for Iran" and "Death to China! Death to Russia!"

This type of pro-US Iranian nationalism (and anti-communism) has much in common with the ideological orientation of the Shah's dictatorship, which was overthrown in 1979. Now the opposition in Iran is welcoming the US-backed attacks over Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program.

An article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on Sunday ("Disclosure of Nuclear Plant Adds to Iran Rift") noted: "The timing of President Obama's announcement of Iran's newest uranium enrichment plant came as supporters of opposition leader Mir-

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Hossein Mousavi have been seeking new momentum in protests against the disputed June reelection of Ahmadinejad."

While Mousavi has nominally opposed Western sanctions, the green movement has solidarized itself with US actions. The *Times* quoted a statement from filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a spokesman for the movement: "The Green Movement in Iran furthermore understands the world's concerns and in fact has similar concerns itself."

Meanwhile, the liberal and "left" supporters of Obama have already begun to assume their assigned roles in promoting the latest US maneuver, led once again by Robert Dreyfuss of the *Nation*.

On Friday, Dreyfuss posted a blog entry prominently displayed on the *Nation*'s web site ("Iran Bombshell: US Reveals Secret Facility") that consisted largely of an uncritical repost of the background briefing put out by the Obama administration.

In his own remarks, Dreyfuss accepted entirely the line of the US government, stating, "The existence of the previously unreported facility, combined with Iran's apparent efforts to conceal it from the IAEA and the world community, will only add heft to charges that Iran is covertly seeking a military nuclear capability."

On Monday, Dreyfuss followed this up with an even more overtly right-wing column ("Can the US-Iran Talks Succeed?"), in which he expresses the hope that the US will succeed in pushing through regime change in Iran.

Dreyfuss begins by declaring that Obama is carrying out a "startling and important reversal of US policy" by preparing talks with Iran this week in Geneva, while abandoning "the charged rhetoric of the Bush administration." This characterization is absurd, given the fact that the talks have been preceded by new ultimatums, threats of severe sanctions and hints at future military attack. In fact, Obama's policy on Iran is entirely in line with that of his predecessor.

Dreyfuss goes on to quote a column by Eliot Cohen published in the *Wall Street Journal* on Monday ("There Are Only Two Choices Left on Iran"). Cohen, a right-wing neoconservative, discusses the possibility of a military attack on Iran, but concludes that the best option is "to break with past policy and actively seek the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. Not by invasion, which this administration would not contemplate and could not execute, but through every instrument of US power, soft more than hard."

While offering certain criticisms of Cohen's rhetoric, Dreyfuss declares that he entirely agrees with the basic premise. "Cohen blithely ignores the fact that it was precisely President Obama's policy of offering to talk to Iran that helped to spark the Green Wave opposition movement in Iran," he writes. "If 'regime change' does come to Iran in the next year or two (or longer) it will be [because] that opposition movement—the very reformists and pragmatists who were disparaged and despised by the neocons until June 12!—manages to get the upper hand."

In other words, Obama, according to Dreyfuss, is more deftly seeking the same end that Cohen seeks.

What are these aims? After carrying out the invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan—two of Iran's neighbors—the American ruling class is seeking to deepen its control over the Middle East and Central Asia by orchestrating a change of government in Iran. This ultimately poses the danger of conflict between the major powers, in which the slogans of "Death to China!" "Death to Russia!" could take on more than a rhetorical significance.

Dreyfuss and other "lefts" are entirely on board with this imperialist agenda. If they were paid agents of the American government, they would write and act no differently. Such a direct connection, however, is superfluous. They perform their services to the American ruling class as a natural extension of their social and political outlook, which is entirely hostile to the interests of the working class—in the United States as well as in Iran.

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