

# One year after Iran's presidential election

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Today marks one year since the presidential election in Iran triggered a bitter factional struggle in the Iranian ruling elite that erupted in the form of the Green oppositional movement. Defeated presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi backed by other so-called “reformers” immediately denounced the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a fraud and launched a well-orchestrated campaign to demand the results be annulled and a fresh election held.

The US, its allies and the international media swung into action behind the protests of tens of thousands in Tehran and other cities. For the Obama administration, this “colour revolution” was seen as an opportunity to fashion an Iranian regime more sympathetic to US interests in the Middle East and Central Asia. In the course of the election campaign, Mousavi had been openly critical of Ahmadinejad's anti-US demagoguery, blaming it for the country's economic isolation.

Reflecting the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois class character of this opposition, whose supporters were drawn largely from better-off sections of the urban middle classes, Mousavi also attacked Ahmadinejad for “squandering” resources on modest subsidies and welfare programs for the working class and peasantry.

Internationally, the various left-liberal and petty-bourgeois “left” organisations such as the *Nation* magazine in the US, the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France and the British Socialist Workers Party took a stance that was scarcely distinguishable from the capitalist press. All of them painted the protest movement in the brightest of “democratic” and “revolutionary” colours, covering up the class character of its right-wing leadership and the obvious interests of its imperialist backers.

One year on, the Green movement has largely subsided. Mousavi and his fellow reformist Mehdi Karroubi at the last minute called off opposition protests planned for today “in order to preserve people's lives and property,” adding that the struggle against the “illegitimate” government would go on. Despite the continual references by Iranian

oppositionists and the press internationally to the “rigged” election, no evidence has ever been produced to demonstrate Ahmadinejad did not win, convincingly.

A rash of commentary has appeared in the international media purporting to analyse the decline of the Green movement, which is invariably put down to state repression. Only occasionally is there a reference to the opposition's class character. For instance, a *Financial Times* article entitled “Reformists Struggle to Regroup” noted that Mousavi had tried “to expand his support base beyond the educated middle class by talking of economic problems,” but “workers and the poorer segments of society have not heeded his calls so far.”

The lack of working class support for Mousavi was evident at the time of the election. Whatever their criticisms of Ahmadinejad, workers and the rural poor regarded Mousavi and his fellow “reformers” with deep suspicion. For all his talk about “democracy”, Mousavi was prime minister between 1981 and 1989 and instrumental in the jailing and murder of thousands of leftists. He is backed by two former presidents—Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, one of the country's wealthiest businessmen, and Mohammad Khatami, who initiated a pro-market agenda that had a devastating impact on living standards.

Mousavi, Rafsanjani and Khatami represent a faction of the reactionary Islamic regime that wants a compromise with the US to end economic sanctions and to integrate the country more closely into the processes of globalised production. As was clear from last year's protests, they are supported by better-off layers of the urban middle classes in Iran and among the Iranian diaspora abroad who want an easing on the regime's restrictions so as to pursue their personal lifestyles and ambitions. Some openly vented their spleen towards workers and the poor, describing them as dupes of Ahmadinejad and his limited handouts.

While the Green movement is rather amorphous and faction-ridden, it has as a whole swung further to the right.

Its demonstrations last September were organised 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.” Others chanted, “Death to China! Death to Russia!” as a riposte to the “Death to America!” slogan of Ahmadinejad’s supporters.

Sensitive to government criticism, Mousavi has been at pains to deny any links to or support from the US or any intention to overthrow the regime. Other opposition figures have not been so reticent. Iranian film director and opposition spokesman Mohsen Makhmalbaf openly appealed for US support in a comment in yesterday’s *Wall Street Journal* entitled “How the West Can Help Iran’s Green Movement.”

After criticising President Obama for previously seeking a deal with Ahmadinejad over Iran’s nuclear program, Makhmalbaf wrote: “A first step would be to overhaul the most important tool America has in its arsenal, Voice of America broadcasting, by finding management interested in enlightening the Iranian people ... And I am asking the Europeans to broadcast EuroNews in Persian.”

The Obama administration needs no persuasion. The US pushed new sanctions through the UN Security Council on Wednesday, which, as Obama pointed out, were designed to help the political opposition in Iran as much as to pressure Tehran over its nuclear program. The sanctions are particularly aimed at undermining Ahmadinejad’s base of support by targeting the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Washington is boosting support for the Iranian opposition with technical support to counter Tehran’s blocking of opposition web sites and Western broadcasting. On Thursday, the *Wall Street Journal* reported: “Green Movement representatives in the US and Europe say they are involved in a broadening dialogue with US representatives about how to best promote democracy in Iran. The meetings have taken place in Europe and Washington hotels, think tanks and restaurants in recent months, according to participants. The State Department confirmed the meetings.”

The anniversary of Iran’s election has generally been ignored by the ex-radical organisations which so enthusiastically promoted the Green movement a year ago. One exception is the British-based International Marxist Tendency (IMT), which issued a lengthy appeal yesterday to its supporters in Iran not to be dispirited. It declared that the “powerful movement” and its “unbelievable heroism” was “a tremendous source of inspiration for the workers and

youth of the world” and the “final answer to all the cowards, skeptics and renegades who doubt the revolutionary potential of the masses.”

Nowhere in the pages that followed is there any class analysis of the Green movement or the politics of its leadership. Empty “revolutionary” bombast cannot disguise the fact that the IMT, along with other ex-radical outfits, seeks to subordinate the working class to an openly bourgeois movement led by a dissident faction of the Islamic regime. This takes place at a time when there are signs of discontent and opposition among workers and the poor over high levels of unemployment and poverty, which will only be compounded by Ahmadinejad’s decision to slash price subsidies on a series of essential goods.

Undoubtedly, there are young people and workers in Iran who are looking for a means of putting an end to the present oppressive regime. However, as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in the midst of last year’s protests: “To the extent that they remain trapped behind one or other faction of the ruling elite, the result will inevitably be the consolidation of bourgeois rule and another round of political repression. The only road out of this political trap is the turn to the independent mobilisation of the working class and the oppressed masses in the struggle to seize power and establish a socialist Iran. Such a perspective is conceivable only as part of a broader struggle for a United Socialist States of the Middle East and internationally.”

The political lessons of the past year should be drawn. The fight for workers’ power and a socialist Iran requires above all the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Iran and throughout the region as the essential revolutionary leadership needed by the working class.

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