

A reply to a proponent of “Iranian Islamic socialism”

The struggle against imperialism and for workers’ power in Iran

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This is the first of a three-part series in reply to Iran Press TV journalist Ramin Mazaheri’s criticisms of the WSWS’s coverage of, and support for, the recent explosion of working-class anger against Iran’s bourgeois-clerical regime.

The protests that erupted in Iran at the end of 2017, and rapidly spread to 85 cities and towns across the country, mark a new stage in the development of the class struggle in the Islamic Republic. Defying state repression, tens of thousands of unemployed youth and impoverished workers took to the streets to oppose price rises, mass joblessness, rampant social inequality, and years of government austerity.

Frightened by the breadth and intensity of the protests, Iran’s faction-riven clerical-bourgeois elite came together to support their suppression by state security forces. This was justified with claims that the protests had been fomented by the US, Britain, Saudi Arabia and other imperialist client regimes in the region, with the aim of subverting the Islamic Republic.

In reality, Washington and London were as surprised as Iran’s rulers by the sudden outbreak of working-class opposition.

The recent protests are of a fundamentally different character to those mounted by the Green Movement in 2009. The latter sought to overturn the re-election of Iran’s populist president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, based on unsubstantiated and implausible claims of electoral fraud, so as to bring to power that faction of the Iranian bourgeoisie most eager for rapprochement with US imperialism and an acceleration of pro-market, pro-investor “reform.”

The recent protests were animated by working-class opposition to social inequality and austerity. They involved some of the most impoverished layers, drawing support in provincial cities and towns that were previously a base of support for Ahmadinejad.

In the days immediately prior to the first protests on December 27, discussion raged on social media about social inequality. The trigger for this outpouring of anger was President Rouhani’s latest austerity budget. Even as it detailed the huge sums paid over to the Shia religious establishment, the budget, in a measure explicitly commended by the IMF, slashed \$5.3 billion from the meager cash payments provided to lower-income Iranians and proposed to hike gasoline prices by as much as 50 percent.

The Green protests closely followed the script of US-sponsored colour revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and elsewhere. In the run-up to the June 2009 presidential elections, the western media, led by the *New York Times*, published glowing accounts of the Green-led “reformist” wave that was purportedly sweeping Iran, then immediately trumpeted the Green leaders’ claims of electoral fraud. Subsequently, they gave saturation coverage to the Green protests, while US and European political leaders

piled on with denunciations of Iran.

The popular support for the Green protests came almost exclusively from the most privileged sections of society. It was geographically limited to the wealthier districts of north Tehran and a handful of other cities. In keeping with the Greens’ rightwing orientation, these layers were mobilized with selfish pledges to end Ahmadinejad’s “squandering” of resources on the poor, as well as complaints about the reactionary, state-enforced moral codes.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has welcomed the resurgence of working-class struggle in Iran, emphasizing that it is part of a broader working-class movement emerging across the Middle East, North Africa and around the world.

Under conditions where Iranian workers have for decades been denied any form of self-organization or political self-expression by Iran’s capitalist rulers, working-class opposition will inevitably, in its initial stages, be politically limited and confused.

The Iranian regime was quick to trumpet the attempts of royalist and other rightwing, pro-imperialist forces to infiltrate the protests and leverage them for their own reactionary purposes, including no doubt by encouraging precipitous attacks on government property and security forces.

Severe as the state crackdown was, it alone does not account for the collapse of the anti-government protests. The absence of a clear political perspective, opposed to imperialism and all factions of the Iranian bourgeoisie, caused broader sections of the working class, as well as middle class layers otherwise sympathetic to the protesters’ social grievances, to remain on the sidelines amid the mounting repression.

Any respite for the Iranian bourgeoisie will prove short-lived, however. The anti-government protests that rocked Iran in the week straddling the new year had been preceded by a mounting wave of strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations against job cuts, unpaid wages and poor working conditions. According to one study, there have been 900 such protests just since the beginning of the Persian new year in March 2017. Another documented 1,700 social protests since March 2016.

The long-suppressed Iranian working class is seeking to assert its class interests and is doing so as part of a growing upsurge of the working class in the Middle East and beyond. The character of the debate underway in Iran is indicated by the reportedly intense discussion that developed on social media in the protests’ wake under the rival hashtags, “We will not become Syria” and “We will become Tunisia.”

The task of revolutionary socialists is to politically arm the working class in Iran with a socialist and internationalist strategy.

As the WSWS explained in its very first article on the protests, “Iranian workers and youth must fight for the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force in opposition to imperialism and all factions

of the national bourgeoisie.

“Any right-wing forces advocating an orientation to Washington and/or the other imperialist powers within the anti-government movement must be exposed and politically isolated. It is imperialism that over the past century has suffocated the democratic and social aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East, laid waste to the region through a quarter-century of predatory wars, and today threatens to embroil the people of Iran and the entire region in an even bloodier conflagration.

“The Iranian bourgeoisie, as demonstrated by more than a century stretching back to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, is utterly incapable of establishing genuine democracy and freedom from imperialism, because to do so would require a revolutionary mobilization of the masses of such dimensions that it would imperil its own selfish class interests and ambitions.

“... [A] new upsurge of the working class must settle accounts with the Islamic political establishment, the Iranian bourgeoisie as a whole and imperialism as part of an international socialist revolution.”

The objections of an “Iranian Islamic Socialist”

This principled stance has evoked opposition.

Ramin Mazaheri, a foreign correspondent for Iran’s Press TV, posted a blog accusing the *World Socialist Web Site* of betraying its “socialist principles” and aiding imperialism, because we welcomed the working-class opposition to Iran’s capitalist government and opposed the state suppression, which had been justified on the pretense of combatting imperialist-sponsored subversion.

Even as he made these charges, Mazaheri, a self-professed votary of “Iranian Islamic socialism,” expressed admiration for the WSWS. He called it “a darn great site,” “exceptional in most every way,” “perhaps the most-widely visited truly leftist web site” and one that is “adored in the Third World.”

He also conceded that the WSWS had opposed the Green Movement. Indeed, we did, publishing numerous articles in 2009 to warn working people in Iran and internationally that this was a rightwing movement, encouraged and manipulated by imperialism.

The WSWS responded to Mazaheri in a comment posted January 6, “The working class unrest in Iran: The WSWS replies to an apologist of the Iranian regime.” In our reply, we drew attention, as we had from the outset of the protests, to the fundamentally different social character of the current anti-government movement to that of 2009.

“The Islamic Republic,” we explained, “is a bourgeois nationalist regime” that was consolidated through the harnessing and subsequent bloody suppression of the popular anti-imperialist upsurge that toppled the despotic rule of the US-backed Shah. “It maneuvers on the world stage to advance the interests of Iran’s capitalist ruling elite, while balancing between different social forces within Iran, including the direct and indirect influence of foreign capital and the working class.”

The comment went on to explain, “The WSWS’s attitude toward the Islamic Republic is based on two fundamental factors: Iran’s character as an historically oppressed country that must be defended against the predations of imperialism, and the antagonistic relationship between the Iranian bourgeoisie and working class.”

Mazaheri has published a second blog in which he repeats and amplifies his criticisms of the WSWS’s attitude to the recent protests, the Islamic Republic, and the struggle for socialism in Iran. He also thanks the WSWS for publishing its reply and again praises it for its “true leftism.” “The WSWS,” writes Mazaheri, “is a deservedly-appreciated site around the world, ... I have often found (its work) insightful and inspirational.” [1]

Mazaheri’s compliments are generous. But they clearly are not based on an understanding of what has enabled the WSWS to emerge as the pole of socialist opposition to imperialist aggression and war. Our steadfast opposition to imperialism is rooted in our class perspective; in the implacable opposition of each of the national sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to the bourgeoisie of their “own” country and to their unrelenting struggle for the political independence of the working class. This is equally true of the Socialist Equality Parties (SEP) in the USA, Germany and other imperialist centers, as it is of those, like the SEP of Sri Lanka, that are fighting to build revolutionary parties of the working class in countries historically oppressed by imperialism.

This class orientation is itself rooted in Marxism, i.e., scientific socialism, and leavened by the strategic lessons of the great class struggles of the last century, above all the theory and strategy of Permanent Revolution.

From Mazaheri’s comments, we must assume that he has both long appreciated our steadfast opposition to the predations of imperialism, including US sanctions and war preparations, against Iran; and that he was genuinely taken aback by our insistence that we stand with the working class against the rulers of the Islamic Republic, and reject their attempts to blackguard opposition to rampant social inequality and capitalist austerity as imperialist subversion.

Mazaheri’s surprise and incomprehension flow from his political conceptions—above all his identification of nationalism with socialism and, in tandem with that, his failure to examine class forces.

In his second blog, he repeats the errors of his first: He fails to examine the 1979 Iranian Revolution in its historical context or to investigate its social dynamics. Rather than analyze the class forces that shape the policies of the Islamic Republic, he repeats the claims of the Islamic Republic’s rulers, or, to be more precise, of a section of them: that Iran is pursuing Islamic socialism.

He again insists that socialism in Iran can galvanize the masses only if fused with Shia Islam. This argument is far easier to make if one ignores, as Mazaheri does, any consideration of the pivotal role of the Stalinist Tudeh Party in the development of the Iranian workers’ movement.

He does not mention, let alone advance a coherent reply, to the points we made both about the huge influence wielded historically by the Tudeh Party within the Iranian working class and the Stalinists’ systematic subordination of the working class to the so-called “progressive” or “anti-imperialist” wing of the bourgeoisie. This included the Tudeh Party providing political support to Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shia populist clerics in the aftermath of the Shah’s overthrow—that is, until the regime targeted the Stalinists themselves for savage repression in 1982–83.

Mazaheri takes umbrage at our assertion that the policy of the Islamic Republic is “not anti-imperialist.” Yet, even if one leaves aside its relations with the other imperialist powers, there is a decades-long record of Tehran pursuing rapprochement with US imperialism, including by conniving with Washington in the 1991 Gulf war, the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the initial stages of the Iraq war.

Mazaheri’s outlook is exemplified by his denunciation of the WSWS for characterizing the Islamic Republic as a “bourgeois regime.” In a country where, for decades, the state has ruthlessly suppressed the working class, preventing it from exercising any form of self-organization, he suggests there is no state, or if there is, it embodies an Iranian nation that exists above and outside the class struggle.

He grants there are workers and capitalists in Iran, and that, for decades, under a succession of presidents, Iran has pursued pro-market policies. Yet he insists the government elected in a pseudo-democratic system—under which the Shia clergy has vast privileges and powers, including to eliminate “impious” candidates and annul legislation deemed contrary to Shia precepts—expresses the “democratic will” of the Iranian

people and, therefore, that any challenge to its rule is illegitimate.

His criticism of our insistence that the Islamic Republic is a capitalist state rooted in, and committed to, ruthlessly upholding the property and interests of the Iranian bourgeoisie, goes hand in hand with his claim that we reject “the democratic popular nature” of the Iranian Revolution.

To the contrary, we insist the Iranian Revolution was a mighty anti-imperialist upsurge that galvanized and politically activated Iran’s workers and toilers.

For the Iranian people, the Shah was the personification, not simply of tyrannical and corrupt rule, but of all the indignities and violence to which imperialism had subjected their nation for a century. His overthrow was a body-blow to US imperialism. For a quarter-century the Shah’s regime had served as a US gendarme in the oil-rich Gulf and a vital base for operations across Eurasia, first and foremost against the Soviet Union.

The immense emancipatory potential of the Iranian Revolution was, above all, revealed in the role of the working class in the Shah’s overthrow. As the popular upsurge developed in the latter half of 1978, the working class, employing the methods of proletarian class struggle—strikes and workplace occupations—emerged as the principal social force behind the impending revolution. Ultimately, it was the oil workers’ strike that broke the back of the Shah’s regime.

The tragedy of the Iranian Revolution is that the working class was unable to play a political role commensurate to its social weight in the struggle against the Shah’s dictatorship.

It was politically neutralized by Stalinism, first and foremost by the Tudeh Party, but also by other leftist currents that were under Stalinist influence. They disoriented the working class, especially through their false evaluation of the role of the national bourgeoisie in the struggle against imperialism, and their insistence that there was no objective basis for a working class-led socialist revolution in Iran.

As a result, a section of the clergy, espousing an Iranian nationalism laced with Shia populist demagogy, and representing the traditional, bazaar-based faction of the Iranian bourgeoisie, was able to contain the popular upsurge, then ruthlessly snuff out all independent, working-class organizations and restore bourgeois order. By 1983, and in most cases well before, all workers’ councils and trade unions independent of the regime, and all leftist parties, were banned and physically broken up.

In the revolution’s early days, Khomeini employed populist phrases that echoed socialist slogans, in order to equate Islam with social justice. But, as the mullahs consolidated their rule, he ever more forthrightly emphasized Islam’s championing of private property, the importance of the bazaar, and the need for law and order.

The Islamic regime made certain social concessions to Iran’s workers and rural toilers in the first flush of the revolution. But these have been systematically rolled back, and at an accelerating pace, as Iran’s bourgeois rulers seek to appropriate an ever-larger share of national wealth and increase their possibilities for capitalist exploitation.

In criticizing the WSWS, Mazaheri repeatedly points to the threat that Iran will be re-subjugated by imperialism. Certainly US imperialism covets Iran. In its drive to re-impose the type of neo-colonial bondage that prevailed under the Shah, Washington has, for the past four decades, imposed tremendous hardships on the Iranian people.

The WSWS, as Mazaheri himself recognizes, has been in the forefront of mobilizing the international working class against the US war threats and sanctions targeting Iran.

However, the defence of Iran against imperialism does not mean support for the clerical-bourgeois regime, consolidated through the suppression of the democratic and social strivings of Iran’s workers and toilers. The Iranian bourgeoisie’s pursuit of its own selfish class aims weakens and endangers Iran, at every point, in the face of imperialist intrigue and bullying.

The history of Iran and of the global struggle against imperialism

demonstrates that a viable strategy to defeat imperialism can only be founded on the working class, and requires its mobilization as an independent political force in opposition to all factions of the bourgeoisie.

We welcome the opportunity provided by Mazaheri’s criticisms to clarify key questions of revolutionary strategy in Iran—a country that for decades has been caught in the maelstrom of imperialist geo-politics, and where the working class, as heralded by the protests that opened 2018, is now striving to find the road of independent class struggle.

Trotsky, the Lessons of Russia and China, and Permanent Revolution

Mazaheri’s central line of attack in both his blogs is that the WSWS is made up of dogmatists, engaged in Trotsky “ancestor worship,” who denounce any and every movement for failing to live up to “universal, permanent revolution” and engage in “ineffectual ivory tower” commentary, rather than advancing policies for “right now.”

The WSWS and the ICFI are not Trotsky idolaters. We base our political work on the historic struggle waged by the Fourth International and its predecessor organizations because it embodies the essential lessons of the revolutionary struggles of the international working class over the course of more than a century-and-a-half.

Trotsky, to be sure, was an extraordinary individual: the co-leader with Lenin of the October 1917 Revolution; the organizer of the Red Army; the political and theoretical leader of the Marxist opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy; a brilliant writer and orator, who illuminated the central issues in the struggle against fascist counter-revolution in Germany and Spain. One could go on.

But the enduring significance and burning contemporary relevance of Trotsky lies, above all, in the program and perspective for which he fought, that animated his activity whether in periods of working-class upsurge or regression, revolution or counter-revolution, and that he developed and elaborated in his speeches, reports, and writings.

Trotsky was and, in as much as he lives in his writings, remains the foremost strategist of world socialist revolution. Hence the indissoluble association of his name with the theory and strategy of Permanent Revolution—an association familiar even to those like Mazaheri who otherwise know little, if anything, substantive about it. Or, to be more precise, whose conception of Permanent Revolution bears, whether they are aware of it or not, the imprint of Stalinist distortion and caricature.

The debate over the Permanent Revolution is an old one, embracing the period before, during, and after the October 1917 Revolution.

Permanent Revolution anticipated and provided the strategic orientation for the conquest of power by the working class, in alliance with the peasantry, in October 1917, and for the actions of the revolutionary workers’ government led by the Bolsheviks. It would become the central political issue in the dispute between Trotsky and Stalin, the latter of whom came to the fore as the political spokesman for the privileged bureaucracy that usurped power from the Soviet working class, under conditions of the isolation of the first workers’ state in a backward, war-ravaged country.

Mazaheri mocks “universal revolution,” echoing the Stalinist claims that Trotsky advocated simultaneous global insurrection, irrespective of the level of the class struggle and revolutionary preparedness of the working class.

But Permanent Revolution is not a chimera, nor an abstract principle. It is a unified world revolutionary strategy that arises out of the character of capitalism as a world system and the logic of the class struggle. It embraces the central problems of the transition of capitalism to socialism, including and, this is especially relevant to our differences with Mazaheri,

the relationship of the democratic to the socialist revolution in countries of belated capitalist development, such as Iran.

Socialist revolution is not a single, national event—the establishment of workers’ power in a given country, pivotal as that is—but a global process, which, by virtue of the breadth of its tasks, constitutes an historical epoch. It begins on the national arena, but necessarily unfolds on the international arena, and can find victory only in the liquidation of capitalism globally and the establishment of a world socialist federation.

The impossibility of “national socialism” or “socialism in one country,” to use the battle cry of the Stalinists in their assault on Permanent Revolution, does not arise simply or mainly out of the fact that the world bourgeoisie views the victory of the working class in any country as a mortal threat. Rather, it is because the nation-state system, in which capitalism is historically rooted, along with private ownership of the means of production, represents the principal barrier to the rational use of the resources of world economy to fulfill human needs. The resulting geopolitical rivalry finds its consummate expression in the growth of imperialist violence, great-power conflict and the threat of a third imperialist world war.

The origins of Permanent Revolution lie in the pre-revolution debates within the Russian socialist movement about the class dynamics of the approaching revolution in Russia. At the beginning of the 20th century, Russia was a semi-feudal country, ruled by a Czarist autocracy, but with a rapidly growing and combative working class.

The revolution’s basic tasks—the overthrow of the autocracy and the uprooting of landlordism through a radical transformation of land relations—were of a bourgeois-democratic character. However, this, as Trotsky would subsequently explain, did not answer “in advance the question of which classes would solve the tasks of the democratic revolution and what the mutual relationships of these classes would be.” [2]

The manifesto issued by the founding congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP) in 1898, recognized: “The further east one goes in Europe, the meaner, more cowardly and politically weak the bourgeoisie becomes, and the greater are the cultural and political tasks that fall to the proletariat.”

The Menshevik or opportunist wing of the RSDLP nevertheless insisted, on the basis of a formal analogy with the English Revolution of the 17th century and the French Revolution of the 18th century, that the working class and socialist movement had to act as the loyal and subordinate ally of the liberal bourgeoisie in carrying out “its” revolution.

After the bourgeoisie had allied with the Czarist regime to crush the 1905 Revolution, the Mensheviks openly argued that the working class had pushed the bourgeoisie into the camp of reaction by too aggressively pursuing its democratic and social aspirations. In 1917, the Mensheviks became a pillar of counter-revolution, supporting the bourgeois Provisional government as it continued Russia’s involvement in the imperialist world war, opposed land reform, and suppressed the working class.

A pamphlet by Keith Jones

In opposition to the Mensheviks, both Lenin and Trotsky insisted that the democratic revolution in Russia could triumph only in opposition to the bourgeoisie, which, because of its ties to imperialism and landlordism and fear of the working class, would and could only play a counter-revolutionary role. In relentless struggle against the Mensheviks and their policy of subordinating the working class to the bourgeoisie, they fought for the political independence or “hegemony” of the working class and a revolutionary alliance of the proletariat and peasantry.

What made Trotsky’s pre-1917 position unique was his insistence that the democratic revolution could and would only be completed through a socialist revolution, led by the working class.

The incapacity of the Russian bourgeoisie to liquidate feudalism and

absolutism meant that those democratic tasks fell to the working class, at the head of the peasant masses, who possessed great revolutionary energy but, due to their social heterogeneity and disparate character, would invariably follow one of the urban classes.

However, the revolutionary workers’ government that came to power, to use the words of Trotsky, as “the instrument for solving the tasks of the historically-belated bourgeois revolution,” would be compelled, so as to secure the basic social interests of the working class, to adopt socialist measures. [3] In so doing, the fate of the Russian revolution would become indissolubly tied to, and determined by, the spread of socialist revolution to the more advanced capitalist countries of Europe, that is, to the development of the world socialist revolution.

Changing what needs to be changed, Mazaheri’s left nationalist position is a contemporary rendition of the false Menshevik perspective: that in the contemporary epoch, the bourgeoisie in countries of belated capitalist development is the ally of the working class and toilers in the democratic revolution and the struggle against imperialism.

The Menshevik perspective was revived by the Stalinist bureaucracy, as it broke with the program of world socialist revolution and sought to base the defense of the USSR (whose state apparatus was the source of its own privileges) on social forces other than the working class, including the national bourgeoisie in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. The bureaucracy’s nationalist orientation would, as Trotsky warned, soon lead it to consciously suppress and sabotage social revolution, in pursuit of an accommodation with world imperialism.

The Stalinists’ insistence that the working class in the East had to subordinate itself to the “progressive” and reputedly “anti-imperialist” national bourgeoisie would have catastrophic consequences for the working class and oppressed masses. This would include, as our subsequent review of the role of the Tudeh Party will show, in Iran. In the name of the anti-imperialist “united front,” the Stalinist Communist Parties systematically harnessed the working class to the political representatives of the national bourgeoisie, boosting the likes of the Indian National Congress, the Iraqi and Syrian Baathists, and the African National Congress as the leaders of the nation in the struggle against imperialism.

However, it was in China that the tragic implications of the Stalinists’ perspective were first spelt out in blood. Between 1925 and 1927, the Chinese working class spearheaded an anti-imperialist upsurge that spread from the cities to the countryside. But the Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 was crushed, due to the Stalinized Communist International’s insistence that the Chinese Communist Party liquidate itself into the bourgeois Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-Shek, abide by the latter’s discipline, and make no attempt to mobilize the peasant masses under the independent leadership of the working class.

Even after Chiang Kai-Shek had slaughtered tens of thousands of Shanghai workers in April 1927, Stalin was adamant that the Chinese Communists remain within the Kuomintang, and denounced any and all calls for the working class to rally the toilers under its leadership in the struggle against imperialism and landlordism.

This course was justified on the grounds that, apart from the landlords and the direct agents of the great powers and foreign capital, the Chinese people were objectively united in the struggle against imperialism. The Kuomintang, or so it was claimed, was not a bourgeois party, but a “bloc of four classes”—the national bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, workers and peasants—that incarnated the unity of the nation.

Just days after the supposedly anti-imperialist Kuomintang brutally suppressed the Shanghai workers, Stalin claimed that imperialist oppression “mechanically welds together all classes from without.” In his reply, Trotsky explained, “The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes.”

“Imperialism,” he continued, “is a highly powerful force in the internal relationships of China. The main source of this force is not the warships in the waters of the Yangtze Kiang—they are only auxiliaries—but the economic and political bond between foreign capital and the native bourgeoisie. The struggle against imperialism, precisely because of its economic and military power, demands a powerful exertion of forces from the very depths of the Chinese people. To really arouse the workers and peasants against imperialism is possible only by connecting their basic and most profound life interests with the cause of the country’s liberation. ... But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, is sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict.” [4]

Trotsky’s analysis remains pivotal for understanding the class dynamics of an historically oppressed country like Iran.

The Iranian bourgeoisie, as we shall document in Part 2, has repeatedly come into limited conflict with imperialism, only to turn furiously against the working class and toilers when their democratic and social aspirations threaten its privileges and rule.

In its origins and relations with Washington, the Islamic Republic is very different from that of the Shah. Yet under both regimes, the working class has been denied any form of independent political self-expression.

According to Mazaheri, the economic grievances that were at the root of the recent worker unrest in Iran are due to “the blockade and sanctions. Secondly, the blockade and sanctions. Thirdly, ... [the] blockade and sanctions.”

Unquestionably, the punishing sanctions, which the US and its European allies imposed on Iran for five years, beginning in 2011, had, as intended, a devastating impact on Iran’s economy.

However much more is involved. Iran, like the rest of the world, has been roiled for the past decade by the fallout from the 2008 global financial crisis, including the collapse in world oil prices. Ever deepening social inequality, and the associated drive of the bourgeoisie to roll back the social-welfare measures introduced in the revolution’s aftermath, date back at least to the late 1980s.

But, even if one leaves all that aside, the question remains: How has the Islamic Republic responded to the blockade and sanctions? By accelerating its offensive against the working class and intensifying its efforts to reach an accommodation with imperialism.

It was Ahmadinejad’s administration that in 2010, at the very point when the confrontation with Washington was escalating, implemented the Iranian bourgeoisie’s longstanding demand for the elimination of price subsidies for basic commodities and services. The phasing out of the subsidies now completed, Ahmadinejad’s successor, Rouhani, is seeking to claw back the puny monthly payments that most Iranians receive, as “compensation” for the ever-escalating cost of bread, gasoline, electricity and other essentials.

From the outset, Rouhani’s push for a diplomatic resolution to the dispute over Iran’s civil nuclear program was coupled with an intensification of pro-market “reform,” including the proposed gutting of restrictions on the laying off and firing of workers. He also signaled that Iran would assist in “stabilizing” an American-dominated Middle East if Washington were to forego regime change in Tehran.

By virtue of its class position—above all its determination to safeguard its property and uphold its dominant position inside Iran, including over various national-ethnic minorities—the Iranian bourgeoisie is incapable of mobilizing the masses of the Middle East against imperialism and its client regimes.

Such a mobilization would require advancing a program to resolve the essential class grievances of the workers and toilers of the Middle East—to

provide jobs and public services for all, eradicate the vestiges of landlordism, establish social equality by expropriating the bourgeoisie and oil sheiks, separate church from state, and oppose all forms of sectarianism and national oppression.

Before examining in greater detail the conditions that made it possible for the Iranian bourgeoisie to hijack the anti-imperialist upsurge in 1978-79, one further point should be made about Mazaheri’s attack on Trotsky and the Permanent Revolution. He favorably compares Stalinism and Maoism to Trotskyism because, unlike the latter, they have “appreciated” the need to modify socialism to “national tastes.”

That the left nationalist Mazaheri should recognize an affinity with Stalinism in no way surprises us. Politically, Stalinism was a nationalist reaction against the October Revolution. Its watchword of “socialism in one country” was a direct repudiation of the program of world socialist revolution on which the October revolution had been based.

Far from being more “practical,” the nationalist program of Stalinism was unviable, as demonstrated by the fate of the Soviet Union and Mao’s People’s Republic.

The subordination of the Chinese working class and Communist Party to the bourgeois Kuomintang during 1925–1927 was the beginning of the derailing of the Chinese Revolution. Mao’s “Sinofication” of Marxism, and his orientation to protracted peasant war, were a pragmatic adaptation to the slaughter of the Chinese Communist Party’s proletarian base at the hands of Chiang Kai-Shek. Under the exceptional circumstances created by the Sino-Japanese and Second World Wars, Mao’s peasant armies ultimately prevailed.

However, the Chinese national road to socialism, which included the People’s Republic pursuing its own version of “socialism in one country,” proved to be, as Trotsky and the Chinese Trotskyists had warned, an historical dead end. In the late 1980s, the Chinese Stalinist regime presided over the restoration of capitalism and today rules on behalf of a wealthy capitalist oligarchy that ruthlessly exploits the working class.

To be continued

Footnotes

[1] <https://thesaker.is/iran-protests-reply-to-the-wsww-response-to-my-critique/>

[2] Leon Trotsky, “Introduction to the First (Russian) Edition,” *The Permanent Revolution* (London: New Park, 1962) p. 3.

[3] *Ibid*, p.5.

[4] Leon Trotsky, “The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin,” in *Leon Trotsky on China* (New York: Monad Press, 1976) p. 161.



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