

The tasks of the Iranian working class

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In the wake of the presidential poll in Iran, a deep-going fissure has opened up within the ruling elite. The losing candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi, backed by the US and European powers, has mobilised a largely middle class movement under the banner of “democracy” in a bid to oust his opponents led by incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Neither of the contending factions represents the interests of the working class. Both defend the present theocratic state and have a long history of bloody repression against working people. The victory of Mousavi, no less than Ahmadinejad, would inevitably pave the way for a savage assault on the democratic rights and living standards of working people.

The working class should certainly exploit the crisis to fight for its own class interests. But it can only do so through a political offensive against all factions of the ruling elite using the methods of class struggle—strikes and factory occupations guided by committees elected by the rank-and-file. The guiding perspective of such a movement has to be the fight for workers’ power and a socialist Iran.

This program is diametrically opposed to that of the various petty-bourgeois left tendencies in Europe and the United States that have responded to the crisis in Iran by lining up behind their own governments in supporting the Mousavi camp.

Two significant statements by the ex-Pabloite New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in France and the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) are barely distinguishable from those in the bourgeois media. They accept uncritically the claim that the presidential election was rigged, paint the opposition protests in the brightest of democratic colours and declare their solidarity with “the movement of millions in the streets”.

Completely absent from their coverage of the Iranian crisis is any class analysis of the contending forces. Insofar as they refer to “workers,” it is not an appeal to

mobilise the working class independently against the regime. Rather it is to provide a left-wing colouration to the movement of the urban middle classes who have flocked to Mousavi’s banner.

In its statement Monday entitled “With the Population and Workers of Iran!” the NPA inflates the limited actions taken by bus union leaders and unions at the Iran Khodro auto plants into a general strike movement that raises “the spectre of a new revolution”. Amid “the competition between rival clans of the regime, workers and the people have thrown themselves into the breach”.

Very little information is provided to justify the claim that we are witnessing the beginnings of a wide movement of the Iranian working class. However, even if that were the case, that would only make the NPA’s policy of uncritically promoting the opposition protests even more criminal.

The SWP, in its statement “Workers’ Action is Key to the Success of the Iranian Movement,” declares that “for the masses on the streets it is about poverty, alienation and struggling to get by”. After noting that the collective strength of the working class has yet to make itself felt, the statement offers no independent perspective or program. It simply concludes that the outcome of the test of strength between the regime and the opposition movement remains unknown.

The uncritical adulation of the protest movement in Iran serves a definite political purpose: to prevent any serious examination of the program of the Iranian opposition leaders, their history and the class interests they represent.

No mention is made in either statement of the extraordinary campaign being waged in the US and Europe to support the Mousavi camp. Yet there is no shortage of commentary in the media and think tanks, debating how best to exploit the factional differences within the Iranian regime for the strategic and economic advantage of the imperialist powers.

The US-based Stratfor think tank, which represents politically conscious sections of the American ruling class, devoted another article this week to examining “Ahmadinejad’s Second Term”. It welcomes the rifts in the ruling elite as a means of weakening Ahmadinejad and “making it harder [for Iran] to achieve the internal unity necessary to complicate US policy”. Significantly, Stratfor is not averse to work stoppages to strengthen the opposition movement, so long as workers remained shackled politically to the Mousavi leadership.

The most sinister aspect of the statements by the NPA and SWP is their failure to even mention the activities of Western intelligence agencies and front organisations which have been operating inside Iran, as they did in the various “colour revolutions” in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics. A series of articles in the *New Yorker* by Seymour Hersh provided details of extensive campaigns of misinformation and destabilisation conducted by the CIA and US special forces inside Iran since 2005 at least.

Those activities have undoubtedly continued under the Obama administration. A great deal is at stake in Iran for the US and European powers. The country not only has its own extensive energy resources, but lies at the crossroads of two regions—the Middle East and Central Asia—that are central to the strategic and economic ambitions of imperialism. The present international campaign in support of the Mousavi faction is aimed at advancing those interests.

The middle-class left groups render their assistance to these efforts by seeking to subordinate the working class to a faction of the Iranian bourgeoisie. The SWP and NPA both encourage the fatal illusion that such a movement can spontaneously meet the aspirations of broad masses for democratic rights. Neither makes a call for workers to engage in a revolutionary struggle for their own independent class interests by taking power and implementing a socialist program.

What would be the consequences of the victory by the Mousavi faction that they advocate? It is only necessary to recall the experiences of workers in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union in the late 1980s. In the absence of a revolutionary socialist alternative, decades of pent-up resentment and anger were channeled behind dissident factions of these Stalinist bureaucracies that were seeking the restoration

of capitalism. What followed was a series of “colour revolutions” promoted by the US to install pro-Western regimes to accelerate a pro-market agenda. In every case without exception, the result has been an unmitigated social disaster for the working class.

A sober appraisal of the present situation needs to be made. A period of extended political struggle has opened up in Iran, fuelled by the deepening global economic crisis. Workers, students and socialist-minded intellectuals need to orient to the working class on the basis of a socialist and internationalist perspective. That means assimilating the lessons of the key strategic experiences of the working class in Iran and internationally over the past century and building a section in Iran of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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