

# Iran, the media and the World Socialist Web Site

26 June 2009

“Think of the press as a great keyboard on which the government can play,” Joseph Goebbels once declared. In the case of the American media, it is hardly necessary for the government to play. The keyboard plays itself.

This is certainly true of the media’s treatment of the recent elections in Iran.

No sooner was the election over than the media settled on the desired interpretation of events: Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was carrying out a “coup d’etat” through a “rigged” election. The opposition candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, enjoyed overwhelming support and was leading a “green revolution” for freedom and democracy.

This analysis has been presented without even the pretense of objectivity. The possibility that there might be different sides to the story, other interpretations of the election results, is completely ignored. Facts that contradict or call into question the desired conclusion are ignored.

The various TV commentators and print reporters—to say nothing of the newspaper columnists—have become open partisans of the oppositional candidate, who happens to be the candidate favored by the United States.

The role of the *New York Times*, the mouthpiece of American liberalism, is particularly brazen. In retrospect, it is clear that the newspaper had prepared well in advance to assist the US government in a destabilization operation aimed at changing the top personnel and shifting the Tehran regime in a manner favorable to American economic and geostrategic interests. It sent chief foreign affairs columnist Roger Cohen and Executive Editor Bill Keller to Tehran to cover developments, along with many other journalists and staff.

The *Times* has to this day presented no independent

analysis of the actual election results. It has not acknowledged, let alone refuted, those establishment think tanks and commentators who have argued that the election results were by and large accurate.

In none of its articles has the “newspaper of record” referred, for example, to the analysis of Ken Ballen and Patrick Doherty, who conducted a poll showing that in the run-up to the election, Ahmadinejad was leading by a 2-to-1 margin. Instead, it has from day one accepted uncritically and promoted as fact the claims of Mousavi and his supporters.

The *New York Times* set the tone for the rest of the print media. Meanwhile, on television, the cable news stations carried non-stop and highly slanted coverage of the anti-Ahmadinejad demonstrations.

The media has devoted a great deal of coverage to the tragic death of one young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, who has been proclaimed a martyr to the cause of democracy, even though the circumstances of her death are unclear and she was apparently a bystander, not a protester. The scale of Iranian state violence is inflated, while virtually nothing is said about US drone attacks on civilians in neighboring Pakistan that this week alone killed more than 80 people. Do the lives of these Pakistanis not count?

One does not need to be a supporter of the Iranian clerical regime—and the WSWS is the most consistent and principled opponent of this government—to recognize the hypocrisy and dishonesty of the American media.

There appears to be an inverse relationship between the resources the media devotes to a story and the reliable and serious information it provides. None of the more fundamental issues in Iran are ever addressed.

Nowhere in the mass media has there been a serious analysis of Iranian history (let alone the reactionary role of the US in that history) or the class dynamics of

Iranian society. The actual program of Mousavi and his chief backer, the multimillionaire veteran of the regime, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, remains a blank page, as does Mousavi's role in repressing left-wing opposition in the 1980s.

There has been no analysis of the geopolitical interests at stake, above all the interests of the United States. The fact that Iran borders three countries that are presently subject to US military intervention—Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan—is not considered relevant in understanding what is taking place in the country. The long record of US provocation in Iran, including the CIA-organized overthrow of a popular nationalist government and Washington's support for the brutal dictatorship of the Shah, are mentioned in passing, if at all.

Propaganda in the guise of news and analysis has not been confined to the mainstream media. The major "left" publications—the *Nation*, *Huffington Post*, *Democracy Now!*, and many others—have fallen in line as well.

The standard-bearer of left-liberal politics in the US, the *Nation*, sent its chief foreign policy commentator, Robert Dreyfuss, to Iran to serve as an advocate of the "color revolution." As the WSWS revealed, Dreyfuss was once a prominent figure in the fascistic Lyndon LaRouche organization. He wrote a book denouncing the overthrow of the Shah.

Under his byline, the *Nation* published an interview, for the purpose of placing the election crisis in "perspective," with former foreign minister Ibrahim Yazdi. In his book, Dreyfuss had identified Yazdi as the CIA's contact within the clerical regime.

Supposedly "socialist" publications are no different. A recent post on the web site of *Socialist Worker*, the publication of the International Socialist Organization, declares approvingly that even forces "on the political right, who months ago would have agreed with a US strike against Iran, stood with Iranians"—that is, with supporters of Mousavi. That the ISO has aligned itself with neoconservative supporters of a war against Iran does not give the organization pause.

The Obama administration has become the vehicle for these middle-class groups to make their peace with American imperialism. They now have the "space" they so long desired. One senses relief, if not outright glee, that they can politically rub shoulders with the

most reactionary forces.

Under these conditions, the *World Socialist Web Site* plays an absolutely critical role. It is a force of rationality and objectivity, a counterweight to the pressure of the bourgeois media, right and "left."

The WSWS is not just one of many online news sources. It is unique, not only in the quality and breadth of its coverage, but above all in its clear political perspective and orientation, based on the heritage of the Marxist movement. It is precisely this grounding that enables the WSWS to develop a correct analysis of unfolding political events and provide the working class in Iran and internationally with an independent revolutionary perspective.

To carry forward this critical work, we appeal to our readers to support the WSWS financially. As the crisis of capitalism deepens, our tasks become larger, more complex and more costly.

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