

# Iran and the Egyptian revolution

16 February 2011

Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Tehran and other Iranian cities Monday, in response to a call from former presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi and fellow opposition leader Mehdi Karroubi for demonstrations. These demonstrations are ostensibly in solidarity with the recent mass uprisings that toppled the regimes of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia and President Hosni Mubarak in Egypt.

The protests—directed against the Iranian government and, in particular, Supreme Guardian Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the most powerful clerical figure in the regime—had been banned. They confronted swift repression by police and members of the Basij militia. Official sources in Tehran acknowledged that two men were killed in the protests. Dozens of people were reported injured and reports of the number arrested ranged from the hundreds to 1,500.

Whether the protests are merely a continuation of the right-wing demonstrations unleashed with US support in response to Mousavi's defeat in the 2009 presidential election, or if they reflect any broader development of the kind of social discontent now sweeping the Middle East, is not yet clear. Foreign journalists were barred by the government from covering them. Most of the Western media has based its reporting on accounts given by figures in the so-called Green Movement led by Mousavi and Karroubi and is colored by Washington's hostility to the Iranian regime.

It seems clear, however, that the heavy-handed repression carried out by the Iranian government reflects its fears that, as in Tunisia and in Egypt, protests have the potential to tap into mass popular anger created by rising prices, unemployment and social inequality.

The Iranian government has denounced the demonstrations for undermining its attempts to use the Egyptian revolution to advance its own strategic and political interests. "While the lofty message of the Islamic revolution after 32 years is now inspiring people in Tunisia and Egypt undermining the pillars of global hegemony, Mousavi and Karroubi invited people to come

to streets in support of people in Egypt but in fact they have served the agenda of the US and Zionist regime," a group of 233 pro-government members of parliament said in a statement issued Tuesday.

The reality is that the Iranian revolution of 1979, which overthrew the hated dictatorship of the Shah, was, like the revolution that brought down the US-backed regime of Mubarak in Egypt, a largely secular uprising dominated by the Iranian workers and oppressed. It was the betrayals of existing leaderships in the workers movement—particularly that of the Stalinist Tudeh party—which allowed Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shia clergy to assume control, repress the most militant layers and subordinate the revolution to the interests of the Iranian bourgeoisie.

If the regime now fears the potential for Iranian workers to become involved in a similar mass movement as their counterparts in Egypt, it is because the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is in the midst of implementing the most sweeping "free market reforms" that the regime has dared to attempt since 1979.

Backed by the International Monetary Fund and the Iranian ruling elite, the "reforms" began last December with the initiation of a program to scrap the country's \$100 billion price subsidy program. The immediate effect was a quadrupling of gasoline prices and drastic increases in prices of food, fees for water and electricity, and the cost of other basic necessities.

The Green Movement, far from being an opponent of these measures, has criticized the government only for failing to carry them out earlier and more aggressively. Reflecting the interests of more privileged layers of Iranian society, it denounced Ahmadinejad as a populist for "squandering" resources on welfare programs for poorer sections of the population.

The Green Movement first launched protests in 2009, based on the claim by Mousavi and his supporters that the elections were fraudulent, and that Ahmadinejad and his supporters had rigged the results. No credible evidence was presented to back these claims, and polling by both

Iranian and Western groups largely confirmed the vote. The Greens' belief in Mousavi's victory was largely fueled by his lead in the most affluent areas of Tehran, from which the so-called "Green Revolution" emerged.

The development of a mass revolutionary movement of the Iranian workers and oppressed would come into immediate conflict not only with the government, but also this right-wing bourgeois opposition, whose social interests are entirely opposed to those of the working masses.

Many young Iranians will doubtless be inspired by the revolutionary events in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere in the region. The decisive issue in developing a genuinely revolutionary movement for democratic rights and social equality, however, is a political break from movements organized by sections of the ruling elite itself, who oppose the government from the right, desiring only to accelerate its free-market program and forge friendlier relations with US imperialism. Democratic rights, social equality and genuine independence from imperialism cannot be achieved as part of a common front with right-wing bourgeois politicians like Mousavi and the remnants of the Pahlavi dynasty.

Political independence from such forces can be forged only on the basis of a turn to the independent mobilization of the working class and the oppressed masses, on the basis of a socialist and internationalist program. The tool that Iranian workers must build to advance such a perspective is a party in political solidarity with the International Committee of the Fourth International, in opposition to the right-wing, pro-capitalist policies of the Green Movement.

To the extent that protests remain politically controlled by the Green Movement, however, they serve social reaction not only in Iran but internationally, as grist for the mill of US imperialism's propaganda.

Washington has sought to seize on the Iranian demonstrations to advance its own strategy of "regime change" in Iran and to divert world opinion from the debacle suffered by US policy in Egypt and Tunisia—above all, its criminal responsibility for propping up the dictatorial regimes of Mubarak and Ben Ali.

Speaking on Tuesday, President Obama said it is "ironic that the Iranian regime is pretending to celebrate what happened in Egypt," claiming that the Iranian authorities "acted in direct contrast to what happened in Egypt" by employing repression against the protests. That several hundred Egyptians were killed in the uprising against Mubarak and thousands more wounded,

imprisoned and tortured has been excised from the official US account of the Egyptian "democracy movement."

In the same remarks, Obama praised the US-financed Egyptian military, which has taken control of the state and is attempting to quell continuing strikes and protests.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a speech on Monday denouncing Iran for repressing the demonstrations, accusing Tehran of "hypocrisy" in backing protests in Egypt while barring them in Iran itself. She declared Washington's support for the "universal human rights of the Iranian people."

Noticeably absent from her remarks was any mention of what rights Washington believes should be granted to the people rising up against the remaining US-backed Middle Eastern dictatorships and monarchies in countries like Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

While the overthrow of the Iranian government and its replacement with a regime directly subordinate to US interests remains a strategic goal of US imperialism, Washington would view the emergence of a genuinely revolutionary movement of the Iranian working class—that is, a challenge from the left rather than the right—with the same hostility it holds toward the independent struggles of the workers in Tunisia, Egypt and countries throughout the region.

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