

IRAN: THE REVOLUTION MUST BE ANTI-IMPERIALIST

Mass uprisings are shaking Iran. A dire economic situation and seething anger against the Islamic regime have brought the masses onto the streets. Protesters have been met with brutal repression. At home and abroad, many predict that the days of Ayatollah Khamenei are numbered. In Washington and Tel Aviv, the imperialist war-mongers are salivating at the prospect of “regime change” and have threatened direct military intervention. Meanwhile, Reza Pahlavi, son of the despised Shah overthrown in 1979, is actively making his bid to swoop in with the blessing of the U.S. and Israel.

The Iranian masses have every reason to rise in rage. The despotic Islamic regime must be brought down. But the anger of the people—as legitimate as it is—must not blind us to the fact that *who* overthrows the regime and *what* replaces it are of crucial importance. The truth is that if the regime is not replaced by working-class power, it *will* be replaced by a pro-U.S. puppet who will sell off the country and crush its people.

This is why the communist left must constitute a separate pole within the struggle, a third pole, opposed to foreign imperialism, Israel, and all its agents, and committed to bringing down the Islamic Republic on an anti-imperialist and working-class program. Short of such an alternative, the only coherent answer to the regime is that of the pro-imperialist opposition, including the Pahlavi mon-

archy, whose return would mean literally rolling back the wheel of history.

We Must Fight the U.S.

Faced with over 70% in food inflation, empty shelves, and a bankrupt ruling clique, many have come to think that accommodation with Western imperialism is not only a lesser evil, but the way to bring immediate relief to the sanction-stricken economy. This is a dangerous illusion. Conceding to the oppressor always leads to more misery.

The U.S. and Israel care only about maintaining their stranglehold on the region and have no regard for the fate of the population. Just look at Syria, Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine. Everywhere the U.S. and Israel have intervened to bring “freedom”, they have laid waste to entire societies and destroyed their social fabric. Iran will be no exception.

There is no hiding that the Islamic regime uses these exact arguments to shut down any dissent and opposition. It presents itself as the only barrier against the country’s plunder and brands all opponents as Zionist agents. As a result, many today turn their back on the program of anti-imperialism, thinking it puts them in the same camp as the regime. This is the wrong conclusion to draw. The Ayatollah is right that the U.S. and Israel want to turn Iran into a new Iraq. However, this does *not* mean that the masses must support the Ayatollah.

In fact, anti-imperialism is essential to fight the regime. That the main voices standing against the Ayatollah have come from the pro-imperialists and Zionists has only served to prolong the tyranny of the Mullahs. This once again risks derailing the mass uprising.

We Must Fight the Regime

Among the pro-Palestinian fighters in Iran and internationally, many are denouncing the protests as a Zionist conspiracy. Starting from the correct sentiment of standing with the oppressed peoples of the Middle East against imperialism, they wrongly defend the tyranny of the Mullahs.

It is simply false that the current protests are the making of foreign agents. Millions in Iran hate the brutal Islamic regime, defined by religious obscurantism, oppression of national minorities, youth, women, and workers. Equating anti-imperialism with support for the government only gives it a bad name. The women of Iran will not be convinced to accept their current condition in the name of Palestine. Nor will the masses who live in misery tolerate the widespread corruption and privileges of the elite and clergy.

Furthermore, what the defenders of the regime deny is that Iran's strategy against Israel has been an utter disaster. Iran sought to build up proxy forces that would gradually change the balance of forces in the region. But confronted with a rabid Zionist offensive, Iran failed to react decisively. It clung to its strategy of "boiling the Israeli frog slowly" even as Israel delivered one devastating blow after the other to the Axis of Resistance—from the decapitation of Hezbollah to the overthrow of the Assad regime. The failure of the doctrine of "strategic patience" was ultimately shown by the U.S. and Israel bringing the war home to Iran.

The truth is that to really defeat the U.S. and Israel requires a completely different strategy, one based on uniting all the peoples of the region in a common struggle for their liberation.

A Real Alternative for the Masses

The masses are faced with choosing between a U.S.-backed monarch and a hated regime. There needs to be another alternative built in direct opposition to those two dead ends. Communists in Iran must put forward an independent program:

Down with the Islamic Republic! The masses are right to fight for an end to the regime. Revolu-

tionaries must stand with them and oppose the repression.

Unconditional opposition to the Shah and his agents! Iran does not need a new dictator. We must confront and defeat the supporters of Pahlavi.

No surrender to the U.S.! Unite the Middle East against imperialist-Zionist tyranny! There can be no freedom so long as the U.S. and Israel dominate the region. Only mass struggle can break the sanction regime.

National liberation of Palestine! Self-determination for the oppressed peoples in Iran! The unity of the oppressed can only be forged in opposition to all national oppression.

Down with the imposition of the veil! For women's liberation! Enough with the trampling of women's rights. They must be at the vanguard of the liberation struggle.

Nationalize the properties of the regime and the clergy! No more privileges. Massive redistribution is necessary to bring immediate relief to the masses and unite them against the imperialist cultures.

For a workers government! Only a government based on the working people of Iran can bring true freedom. ■

SPARTACIST

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Iran under attack Marxists who failed the test

Since October 7, 2023, Israel has been on an offensive to crush the Palestinians and cripple any resistance to Zionist genocide in the region. In attacking Iran, Netanyahu moved against Israel's most significant counterweight and a longtime thorn in US imperialism's side. The US bombing brought its military power to bear behind the assault by its Israeli attack dog. The US attack was intended not only to strengthen its control over the Middle East but also, at a time when the American empire is in decay, to send a message to the world that any resistance will be met with overwhelming force.

On the part of Israel and the US, this was a reactionary war of aggression. It was an extension of Netanyahu's murderous onslaught against Gaza, aimed at giving the Zionist butchers a free hand in the region and disarming and prostrating Iran before the imperialists. Iran, on the other hand, was not fighting to oppress anyone. It waged a just and necessary war to defend the country against attack by the oppressor powers that dominate the region. A victory for Iran would have impeded Israel's slaughter of the Palestinians and weakened the US's and Israeli stranglehold on the Middle East. It would have provided a powerful impetus to struggle for the oppressed around the world, not least for workers in the US.

Now an unstable ceasefire is in force, with all sides claiming victory and none of the underlying conflicts resolved. Israel appears to have inflicted greater damage on Iran, but it did not succeed in knocking Iran out as a regional power. The US made a show of force, seeking to compel Iran to accept a humiliating peace deal that would disarm the country and discredit the regime. But Iran has not capitulated. It inflicted damage on Israel, but it did not change the balance of forces in the region. The situation is at a stalemate.

One thing that is clear is that the workers movement was not a factor in this conflict anywhere in the world. It's telling that the opposition in the MAGA movement had more weight. In Israel and the US, union leaders either supported their own rulers' war or said nothing. What little opposition there was around the world was dominated by pacifism. It is a real sign of weakness that the US imperialists could go to war and the workers movement was nowhere to be seen.

What should Marxists have done to advance the struggle for revolution in these circumstances? It was necessary to fight for the working class to become a factor. In the first instance, this meant taking a correct position on the war. Revolutionary Marxism has always taken a side with oppressed nations against predatory great powers. In the current war, standing for the victory of Iran and the defeat of the US and Israel was the basic and necessary starting point. This includes defending Iran's right to nuclear weapons, a basic measure of self-defence for oppressed countries. But it was also necessary to fight for the independent mobilisation of the working class, against reliance on BRICS, the Iranian regime or any other capitalist force to fight against imperialism.

The Marxist left overwhelmingly failed this test. Some tendencies, like International Socialist Alternative (ISA), directly capitulated to imperialism by drawing an equal sign between the US and its victim. Others, like the International Communist Tendency, arrived at the same position with ultraleft arguments against siding with any bourgeois state, denying the fundamental distinction between oppressed and oppressor nations. Most Marxist groups were not openly social-chauvinist: they opposed the war and denounced Israel and the US but still refused to defend Iran. Some organisations took the side of Iran while also supporting its reactionary regime.

Around the world, only a few tendencies took a correct position for class-struggle defence of Iran. But most of these did so only on paper. For the working class to emerge as a factor in this situation, it was not enough simply to come to a formally orthodox position. It was necessary to fight to make the labour movement act on this position.

The tasks of Marxists in Iran
The main argument internationally against defending Iran in the war is that the regime brutally oppresses the population of the country. Obvious and foremost, this is a problem for makes one of two mistakes on this: the defence of Iran in this war reactionary and oppressive and

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