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Iran

Reflections on the Growing Anti-Regime Protests in Iran

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The protests that started in the city of Mashhad on Thursday December 28 have quickly spread to more than 40 cities including Tehran, Kermanshah, Rasht, Isfahan, Shiraz, Hamedan, Kerman, Zanjan, Ahvaz, Bandar Abbas, and even the city of Qum, Iran's religious capital. The participants are mostly young people under 30 but in some cases have included parents with their children. So far, at least 5 people have been killed in Lorestan and over 50 people have been arrested by heavily present security forces. Some government buildings and banks were set on fire by the protesters and pictures of Khamenei and Khomeini have been burned.

In comparison to the mass protests that arose in 2009 after the fraudulent presidential election, these protests are different in several important respects: 1. They directly oppose poverty and systemic corruption. 2. They include the wide participation of the working class (men and women), many unemployed. . 3. Demands include an end to the Islamic Republic, Death to Supreme Leader Khamenei, Death to president Rouhani, Death to the "Revolutionary Guards" and an end to Iran's military intervention in Syria and Lebanon. 4. In some cases, individual women have bravely taken off their headscarves or veils in public places and have encouraged others to follow them.

No one can deny that these protests are arising after at least a year of almost daily labor actions and strikes against non-payment of wages and terrible working conditions, as well as protests by impoverished retirees, teachers, nurses and those who have lost their meager savings in bankrupt banks. Slogans have also called for freedom for all political prisoners and an end to dictatorship.

At the same time, there is no doubt that there is a strong nationalist tone to some of the slogans such as "Neither Gaza, Nor Lebanon, I sacrifice my life for Iran" or a monarchist influence expressed in slogans which support the legacy of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Some Iranians believe that the protests might have been started by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to consolidate its power, given the infighting within the regime and the threat of a direct war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Others believe that monarchists and the Mujahedin Khalq, with support from the Trump administration, have had a major role in encouraging the protests.

For those Iranians opposed to all these actors and genuinely hoping for a liberatory movement, it is extremely important to learn from the lessons of the Syrian revolution. If the mass movement against poverty and dictatorship limits itself simply to the overthrow of the regime without an affirmative and progressive vision, it faces the danger of being taken over by right-wing populists or monarchists and becoming a pawn in the imperialist rivalries.

This is a time when those Iranian socialists and Marxists who do not support authoritarian brands of socialism can make a difference by organizing within this movement on the basis of opposing Iran's capitalist state, helping the development of workers' councils, defending and promoting women's struggles against patriarchy/ misogyny, and speaking out against the discrimination suffered by Iran's ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds and Bahais.

Deepening the content of the current protest movement is the best way to challenge and oppose imperialist war drives by the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, and to express solidarity with other progressives in the region and around the globe who demand social justice.

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