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Iran

The Other Iran's Views on the May 2017 Presidential Election

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At a time when the Trump administration's bellicose language about Iran is raising serious concerns, it is important not to equate opposition to U.S. imperialism with support for Iran's repressive regime and its own regional imperialist wars. There is an Other Iran that needs to be defended.

Although the media coverage of the May 19, 2017 Iranian presidential election has focused on the high voter turnout for Hassan Rouhani, it is important to emphasize that many Iranians voted for Rouhani because they saw him as the only alternative to the "principalists" who are on the far right of the religious fundamentalist spectrum. Furthermore, many chose not to vote. The reasons which this part of the Iranian population gave for its decision included the following: 1. All the candidates had to be approved by the Islamic Republic's Council of Guardians. 2. Many of those who challenged the fraudulent election results in 2009 were imprisoned and killed. 3. The number of executions and political prisoners had increased under Hassan Rouhani's administration. 4. Although Rouhani's being in favor of the July 2015 nuclear agreement with the world powers was positive, he could not get credit for the agreement because that decision had been made by the Supreme Leader Khamenei, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and the regime as a whole. 5. The main difference between Rouhani and his leading opponent Ebrahim Raisi, was that Rouhani was more open to investments by businesses from the West. While Raisi called for increasing state subsidies for his electoral base, and Rouhani supported more neoliberal reforms, both were equally involved in corruption. Neither really cared about the increasing impoverishment of the majority of Iranians. 6. Both Rouhani and Raisi strongly support Iran's military intervention in Syria to preserve Bashar al-Assad and his regime.

Furthermore, let us also not forget that there are still hundreds of political prisoners in Iran who include student youth, women's rights activists, labor activists, teachers, Kurdish, Azari, and Arab activists who demand self-determination for Iran's national minorities, Baha'i activists whose religion is banned in Iran. Currently, Hengameh Shahidi, a journalist and women's rights activist, Athena Daemi, a feminist and human rights activist, and Esmail Abdi, a leader of the Iranian Teacher's Union are on hunger strike at the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. Labor activists, Jafar Azimzadeh and Shapur Ehsani Rad from the Free Union of Workers [formerly Unemployed Workers' Union] are involved in court proceedings to fight eleven-year prison sentences issued against them on charges of "sedition and anti-regime propaganda."

Mineworkers in Yurt

Let us not forget that following a mine explosion that killed more than 40 workers and injured tens of others on May 3, mineworkers protested against Rouhani's campaign appearance outside the Yurt mine in Golestan province on May 7, 2017. They prevented him from giving his campaign speech, banged on and jumped on his car and expressed their anger and frustration with unbearable working conditions, the lack of the most basic workplace health and safety standards, and the nonpayment of their wages and benefits.

One worker said: "Mr. President, none of you knows what it means to be a mineworker. You only remember us now that we have lost 40 miners, 170 children have lost their fathers and 40 women are widowed. Why don't we have safe working conditions?" Another mineworker said: "I swear to the Holy Koran that we don't have bread to eat. I am in pain. . . Do you even know what a mineworker is? We work but we don't have any insurance." [1]

Iranian Feminist Political Prisoner

On May 15, Golrokh Ebrahimi-Iraee who has been sentenced to six years in prison for writing an unpublished story about the barbaric practice of stoning women, issued a letter from the Evin prison. She wrote: *Isn't it true that Rouhani had promised the release of political prisoners but his minister of foreign affairs at the United Nations denied the existence of political prisoners? Isn't it true that the number of executions under the Rouhani administration have doubled in comparison to Ahmadinejad's administration? . . . The arrests, heavy sentences and frightful detention centers of the ministry of intelligence under the reformists' administration are not any better than the detention centers of the principalists' administration . . . What about the safe houses of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps? In what administration have we not had arrests, humiliation and executions?*

Ebrahimi-Iraee concluded: *The vortex that we are immersed in has been brought about by our own imprudence. The only way to free ourselves from it is to open our eyes and review the history which we have not been determined to read.* [2]

Iranian Journalist in Exile

In a recent issue of *Manjanigh*, an Iranian leftist magazine published in Europe, Hamid Mafi, an experienced journalist now in exile challenges Iranians not to believe the regime's lies about the nature of its military intervention in Syria. He emphasizes that Rouhani's rise to presidency in 2013 was simultaneous with the increased military presence of Iran in Syria in support of Basahr al-Assad. In criticizing those Iranian opposition activists who have now become supporters of Rouhani, he writes: *A group of those who protested against the results of the 2009 presidential election, considered Ahmadinejad's victory to be a coup, and hoped that the regional developments would force the Iranian regime to yield. Now they point to the fate of Syria and Libya without paying attention to Iran's role in the war in Syria. They have adopted the path of "reconciliation with the system" in order to avert "the danger of war and partition" of Iran.*

Instead, he argues that the danger of war and partition of Iran can only be averted if Iranian progressives simultaneously oppose any military intervention in Iran by any state, oppose any military intervention by Iran anywhere in the region, and oppose the "alliance of Iranian nationalism and Shi'ism" which is promoting the repression of progressive dissidents and oppressed minorities.

[3]

Young socialist activist

Majid Arianne, a young socialist activist and intellectual calls on workers to not separate their struggle from those of women fighting for full human rights, or the struggles of Iran's oppressed national minorities, such as the Kurds, Arabs and Lurs. He writes: "It is crude and mechanistic to define the working class simply as those from whom surplus value is extracted, and without considering the subjective factor, the world view, the perspective concerning the aesthetics of work and life." [4]

In an upcoming article, I will further examine the discussions among Iranian progressives concerning alternatives, and will critically analyze the views of some Iranian economists.

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Source Alliance of Middle East Socialists [blog](#).

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[1] See this [video of mineworkers stopping Rouhani's campaign speech and encircling his car](#).

[2] The full text of her letter in Persian is available [here](#).

[3] For the full text of Mafi's article in Persian, see [here](#).

[4] Arianne's article in Persian can be found [here](#).