

Iran Mass Protests Rocked the Regime

Iran has been rocked by the mass protests. They spread to almost all cities and towns. Starting from December 28, 2017 the protests continued for a week. The Iranian government responded with iron hand. Around 21 people - including some policemen - died in the clashes. Officials admitted that around 450 people have been arrested.

The mass protests are not sudden incidents. They are part of Iranian peoples growing unrest and anger against the policies of government. In Arak, an industrial city 300 kms south west of capital Tehran, workers of two industries privatised in 2002 clashed with police for two days in the last September, when police swooped on them to break up their protest against the failure of the managements to pay back wages and medical insurance premiums. Hundreds of oil workers and truck drivers protested against the late payment of wages in last October. Workers of Tobriz tractor factory protested against closure of the factory. The workers of tyre factory in Tehran protested against non-payment of bonus.

The current wide spread protests are a continuation of the previous protests and an expression of growing unrest and anger of the people. The workers and youth are very much agitated by the mass unemployment, rising food prices and severe austerity measures. Conceding the right of workers to peacefully protest, the Iranian President Hasan Rouhani has said that "we have no bigger problem than unemployment".

The mass protests are the result of deteriorating economical conditions of the people *n official records*, only 3.2 million or 12.7 per cent of the work force is unemployed in Iran. But the real unemployment among youth is as high as 40 per cent. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) report says that 50 per cent of people live in poverty. The World Wealth Income Database (2013 data) says that the top 1 per cent of Iranians monopolise 16.8 per cent of all the country's income- almost equal to the entire bottom 50 per cent of people, while the top 10 per cent garner 48.5 per cent.

Adding to this, the government substituted the subsidies it used to give on petrol, gas, basic foods and essential services with cash payments since 2010. In the current year, it slashed cash payments to essential goods. The price of petrol shot up to the extent of 50 per cent. Thus the peoples' anger against this situation got expressed in the mass protests.

Though the Iranian President conceded openly that unemployment caused the mass protests, the ruling elite ranging from Ayatollah Khomeini to IRGC deputy Commander General Rasoul Sanayee and former president Mahmmad Khatami blamed Iran's "strategic rivals" (meaning US, Israel and Saudi Arabia) for inciting and supporting mob violence. At various times these 'rivals' called for regime change in Iran and are taking "the war inside Iran". It seems all the factions of Iranian ruling class have come together in the face of mass protests.

It is true that US imperialism and its allies in West Asia have tried to incite people against the Iranian government in the past. In 2009 with the support of US and French imperialisms and western media, a section of the Iranian ruling class that wanted a rapprochement with US imperialism mislead the people into protests against the re-election of the then president Mohamoud Afmenijad.

It is equally true that the current mass protests are basically different from those of 2009. The protests of 2009 were mainly centred in the capital city Tehran and drawn support from upper-middle class of the city, while the current mass protests occurred all over Iran engulfing nearly 15 cities and towns and drawn workers, youth and poorer sections into the protests. While the current mass protests opposed the austerity measures, rising prices and unemployment, the 2009 protests criticised the government for "squandering" money on the poor for social spending.

The economic crisis in Iran is a product of continuous economic sanctions and military pressure by US imperialism, the collapse of oil prices and brutal austerity measures President Rouhani has implemented.

Four decades back in 1979, the Shah's despotic regime backed by US was overthrown by the mass movement. The Iranian bourgeoisie came to power led by Ayatollah Khomeini and Shia clergy standing on the crest of peoples upsurge. Many social concessions were given to the workers and toilers.

The reactionary nature of the Iranian ruling class revealed during the eight year long Iran-Iraq war. The Iraqi government attacked Iran with the support of US imperialism, while Iran precipitated it by insisting on Shatt-al-Arab settlement imposed on Iraq by the Shah regime with US support. Internally the war helped the ruling class to justify suppression of political opposition and dissipate mass upsurge and subordinate it to so-called 'national unity'. The Iranian ruling elite supported US invasion of Afghanistan and 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Yet the US imperialism continued its economic sanctions and military pressure. Rouhani was elected as president of Iran in 2014 with the support of Ayatollah Khomeini and long time advocate of rapprochement with US, Hashemi Rafsanjani. During the last three and a half years Rouhani government implemented privatisation and liberalisation following IMF pro-market prescription. It also amended the rules on petroleum extraction to woo the finance capital of oil giants. It implemented austerity measures dictated by IMF cutting social benefits to toiling masses.

As a result the US and European sanctions were suspended in 2016 as Iran agreed to dismantle part of its civil nuclear programme. The removal of sanction gave impetus to the Iranian economy, but the upper classes garnered most of the benefits, while the poor were made to pay for it.

It is clear that the burden of economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the imperialist powers fell on the Iranian workers, peasants and other toiling masses, while the upper classes made a fortune during this period. This is the reason for the rise of mass protests in Iran.

The people of Iran had to take their future into their hands. They were deceived by the ruling class for four decades. Similar mass protests are erupting in the Middle East. The peoples' anger should not go waste. The workers and youth of Iran should fight and organise the people against imperialism and Iranian ruling classes.
