

Iran's Coming Revolution: For Civil Rights Or Beyond?

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Simplifying the events in Iran as yet another attempt at a U.S. financed “color revolution” is shortsighted, to say the least. But this is the shallow position many on the left are taking. Fortunately, millions of people partaking in mass demonstrations cannot be reduced to “mere puppets” of Uncle Sam — they have aspirations of their own and ways to achieve them.

It is possible that the U.S. played a role in the events leading up to the massive protests in Iran, since the U.S.-sponsored color revolution formula is well known: a pro-western opposition candidate creates political instability — usually around election time — and uses the demonstrators who support them, who are funneled money through the C.I.A., to help topple the existing regime.

Playing with revolution, however, is a lot like playing with fire — both can quickly get out of control. In the case of Iran this means that the abstract demand for democracy — coming from the Iranian opposition — can soon be overrun by more concrete, “radical” demands. This quote comes from political analyst in the New York Times:

“People in the street have been radicalized, and I do not believe that most of them would today subscribe to Moussavi’s avowed platform” (06/24/09 2009).

It is likely that many Moussavi “supporters” weren’t very fond of Moussavi to begin with, but used his demonstrations to protest the political/economic structure of the government itself.

What is the basis for more thoroughgoing demands from Iranians? For one, unemployment is a huge problem and so is the economy in general. The majority of Iranians are under 30 years old and see little chance of a good future. The New York Times notes:

“This new generation is highly educated and has ambitions for a middle class life that neither the economic nor the social system is able to fulfill... But [the government’s] problems are much deeper than calming the streets. It must go beyond [income] redistribution in order to grow the economy and create jobs.”

Mousavvi himself realizes that the movement has already outgrown him — he’s like a puny cowboy failing to cling to a raging bull. This, too, from the Times:

“It wasn’t supposed to happen this way. Until last week, Mr. Moussavi was a

nondescript, if competent, politician — as one of his campaign advisers put it to me, he was meant only to be an instrument for making Iran a tiny bit better, nothing more. Iranians knew that's what they were getting when they cast their votes for him. Now, like us, Mr. Moussavi finds himself caught up in events that were unimaginable, each day's march and protest more unthinkable than the one that came before." (06/19/09)

The protestors who had begun by calling for democracy started to demand the end of the "dictatorship;" the same demand that helped topple the U.S. puppet — the Shah — in 1979. Moussavi has no intentions of going this far; he is part of the regime and has benefited immensely from it. It is probable that his calls for greater civil liberties are mere bluster, since he realizes that once people obtain these liberties, they end up using them to demand things "unrealizable" under the economic system that Moussavi is a product of.

How will these demands be met? After Moussavi is tossed aside, the working and middle-classes of Iran will look for leadership elsewhere, from the left. And this is where the problem lies.

Many are referring to the events in Iran as being "non-ideological," which is code for "confused." It also refers to the fact that the 1979 revolution was dominated by socialists, radical nationalists, and the bloody victors, the radical Islamists.

The reason that the left in Iran is so sparse is because of the post-revolution repression of the Ayatollahs, who killed thousands of leftist activists while attempting to cement their own place in power. We are thus left with a vacuum for options. But in the real world vacuums are quickly filled; the Iranians are on the move — this genie will not be easily put back in its bottle.

This movement will be filled with searches for organization and leadership capable of expressing the economic and political wishes of the Iranian people; with the realization that these wishes are not achievable under the current economic and political system. A society-wide radicalization will thus continue. The protests are far from over, even though they may be inconsistent and characterized by both lulls and flare-ups.

The protests in Iran have already begun to wake up Iranian society as a whole. The workers, restricted from striking, have taken notice and some have already come out in support of the movement. It must not be forgotten that the oil workers were the ones who put the nail in the Shah's coffin in 1979. When the organized working class puts its full weight behind the movement, the current regime will dissolve.

This is because unions and other workers organizations represent the general interests of the working class as a whole, making their involvement imperative if the movement is to succeed. If the workers, through their unions, reached out to the middle classes and offered both organizational and leadership experience, the movement would be overpowering.

Once the radical traditions of Iranian society are re-discovered and properly organized, the inevitable conclusion will be a democratic social system, directed towards meeting the needs of its people, not the profits of businessmen or Mullahs.

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