

Iran: Whose side are you on?

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I have been reading, with much despair and a deal of consternation, the torrent of ‘analysis’ coming out of ‘left’ field about which, if any, side to support in the ongoing struggles in Iran and, at the end of the day, a good deal more is revealed about the ‘left’ in the West than the situation in Iran.

Typically, the ‘left’ has much ‘advice’ to offer Iran, yet the real issue for us, here in the ‘developed’ world is what are we going to do about our governments. Yet such arrogance is not new, it has its roots in the ideology of racism which unfortunately permeates all of us here in the so-called developed world. We look outward instead of inward, where the issues we really need to confront, reside. Let the Iranian people get on with sorting out their own ruling class, they don’t need us to ‘guide’ them.

It is imperative to separate the issue of Western involvement in events from the distinctly Iranian issues of class, religion, gender and so forth, that regardless, have their causes (and solutions) in Iran. This is not say that Western involvement/interference doesn’t affect events and end up being part of the process, but then this is precisely the problem we in the West have to confront: How to separate out the effects of our incessant meddling in other countries’ affairs from the indigenous processes? So, whatever happened to analysis, class, economic, social and otherwise?

The election It’s pretty obvious that regardless of any fiddling that took place, Ahmadinejad ‘won’. I put it in quotes because the real power in Iran, the entrenched theocracy, controls who can and cannot contest elections. Nevertheless it is apparent that Ahmadinejad garnered the most votes even in an otherwise engineered election.

That said, here in the West where everything is boiled down to simplistic headlines that hide the complexity of the underlying events, it is even more imperative that when the ‘left’ does throw its two-pennyworth into the mix, that we take care not to project our own desires (and misconceptions) onto a situation fraught with danger given the central role that Iran continues to play in the West’s ‘Great Game’, just as it has done for well over a century (See my review of F. William Engdahl’s excellent book ‘A Century of War – Anglo-American Oil Politics and the New World Order’ for more on the disastrous effects of Western intervention in Iran, and most important, how Iran fits into Western strategic and economic interests, that form the background to the current situation).

“The early days of summer of 2009 proved quite stormy in the Islamic Republic of Iran in terms of politics. Almost the entire politically vocal population of the 70-million strong Iran, that’s 40 million people, took part in the election of a new president. It is for the first time in Iran’s history that a fully-fledged election campaign has been launched in the country, with

the main opponents, old rivals in the struggle for power since the 1980s, namely the incumbent leader (rahbar) Ali Khamenei and Mir Hossein Mousavi, then Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, had an opportunity to rally their supporters.” — Iran: the new elite By Vladimir YURTAYEV, 2 July, 2009, Strategic Culture Foundation.

What we (conveniently) forget is the fact that given the total domination by the Western media of events, no matter their location, it is virtually impossible for us to get a handle on exactly what happens, almost anywhere (for more on this see the excellent analysis of ‘news’ coverage in the West by Jeremy R. Hammond, ‘The Case of the ‘Fatwa’ to Rig Iran’s Election’). You need to spend a lot of time digging around to understand what’s really going on, even those engineered by Western interests, let alone the Machiavellian goings on of the Iranian state (just as they are everywhere).

But for the left, here in the West, it’s not an issue of whether to support Ahmadinejad or not, never mind the ‘opposition’ (an opposition that was allowed to contest the election, and as such is every bit a part of the ruling autocracy). After all, Ahmadinejad is not exactly a leftie (in spite of at least one writer, calling him such). No, the real issues transcend Iran and its election.

Yurtayev makes the following interesting observations,

“Meanwhile things in and around Iran are moving in groove, with the partisan media are working off what money they got to (what some quarters thought) spin-doctor a new president, although the previous one has been re-elected. 200 protesters are presented as if they were 200,000. Almost 13 million people make their home in Tehran, so even one million is just one sixth of the city’s grown-up population. The others voted against the protesters. The whole thing boils down to the following: part of the old revolutionary elite that’s taken possession of economic profits gave way to the new elite following M. Ahmadinejad’s win in 2005, an elite that’s emerged on the basis of the Army and that’s relying on the other part of the old revolutionary elite, related to rahbar Ali Khamenei. The problem is whether the new old elite will manage to persuade the opponents not to take all of their money out of the country or not.”

There are two things going on here, the first is Iran from the inside. We forget that inside Iran, the vast majority of people have other things on their minds than what the West says or advocates (another example of our damn arrogance). We assume that all or most Iranians view events just as we do and afford them the same importance, but forget that most of our contacts with Iran are effectively in and of the West, even those originating with Iranians (see Hammond above for examples). All the comments and opinions we get exposed to are designed for the Western mind(set), largely reinforcing existing stereotypes.

As Yurtayev points out, in Tehran, the majority supported Ahmadinejad. But what we saw on our tv sets were vast crowds, whether for or against Ahmadinejad, who knows? The media didn’t tell us or they misled us into thinking that they were mostly composed of Mousavi’s posse. One thing is clear: there all kinds of internal power plays going on in Iran that are tangential to relations with the US and the nukes slash terrorism nonsense. If I were a student of Iranian politics, I could figure out what kinds of interests were involved and make some educated guesses at where its all headed, but I’m not. In any case, what we think of events in Iran are neither here nor there.

What is important is Iran in the international arena, as an ‘object’ of Western interests,

whether economic, political, strategic, it inhabits a media 'space' created specifically for its Western audience. You know the stuff, 'inscrutable', 'evil' even, but definitely beyond our ken and in need of 'translation' for us dummies.

Thus for all of us here in the West, let alone the lefties, it is vital to separate the two, after all we can support Iran's independence and autonomy without supporting or opposing Ahmadinejad.

Let the Iranians get on with their own struggles and let us support them by concentrating on stopping 'our' governments interfering in the affairs of sovereign nations like Iran.

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