

US wages economic war on Iran

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Even as the Obama administration continues the American military build-up in preparation for attacking Iran, the criminal character of its foreign policy is exposed by the social devastation being wrought by the sanctions regime imposed on the country. The US and its allies are already waging an economic war on Iran that is producing hyperinflation, rapidly rising unemployment and immense hardship for millions of working people.

The value of Iran's currency, the rial, plunged by 40 percent over the past week, sending prices, including for staples, soaring. In just two days—October 1 and 2—as panic over the currency spread, the rial lost more than 25 percent of its value against the US dollar. Since the end of last year, the currency has depreciated by over 80 percent.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon pointed yesterday to the “significant effects on the general population” caused by the harsh economic sanctions—which he has backed. These included “a rise in commodities and energy costs, an increase in the rate of unemployment and a shortage of necessary items, including medicine.” The lack of medicines needed to treat cancer and heart and respiratory conditions will inevitably lead to unnecessary suffering and death.

Prices for basic food items such as milk, bread, rice, yoghurt and vegetables have at least doubled since the beginning of the year. The price of meat has put it beyond the reach of many working class families. “Food, transportation, everything is up, and people are worried not only about today, but also tomorrow. People are extremely panicked about the economy,” Mehdi Khalaji from the Washington Institute for Near East Policy told the media.

The Obama administration reacted to the news with barely disguised glee and attempted to fuel internal opposition by blaming Tehran for the disastrous economic situation. “The Iranian state has horribly managed all aspects of their internal situation,” State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland told reporters.

There is no disguising the fact, however, that the Obama administration has set out to crash the Iranian economy. Punitive sanctions unilaterally imposed by the US and the European Union have this year halved the oil exports that constitute 80 percent of Iran's foreign revenue. The US and the EU are preparing additional penalties in the coming weeks that will further impact Iran's energy exports, its access to international finance, government revenue, and the living standards of ordinary working people.

Underlining its role as the mouthpiece for US gangsterism, the media have reacted to the latest economic news with complete indifference to the suffering of the Iranian people. The crippling sanctions are treated as a legitimate tool of foreign policy to force Tehran to cave

in to Washington's demands that it shut down its nuclear programs. The only issue for the various pundits is whether or not US aims will be achieved short of launching war on Iran.

The Obama administration's accusations over Iran's nuclear programs reek of hypocrisy and cynicism. The US has produced no evidence that Iran is building or seeking to build a nuclear weapon. Indeed, Tehran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and allows international inspections of its nuclear plants, even as Israel, America's chief ally in the Middle East, refuses to do so and has a large, sophisticated nuclear arsenal.

Moreover, Israel and the US have repeatedly launched wars of aggression and are openly threatening to attack Iran. The primary aim of US imperialism in this escalating confrontation is to consolidate its strategic dominance over the energy-rich regions of the Middle East and Central Asia.

While opposing the war plans of the Obama administration, the *World Socialist Web Site* gives no political support to the reactionary theocratic regime in Tehran or any faction of the Iranian bourgeoisie. The response of President Mahmoud Ahmadinjad to the international sanctions has been to impose the full burden on the working class and rural masses. His government has dismantled price subsidies on essential items and replaced them with handouts whose value is rapidly evaporating.

Officially, unemployment is 12 percent, but various analysts put the actual figure twice or three times higher. An estimated 500,000 to 800,000 Iranians have lost their jobs in the past year. Production in the Iranian auto industry has plunged by 30 percent over the past six months.

The Associated Press reported a petition by some 10,000 workers and trade unionists that declared, in part: "A staggering increase in prices has been biting over the past year as wages of workers have increased only 13 percent this year... Millions of workers cannot afford their monthly housing costs."

Undoubtedly, the various rival factions of the ruling elite are seeking to exploit this widespread discontent, which erupted in protests this week in Tehran's bazaars, for their own political purposes. Washington will attempt to do the same as it did in 2009, when it backed the so-called Green Movement based largely on Tehran's upper-middle classes as a lever for regime-change.

None of this has halted the US preparations for a war of aggression against Iran. As in the case of Iraq, which suffered a decade of crippling international sanctions, the sanctions regime imposed on Iran is designed to politically and economically weaken the country in the lead-up to an attack. The US has just carried out a huge international de-mining exercise in the Persian Gulf, and later this month will hold joint war games with Israel designed to test anti-missile systems. These exercises are not "defensive" but are intended to strengthen the ability of the US and its military allies to counter any Iranian retaliation that will result from an American attack.

A war on Iran will have devastating consequences not only on the working class in Iran, but throughout the region and the world. The only social force capable of halting this war drive is the international working class. Workers in the US and Europe must unify with their class brothers and sisters in the Middle East and around the globe to build an independent political movement against imperialism based on the fight for socialist internationalism.

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