

# **“Bread, jobs and freedom”: the street protests in Iran**

Friday 13 April 2018, by [ASEFI Soheil](#), [GALLO Mattia](#) (Date first published: 26 January 2018).

**Iran’s current wave of protests is different from last time. This time, the urban poor are in the streets.**

**What is the main difference between the 2009 protests of the Green Wave movement and those of today?**

S.A: The main difference between what has been branded in the Western mainstream media as “the Green Movement” in 2009 and the recent protests, named the “bread, jobs and freedom” uprisings, is the significant presence of the urban poor on the streets across the country; it was indeed a unique phenomenon in the history of Iran that a wave of protests spontaneously and simultaneously swept into small towns and big cities. There were 70 to 80, according to unverified reports, across all of the country’s provinces. In 2009, the Iranian establishment or the “Nezam” tried to heat up the cold process of elections by arranging televised electoral debates. Holding a high turn-out election would pull the desired rabbit out of the hat, that is, the re-election of Ahmadinejad, who was very close to the main foreign macro-policies and domestic nuclear policies of the regime and personally close to Ayatollah Khamenei. However, the entire scenario did not happen as such. The dire political and economic situation brought out part of the silent population to the stage with the hope of reform through Mousavi and Karroubi. All of this was happening at a time when neither of the two reformist candidates, nor Ahmadinejad had any structured economic plans or ways out of the crisis except the prescriptions of the IMF. Thanks to the Persian propaganda apparatus in the West such as the BBC Persian and the VOA and the rest, the “Green Movement” soon became a business in Washington, London, Berlin, New York and Paris where some claimed to be the representatives of the religious reformism and some completely against it for a “full-regime change.”

So putting aside the significant presence of the so-called “middle class” on the streets in 2009, in the aftermath of recent protests, it took some time for the pro-West mainstream pundits and their reformist allies within the country to find an “appropriate” language to address these protests or the bread riots as they have been called by political scientists. As always the propaganda machine just went into hyper drive, each according to the employers’ agenda. “Appropriating “The People”” is probably the best way to frame this situation. As one of these fixers of a Washington-based lobby NIAC, which has been selling its brand of yuppie neoliberalism to its clients in Washington for a while now, mentioned in his piece in The Nation, when the recent protests broke out, he immediately reached out to organizers of “the Green Movement,” to find out what was going on: “But almost everyone I spoke to give me the same answer: We don’t know. We haven’t been able to piece it together yet. We are all confused.”

So they needed some time to even formulate these upheavals within their own languages and agendas, from the so-called “progressive” imperialist smart power venues tactically close to Iran’s “Moderate” government to those regime changers at the FDD, the Brookings, Hoover and that ilk. Shortly after this, we faced the production line of think tank and academic analysis.

## **What is the significance of these pundits on the current misinformation about events?**

Well, being an “Iran expert” these days is more or less like working as a marketing manager. Many of these pundits are of course the employees of this and that Western think-tank, who get paid to produce the kinds of things according to the agenda of their specific employers; some are paid to “represent” the “moderate” forces within the system and promote “reform” and foreign direct investment policies; and others stand for “irreconcilable opposition,” demanding sanctions under the pretext of the IR’s human rights violations and even direct military intervention for “regime change.” As you know, Washington’s plan for political transition involves both smart and hard power, both overt and covert funding, if you will. We had the same experiences in Venezuela, Haiti, and Cuba, and earlier Nicaragua and more or less in the so-called Arab Spring. As has been shown by William Robinson, in these countries, neoliberal elites are bolstered through political intervention programs. In El Salvador, for instance, “democracy promotion” programs, which had been conducted throughout the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, were greatly expanded in 2003 as presidential elections approached.

So when it comes to Iran, most of the exilic politician figures to speak on Western media should be best thought of as mediators or marketing managers. For the sake of accuracy, we can then “the native informants” who are granted the power to speak for “their people” and to “explain” their culture and politics to dominant groups if you will; for instance, the ones at the US-funded bilingual venue IranWire are definitely good examples of these kinds of agents. From the *BBC Persian*, *VOA*, and *Manoto tv*, to the new Saudi-Funded satellite TV in London *Iran International*, we see lucrative salaries for their former “reformist” employees who have joined the regime-change club.

## **And it seems a number of activists on social media are mostly the audience of the venues you’ve mentioned.**

Yes, sadly, and mostly from what you may call “the middle class” Iranians; this is typical of the slacktivists, left or right, who labor under the illusion of the political agency of the Hashtag Movement or other Silicon Valley toys, which are of course part of communicative capitalism and a fashionable trend of “social movement studies” in Western academia.

## **Let’s get back to the social composition of the protesters. What are the biggest claims?**

As Asef Bayat the author of *Street Politics: Poor People’s Movements in Iran* has stipulated in a recent interview, we still need more information and exact details on recent protests to give a solid analysis. The Security deputy of the Intelligence Ministry says that 90% of those arrested are under 25 years of age. What does it mean? In addition to the important points on “the implicit rules of the game that formed the contract between state and society” mentioned by the WaPo author, it also means they were born during the presidency of Rafsanjani, known as the father of neoliberalism in Iran in the 1990s, so they are barely old enough to meaningfully have taken part in the protests following the 2009 elections. Putting aside the imperialist agenda for a colored revolution in 2009, one should not forget that even the so-called “Green Movement” itself was an indirect offspring of the demanded “Structural Adjustment Programmes” demanded by the World Bank and the IMF, began in the 1990s under presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, and pursued-despite the rhetoric-by Ahmadinejad and even more vigorously, by today’s more “moderate” government, or as I used to call it, the executive committee of Iran’s chamber of commerce. Interestingly, in recent days, the name of Iran’s “Ministry of Education” has been changed to “the Ministry of Formal and General Education.” For the sake of coordination, the name of the Ministry of Intelligence (VEVAK) can also be changed into “the Ministry of Discipline & Punish.” The governmentalities of neoliberalism!

## **So it seems the protesters; grievances have been reasonably clear and have followed a**

## **specific historical continuity. ...**

That's true; it has started with opposition to price increases; basic food prices have sky-rocketed in the last few weeks and the rate of inflation is out of control. The price of eggs, to give you one example, has gone up by 40% in a matter of days. The larger protests came in the aftermath of a number of local protests by workers in opposition to job losses, notably, the Ney Shekar workers in Khuzestan province. Mass unemployment is worse in provinces where the protests started. As a result of the relative diversity of internal media, Iranians are also aware of multibillion dollar corruption scandals in all factions of the regime, both Rouhani's government and senior ayatollahs associated with the more conservative factions of the system.

## **It's been said that the protests were part a plot by 'conservative factions' to discredit Rouhani's government. Do you agree with that?**

In the beginning of the wave of recent protests, the head of Astan-e Quds Razavi, Iran's wealthiest and most influential charitable organization, and Mr. Raisi, who was Rouhani's political rival in the last election, played a role. Regardless of this, we are talking about a gun ready to go off, so the slogans soon became political and the main target was Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian Republic itself.

## **Were you surprised by the wave of protests that swept all across Iran?**

First and foremost, I would say I'm not "surprised" at seeing this eruption of urban poor in Iran. Amazement would be a better word choice as with many of other Iran watchers and pundits. It was definitely not an all of a sudden thing and was pretty predictable for one who has followed Iran's politics beyond factional rivalries among elites and the nuclear program. If we don't go further, at least since Rouhani took office, there has not been not a single day without a protest by unemployed workers, retirees, teachers, environmental activists and different parts of the most vulnerable strata of Iranian society. In July this year, Mohammed Mukhaber, a senior Islamic Republic official, warning about imminent "social and security-related disasters" said, "the situation in Iran has reached a dangerous level, where we have 12 million people living below the absolute poverty line and 30 million citizens living below the relative poverty line." The total number of those who live around or under the poverty level is obviously a lot higher, reaching 40% of households according to some reports.

## **Some of the protest slogans we've heard about in the western media were also pretty controversial. What do you think about it? Tell us more about the demands and slogans.**

That's true; some of the slogans imported to the streets of Iran by the Western think-tanks in 2009 and sold successfully to the desperate people of Iran by the pro-West Iranian pundits in the diaspora satellite TVs were pretty reactionary. This includes those like, for instance, "Neither Gaza, nor Lebanon, I will die only for Iran," or "Leave Syria, think about us!" But buying these kinds of slogans, or even some pro-monarchy slogans on those streets by the ordinary people is pretty understandable for those who have lived experiences in that country. Given the IR's agenda during all these years and the suppression of left and alternative voices, one can unfortunately sell whatever Western garbage to part of the public in Iran today. Though the western mainstream media did their job as always and highlights these slogans, given Iran's important geopolitical role in the region, a number of student protesters opposed these reactionary slogans: they changed the pro-nationalist and pro-West slogan of "neither Gaza, nor Lebanon, I will die only for Iran" for the much deeper slogan of "From Gaza to Iran, down with the exploiters."

Having said this, just take a look at some interesting footage of street interviews in Tehran on the

recent protests. These interviews demonstrate that socio-economic justice is the central demand of protestors who decry so-called free market capitalism, the scrapping government subsidies and inequality, and the IMF and World Bank prescription for the IR, which is of course the pre-requisite of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the global South. One of the protesters: "My 37-year-old son is also single & has nothing going on... I am a disabled veteran. No pharmacy has my medicine. Am I supposed to buy them on the free market? Who can I tell my pain to? There is shrapnel in my spine and I can go paralyzed any minute. We are the forgotten ones." And another one in defense of the incomplete 1979 Revolution: "They are those who come and direct the chants towards the entire regime. This is our revolution. We like our revolution. We have paid with blood for it, I fought in the #Iran-Iraq War myself. But, I am protesting inequality and corruption. Who is responsible for these?"

**You've briefly mentioned the role of the the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the protests. Could you please elaborate a little bit on that point?**

A good question, given my observations of the long-time conflicts between the IRGC, as the strongest part of Iran's militarized bourgeoisie, and the clerical body of the current system. By the way, one also has to see these upheavals in the context of the ongoing battle to succeed supreme leader Khamenei. The fact is all sides seek to secure a political upper hand before post-Khamenei power struggle begins in earnest. It sounds like the prime mover of the ongoing transition in the Islamic Republic is nothing but the IRGC. As the evidence shows, they're currently the only entity able to severely marginalize the clerics, both politically and economically, if conditions were to arise. You can barely find "reformists," by which I mean the typical figures of the so-called "reform movement," among the current forces of the IRGC. The current reformists, close to Rouhani's government mostly come from the clerical body of the system and have always had friction with the IRGC, and the IRGC is pretty aware of the amount of hatred towards clerics more than anyone else outside the system.

Since I mentioned earlier the post-Khamenei era, the fact is that the entire US strategy of degrading Iran's military defenses and securing major neo-liberal "reforms" depends on the battle inside the battle to succeed supreme leader Khamenei. The question which needs to be answered is who is Ahmadinejad himself? or Rouhani? Or even Khamenei?! Are they really prime movers, or nothing but representatives of different factions of ruling capital powers and entities which have no organic relations to those who do all the productive work? All things considered, I think the determination of the IRGC, or the core of militarized capitalism in Iran if you will, is going to follow this path through a gate where 'economic surgery', the term Islamic Republic officials and also the neoliberal economists in Iran used to use, began years ago. We are talking about a bunch of military people who have monopolized capital and power and keep it in their hands. They will of course be readier to work with foreign capital once the situation gets a bit more stable and if the widespread corruption in the system allows them to pursue the whole agenda of the IMF and the World Bank for the so-called developing countries. Of course, this plan is not that simple and is still different from what you know as neoliberal capitalism model in the West. They have been preparing the prerequisites though. However, it is true that there is no such thing as a systematic structure in the current regime, and that makes it so difficult to venture a cut-and-dried opinion.

**According to many pro-Rouhani pundits, what's going on in Iran's economy is not a real privatization. Is that a way within the system to move to a standard model or whatever one might call it?**

That's another irony. "What is 'real privatization'?", I would ask them. The ingredients have always been the state, military-industrial complex, and a fake civil society, what else? They'll protect our "national security." The fact is the state has always been the engine of privatization everywhere. One

of the key insights of the Hungarian philosopher Karl Polanyi is that there is no such thing as a free market. There never has been, and there never can be. In his words, the concept of an economic sphere completely divorced from government is a "stark utopia." As I said before, we do not have only one model of neoliberalism in the world; experience has shown that the so-called Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) through which Iran has been sinking into this swamp more and more, can adapt given the different political, geographical and regional structures in the world and different countries. The irony is that the only alternative of the "moderate government" in Iran, and a number of its supporters and pro-reformists- "Iran experts" in the different Western liberal think-tanks-is nothing but getting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Multinational Corporations (MNCs). We really need some serious, non-reductive studies of the class composition of the forces involved in these upheavals.

**We haven't heard any slogan in support of the reform movement or of the Iranian opposition leader who has been under house arrest since 2011.**

Absolutely, not a single word indeed. Another significant point of these recent protests was the end of the political project of "reformism" in the structure of jurisprudence. The long-lasting battle between the modern nation-state model and jurisprudence has entered into a new irreversible phase. One of the protesters' slogans, "reformists, conservatives, the story is over" ("eslaahtalab, osoulgara, dige tamooome maajera") which has been heard over and over on the streets of Iran, is very significant. If you ask me, it's like a turning point in the upcoming upheavals; it indicates the unfixable fracture of the so-called reformist-principalist "historic bloc," in Gramscian language. In the meantime, as protests against neoliberal policies rage in Iran, the so-called "conservatives" to the "reformists" continue to support privatization and a capitalist economy, differing only on the speed and scope of privatization. WaPo's pundit calls "'the reformists'...the main agent of democratic change within the country!" Along the same lines, *the Economist* takes on Rouhani's "trickle-down" economics, as if the consequences of these devastating policies across the globe, the myth of trickle-down economics, are only limited to Iran! The fact is that the principle phrase, "If you build it, they will come" has been the road map for the whole system in Iran for a while. Meanwhile, according to the the official reports, average Iranians have become 15% poorer over the past decade.

**For about two years, Iran has become an oil-exporting country to the European powers. This has increased its regional power after the lifting of international sanctions. Has the Iranian population benefited from this export policy? Or did the money only go to the upper classes?**

No, putting the consequences of the brutal imperialist sanctions aside, which have also played a great role in generating corruption within the system, it did not work that way, and the same power structure did not allow Iranian society to benefit from this export policy. The World Bank study for 2016 is pretty informative: "the Iranian government has implemented a major reform of its subsidy program on key staples such as petroleum products, water, electricity and bread, which has resulted in a moderate improvement in the efficiency of expenditures and economic activities." In plain English, "efficiency of expenditures" means the Iranian government is cutting down on how much its social welfare programs actually provide social welfare. The report continues:

"The overall indirect subsidies, which were estimated to be equivalent to 27 percent of GDP in 2007/2008 (approximately US\$77.2 billion), have been replaced by a direct cash transfer program to Iranian households. The second phase of the subsidy reform plan began in spring 2014, which involves a more gradual fuel price adjustment than previously envisaged and the greater targeting of cash transfers to low-income households. Around 3 million high-income households have already been removed from the cash transfer recipient list. As a result, the expenditures of the Targeted

Subsidies Organization (TSO) is estimated to have declined to 3.4 percent of GDP in 2016 from 4.2 percent in 2014.”

### **And what is the role of international finance?**

International financiers are the main facilitators of turning Iran’s economy into a case of casino capitalism in the Middle East. At the same time, the Iranian government’s efforts to cut the helping hand it gives to the neediest Iranians, reducing such help from 27% of GDP in 2008 all the way down to 3% by 2016; an extreme neoliberal, shock-and-awe kind of capitalism is something one can barely see in the analysis of “democracy promoters” and “regime change” forces in the West. So proletarianization has been going on for nearly three decades, there are no worker’s unions left that could pursue their class interests, there is a dramatic increase in unemployment due to financialization of capital.

### **So the neoliberal policies carried out by Rouhani have caused the discontent of the recent protests?**

Of course they have; but it’s not only limited to Rouhani’s government. In Iran, the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) started with Rouhani’s godfather, Hashemi Rafsanjani, following the end of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1990s (and this is not even mentioning the wage-suppression by Mousavi’s premiership in the 1980s, which paved the way for the SAPs. Rafsanjani was the founder of a neoliberal economic policy which harmed workers and the poor, and this policy has been followed by all the subsequent governments of Iran until the present day. As I mentioned in my 2013 MR piece on the IR neoliberal policies and social security in Iran, Mohammad Nahavandian, a U.S.-educated neoliberal economist and politician and former head of the Chamber of Commerce, who now serves as chief of staff to Iran’s “moderate” president, is just one of Rafsanjani’s pawns populating the Rouhani cabinet. Along with other adept diplomats of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, he is expected to be a prime mover pushing Iran further into the aforementioned new phase of neoliberalism. A look at Rouhani’s book, *National Security and Economic System of Iran*, provides evidence about where his policies are rooted. In his book, he argues that that “the minimum wage must be slashed” and restrictions on the laying off of workers eliminated for Iranian ‘owners of capital’ to help the country’s economy flourish. He notes “one of the main challenges that employers and our factories face,” Rouhani writes, “is the existence of labour unions. Workers should be more pliant toward the demands of job-creators.” Along the same lines, when it comes to the commodification of nature in Iran today, the tragic example of the Karun, Iran’s largest river, can help us to get a better picture of the grievances of the protests; it’s important to know that beyond the mainstream narrative, it’s not simply about mismanagement and such. It’s a systematic process of accumulation by dispossession, what we can see in both the global North and South, neoliberal capitalistic policies have led to the loss of intrinsic value of nature, affecting the indigenous lifestyles, and serving as an instrument of modern imperialism.

### **What do you think is the weight of President Donald Trump’s political positions on the protests?**

It’s really hard to help myself from making a “polite” comment on this. In response to the “solidarity” message from Trump or Hillary, I would simply repeat the famous phrase, “It’s about neoliberal capitalism, stupid!” The fact is that President Trump just dedicated a “symbolic” gift, a kind of “smart sanction,” to the verity of different Iranian political actors (“democracy and human rights promoters”) at the “regime change” club.

**As you wrote in your Counterpunch piece in 2012, “Bringing the People of Iran to Their Knees,” the inevitable failure of the ruling theocracy in Iran is going to become “an**

## **unmitigated tragedy.” Are they the same political actors?**

Yes, these people or agents in the semi-oppositional forces are exactly that part of the “democracy promoters” who helped the West to impose the brutal “crippling” sanctions to the people of Iran, which have definitely exacerbated the situation and are one of the main causes of corruption, and hence, of the largest public display of discontent in Iran; from the Brookings and FDD pundits to Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi, who has been part of the human rights industrial complex, to Rudy Giuliani’s and John Bolton’s MEK cult (the exiled People’s Mujahideen Organisation), which is what regrettably remains of a revolutionary political organization of the 1970s, to the codirector of “the Iran Democracy Project” at the Hoover Institution and the US-funded bilingual “democracy promoter” venue *IranWire*, to the new Saudi-funded satellite TV *Iran International* and that ilk. The names on this list are endless; and the river of tears is not able to address what happened to the incomplete revolution in 1979.

So putting aside the absurdity of Trump’s Twitter threats when his administration just made its travel ban permanent, it would be naïve to underestimate the specific agenda of the actors such as Dark Prince or Ayatollah Mike, the C.I.A.’s Iran operations, or the Israeli and Saudi governments. The New York Times’ article, titled “How Can Trump Help Iran’s Protesters? Be Quiet” or the piece by Wendy Sherman, one of the most important representatives of imperialist smart power from Obama’s State Department who successfully sold the “Iran Deal” to militarized capital and clerics in Iran to facilitate privatizing major oil and gas fields and attracting FDI even at the cost of strategic national defense, are very significant. They may show the differences and similarities of two approaches to the issue of Iran in the US government, but there is not a big difference when it comes to the results. So, needless to say that as an anti-war activist, against any kinds of wars, and not only a direct military intervention, I would say the U.S. imperialist establishment, whether led by Hillary, Obama or Trump, by its very nature can never be an ally to the forces of revolution and progress.

**“Regrettably, the remains of Socialist ideas and a hatred of Capitalism more or less continue to exist in our society.” Who do you think might have said these words? No, it was not US Senator Joseph McCarthy speaking in the 1950s. It was “the anticipations” of Mahmoud Alavi, an Iranian cleric, politician and the minister of intelligence in Hassan Rouhani’s government in Iran.” That’s the lead of your op-ed piece entitled, “Reading Hayek in Tehran.” Could you please briefly mention the role of Iranian leftist activists in the ongoing upheavals and organizing?**

I have seen that people are talking about a leaderless movement and such these days, but the fact is despite the brutal repression of leftists and unionists in Iran, we have been faced with a wave of labor councils in different sectors in recent years. The fact is they have been active during the new phase of protests in Iran, yet they are still very fragile and scattered. Many trade unionists from the Iranian Teachers’ Trade Association and or other unions have been imprisoned for engaging in nothing more than trade union activity. Another part is the student councils at different universities across the country, which have also been pretty active in the recent protests. A number of leftist student activists have been also arrested in what they would like to call the movement of “bread, jobs and freedom.” However, there is still not any meaningful connection between the scattered cores of labor activists and the body of the student movement. When it comes to Iran’s left, or for the sake of accuracy, Marxist forces, the fact is that all of them were present on the stage in the recent upheavals, but not in any systematic and organized way and of course, not without internal debates. A number of the leftist student activists have also been arrested and are still behind bars. Rouhani’s government called it “a preemptive arrest”! Indeed, official authorities of the Islamic Republic have repeatedly warned against the presence of Marxists in the recent movement. In general, it’s been a very rough political terrain to act in when

your organizations are mostly banned and you don't even have the right to assembly. In spite of this all, the left is still present at all levels of society and the system fears their presence; their potential power is very evident in the recent events. They make use of their past historic experiences, and that's the secret of their survival. The left in Iran has been pretty active in shedding light on the current process of commodification of public spheres in recent years; at the same time, the syndrome of slacktivism and Hashtag activism among a large group of leftist activists needs to be addressed as well as the growing attachment to the notion of "leaderless and horizontal" movements. The later has not only coincided with the growth of technological advancements and the controversy-surrounded messaging app Telegram; it has also run parallel with the rise of neoliberal, market-based politics and economies in which individual rights are at the core.

The two statements from Iranian leftist activists in diaspora and the one within Iran have clearly mentioned the devastating consequences of the IMF's Structural Adjustment Programs in Iran, the nature of neoliberal policies and a strong opposition to any kinds of imperialist interventions. The other statements from within the country, such the one by Tehran bus workers and Haft Tapeh Sugarcane workers, were also pretty significant. In the statement of a group of leftists, socialists and communists outside Iran that I also signed, we condemn the wave of detentions and kidnappings of leftists. It is also important to mention that many of these kidnapped students were student union activists who have voiced and pursued actual student demands. They have organized protests against the state's neoliberal policies such as commodification of educational system and privatization of universities, as well as the government's new Apprenticeship Program, by organizing a campaign called "Bigarvarzi" [a wordplay combining forced labor (bigari) and Apprenticeship (kaarvarzi)], and succeeded in organizing effective objections, criticisms and protests against this program. They have argued that the state-run Apprenticeship program actually turns graduate students into extremely cheap labor power the pretext of preparation for employment, which rarely comes. These statements clearly said that these students have explicitly fought against any intervention by imperialist powers and their reactionary allies in the region. In part of that, we can read:

"They were the most active opponents of the sanctions, emphasizing that the main impact of international financial and economic sanctions against Iran would be on the poorest and the lower classes. They have always been a constant supporter of the Palestinian struggle against the Zionist occupation. Unlike many opposition figures in exile, they can hardly be described as the puppets of imperialist states or Saudi Arabia and Israel, or the the Pro-West and right-wing forces within the opposition of regime. One might ask then why the state is seeking to stifle the voice of leftists and justice-oriented activists and students. They are the bearers of social justice discourse and the most important and determined critics of the neoliberal economic policies in Iran."

### **Is that the end to the protests as the mainstream media claims?**

Well, probably in this phase; as you know the number of protests in the recent uprisings which have been called "Bread, Jobs, Freedom," have decreased a lot these days because the IRGC has finally entered the scene with live munition. As far as we know, some of the protesters were killed by the security forces on the streets across the country, and five at the detention center thus far. A number of people are behind bars. What one would say, however, is that the particular conditions that generated these riots in the first place, both within the system and beyond, have remained.



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**P.S.**

Soheil Asefi is an independent leftist journalist and academic. At a very young age, he started writing articles and working for various media and publications, both in cyber and print media. As part of his work, he covered the Majlis [Iranian parliament] and has interviewed numerous high-ranking government officials in Iran. He was arrested in 2007 and spent several months at the Evin prison in Tehran, mostly in solitary confinement at the notorious 209 ward. After being temporary released on bail and barred from continuing his professional work and education in Iran, he left Iran for Germany as “a writer in exile.” To return to academia, he moved to New York City to study at The New School for Social Research. While in exile, he has written extensively on political agency in exile, international human rights, imperialism and the dimensions of ongoing neoliberalization in Iran. He can be reached on Twitter @SoheilAsefi. Mattia Gallo conducted this interview on January 12, 2018 and generously offered it to LeftEast.

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