

# **Reflections on the Growing Anti-Regime Protests in Iran - They are different in important respects from those that arose in 2009**

Tuesday 2 January 2018, by [AFARY Frieda](#), [JALILIAN Behrouz](#) (Date first published: 31 December 2017).

**In comparison to the mass protests that arose in 2009 after the fraudulent presidential election, these protests are different in several important respects. They started in the city of Mashhad on Thursday December 28 and have quickly spread to more than 40 cities.**

The protests that started in the city of Mashhad on Thursday December 28 have quickly spread to more than 40 cities including Tehran, Kermanshah, Rasht, Isfahan, Shiraz, Hamedan, Kerman, Zanjan, Ahvaz, Bandar Abbas, and even the city of Qum, Iran's religious capital. The participants are mostly young people under 30 but in some cases have included parents with their children. So far, at least 5 people have been killed in Lorestan and over 50 people have been arrested by heavily present security forces. Some government buildings and banks were set on fire by the protesters and pictures of Khamenei and Khomeini have been burned.

In comparison to the mass protests that arose in 2009 after the fraudulent presidential election, these protests are different in several important respects: 1. They directly oppose poverty and systemic corruption. 2. They include the wide participation of the working class (men and women), many unemployed. 3. Demands include an end to the Islamic Republic, Death to Supreme Leader Khamenei, Death to president Rouhani, Death to the "Revolutionary Guards" and an end to Iran's military intervention in Syria and Lebanon. 4. In some cases, individual women have bravely taken off their headscarves or veils in public places and have encouraged others to follow them.

No one can deny that these protests are arising after at least a year of almost daily labor actions and strikes against non-payment of wages and terrible working conditions, as well as protests by impoverished retirees, teachers, nurses and those who have lost their meager savings in bankrupt banks. Slogans have also called for freedom for all political prisoners and an end to dictatorship.

At the same time, there is no doubt that there is a strong nationalist tone to some of the slogans such as "Neither Gaza, Nor Lebanon, I sacrifice my life for Iran" or a monarchist influence expressed in slogans which support the legacy of Reza Shah Pahlavi.

Some Iranians believe that the protests might have been started by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps to consolidate its power, given the infighting within the regime and the threat of a direct war between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Others believe that monarchists and the Mujahedin Khalq, with support from the Trump administration, have had a major role in encouraging the protests.

For those Iranians opposed to all these actors and genuinely hoping for a liberatory movement, it is extremely important to learn from the lessons of the Syrian revolution. If the mass movement

against poverty and dictatorship limits itself simply to the overthrow of the regime without an affirmative and progressive vision, it faces the danger of being taken over by right-wing populists or monarchists and becoming a pawn in the imperialist rivalries.

This is a time when those Iranian socialists and Marxists who do not support authoritarian brands of socialism can make a difference by organizing within this movement on the basis of opposing Iran's capitalist state, helping the development of workers' councils, defending and promoting women's struggles against patriarchy/ misogyny, and speaking out against the discrimination suffered by Iran's ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds and Bahais.

Deepening the content of the current protest movement is the best way to challenge and oppose imperialist war drives by the U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, and to express solidarity with other progressives in the region and around the globe who demand social justice.

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December 31, 2017

\* <https://www.allianceofmesocialists.org/reflections-growing-anti-regime-protests-iran/>

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## **Iranian Revolutionary Upswing: A Reader's View**

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In the past few days the protests, the rallies and the rebellion of the Iranian people, the people of the lower depths, has been gradually speeding up. In the very short time of 3 days, protests from the major city of Mashhad in north east, spread to all major and big cities in Iran. In the second and third day, almost 40 cities called for protest, setting the time and the place to start.

Popular slogans calling the government a thief or slogans which were ultra-nationalist and anti-Arab, changed to more radical, politically aware slogans such as, "We have no jobs," "Bread, shelter, freedom", "Capitalist Mullah, give us our money", "Death to the dictator", "Worker, teacher, student, unite unite!", "Free political prisoners", "Reformist, Fundamentalist, this is the end of your story", and many more.

There have been protests, workers strikes, almost every day in last few years in Iran. But none of them could connect to each other to make a general and massive popular uprising like now.

In the beginning of the current wave of protests, and as usual, "the Left" was behind, and very suspicious. They thought this could be a conspiracy of the other side of the regime in opposition to the government. But this view was quickly replaced by wonder and astonishment at the speedy radicalisation of the core of the movement. Now leftist trade unionists, women, writers, university students are joining the protests and trying to influence them politically.

From the day after the great 1979 revolution, the regime tried to crush, imprison, kill, exile the

activists, workers' organisers, members of revolutionary parties. In 1981, the regime succeeded in achieving this by imposing the years of terror and almost wiping out all Marxist activists. At the moment there is a huge gap between two generations of Marxist and leftist activist. The connection is cut off. But the new generation are more eager and quick learners.

In the 2009 massive uprising, despite the disagreement of the older generation, the leftists and most activists fell for the reformists. This time one of the amazing differences is that no one cares for the reformists. People see their future in the left and its plan and movement. They are progressively leaning toward the left. Unfortunately everything that is happening does not have organisation and leadership, which the left should quickly take. This time almost all left movements in exile and inside the country are on the same wave.

This uprising hasn't been in the making for a few days or months or even years, but for a long time. The last time (2009), the excuse for popular unrest was "vote rigging" and the reformists, who were part of the establishment, were the leaders. The regime crushed that uprising after a few months and imprisonment the leaders. But this time there are no visible leaders or organisations to cut off. That has made the regime commit many mistakes so far and respond in a confused manner.

The last uprising in 2009, was mostly controlled by the middle class and the urban petty bourgeoisie. In 2009, the working class came late to the movement and were not in charge. But this time, the uprising is totally a class struggle wave of rebellion.

Another noticeable difference is the presence of women in the front row and fighting the police and even leading the slogans. And different from last time, the uprising has started mostly outside of the capital city of Tehran, and instead in cities which have a more impoverished working class population.

The wages are at a historic low and necessary items of living have become more and more expensive. Almost one third of Iranians live under the poverty line. Living expenses are nearly 50 percent more than average wages. People have massive debts to banks and the majority of the working class, cannot see any better future for their families.

The only way to have any success in this great revolutionary upswing is to be organised, and for Marxists and other leftists to be in the leadership. There are potential and capable activists in Iran who have been less affected by Stalinism than the previous generation. They don't have any illusions about the regime and its knee-jerk anti Imperialism.

The regime defiantly and eventually will find the way to suppress the movement but until then, the major duty of the movement and its future leaders is to discover a correct tactic to resist and fight back the system. We are still in the beginning of the revolutionary upswing. That should be the main understanding. Any revolution needs time to progress and develop. At the moment people cannot tolerate the system anymore, and regime on the other hand, is losing control of the situation day by day.

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December 31, 2017

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