



‘The basis of socialism is the human being... Socialism is the movement to restore human being’s conscious will.’

- Mansoor Hekmat

The great Marxist thinker and leader of the Worker-communist Party and worker-communist movement, 1951-2002

A turn to the Left in the movement to oust the Islamic regime in Iran

An assessment of the recent student protests

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Recent student protests in Iran have been a step

forward for the Left movement in society. They have been nothing like the previous student protests in terms of demands and slogans, forms of protest, dimensions and continuity. They have been more extensive, organised, radical and independent and there has been a distinct mark of the Left at the core and essence of their demands. This is the result and reflection of a new balance of forces in favour of the Left in society on the one hand and a step forward in strengthening the position of the Left pole in the movement for the Islamic Republic of Iran’s overthrow on the other hand. These struggles are not yet over. The initial demand to overturn Hashem Aghajari’s death sentence has not yet been achieved (Aghajari is a university lecturer and famous 2nd Khordad (also known as so-called reformist) personality who was in prison accused of ‘insulting the clergy’ because he stated ‘people were not monkeys’ to imitate the clergy). Protests are still continuing albeit in a scattered fashion. The Islamic regime in Iran has embarked on arresting the activists of the recent protests, which could lead to further protests. It

must be said, however, that the first round of this struggle has ended. It is imperative to analytically evaluate the recent student protests and their place in the movement for the regime’s overthrow in order to identify the outline of their future path and development.

From protests against a death sentence to one against the entirety of the regime

The students’ struggle began with protests against Hashem Aghajari’s death sentence. In its drive to terrify the people through a wave of executions, the Islamic Republic of Iran decided to also sentence this 2nd Khordad personality to death; by doing this, the regime’s right-wing faction wanted to give the opposing so-called reformist faction a good lesson and terrify the people in the process by showing them ‘if this is what is done to insiders, then imagine what is done to outsiders.’ This right-wing offensive, however, quickly backfired. Like in the past, the people, and this time the students in specific, found a golden opportunity to intervene using the divisions within the ruling factions.



Woman in compulsory veil wearing headband saying: ‘Freedom and Equality’.

They stepped in and challenged the entirety of the regime. The movement quickly went beyond a protest against Aghajari's death sentence. It put forth demands for the unconditional freedom of all political prisoners and freedom of expression and gave clear and radical slogans such as 'leader get lost!' against Khamanei and other government officials. In some instances, there were slogans for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic and Khamanei's prosecution. Despite warnings, students organised their own independent actions in some instances. On one occasion, young men and women took part in the demonstrations, hand in hand, with headbands on reading 'Freedom and Equality'. Of course these latter examples were not the dominant forms and essence of the protest but they were also not against the current and isolated from the mainstream of the struggle either. They are indicative of developments, which give an idea of things to come. They are today's exception and tomorrow's rule.

In addition to these exceptions, the main slogans of the movement also illustrated that the 2nd Khordad, even its Left faction, is irrelevant and has no influence on these protests. It became clear very early on that the legal student organisations, the 2nd Khordad bodies whose role has always been to control the student protests within the 'reform' framework and safeguard the system, could no longer play their traditional

role. In the recent protests, these bodies could only maintain their presence by distancing themselves from the official line and even from the 'Left' of the 2nd Khordad. In the recent struggles, contrary to past occasions, there was no sign of any slogan in support of Khatami and 'reforms' not even on the fringes and the margins. The student movement did not need to make such considerations. This time it was the student movement that was dragging the 2nd Khordad organisations along with it and not the other way round. The important point is that the Left slogans characterised the recent student protests and the 2nd Khordad organisations had not option but to follow the Left. This time, the 2nd Khordad was forced to 'pretend to be Left.' The Left, which stayed put, although it had no option but to remain clandestine, however, did not need to 'pretend to be reformist.'

The general condition of the rise of the Left

The leaning of the students' struggle to the Left is of course the result of a more general balance of forces which has taken shape in society. There is a complete impasse and bankruptcy of the 'reform' movement and the intensification of the regime's political crisis. Ganji's Manifesto, the constant threat of a section of the 2nd Khordad to 'abandon the government', the intrusion into the Friday prayers and the Right-wing papers discussing the fall of the regime are all manifestations

of this phenomenon in recent months. On the whole, this has weakened the position of the regime vis-à-vis the people and the movement for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic. Neither does the 2nd Khordad's 'Be patient, it will be OK' work, nor does the extreme Right-wing's 'hands are free for repression.' The hatred against the Islamic Republic, however, is ever increasing and the movement for its overthrow, even where it cannot show itself, gathers force, puts aside its doubts, refines itself and become ever more radical and Left.

With the first opportunity that presents itself, it is natural that the Left would raise its head in the universities. The university has traditionally, and from the Shah's time, been an environment for the growth of the Left. It was the same story in the 1979 revolution before the attack on the universities in 1981. The Islamic Republic began its final offensive against the revolution by attacking the universities and has tried to keep the universities from the influence of the Left ever since. Although today's student generation have no direct experience of this past, they understand it and like before, are reflective, ideological and politically form the sensitive section of society. If, in our era, the Left represents the search for truth, modernism, ideals and the need to change and improve people's lives, then it is natural that students and the students' struggle would 'ordinarily' have a tendency to the Left. It is possible, in the university and society in

general, to suppress and push back the Left but it is impossible to wipe out the Left. The 'cultural revolution' of Mr. Soroush during the presidency of Banisadr forced the retreat of the Left in universities, followed by society. We are now witnessing the rise of the Left, which is returning to the very same barricades that it lost. In between the suppression of the universities during July 1981 up to now, the 2nd Khordad tried to become the tool of protest or more correctly become the tool of the control of the student protests. It could not succeed even during the student protests of July 1999 when the 2nd Khordad was at its height. The 2nd Khordad and its legal bodies did not go beyond being a pretext for the students and generally the people who made use of them to express their independent protests and the demands of the young generation. The 2nd Khordad is an unseemly outfit for a generation who does not have any experience of the defeat and suppression of the revolution by the Islamic Republic and wants an open, joyful and modern life without any compromise. Today the students' movement is throwing away this un-shapely outfit.

Who is against capital punishment?

Apart from the general socio-political background, this time the factional fighting in the regime provided the setting for the emergence of the Left. In all societies, particularly in the Iran of the Islamic Republic, and more than any other opponents of the regime,

the Left and particularly communists have been the victims of capital punishment. In the Islamic Republic of Iran in particular, following the suppression of June 1981 and the summer of 1988, tens of thousands of communists were executed for failing to pray and atheism. They were buried in mass graves. A single negative response to whether they believed in god, prayer, and the Islamic Republic was sufficient for the prisoner to be put before the firing squad. In its confrontation with the danger of the Left, the Islamic Republic basically established its power specifically by the terror of a 'death sentences for expression of thought.' Today, too, by embarking on a wave of executions, it is using this very old device.

One thing has certainly changed since then though. The 2nd Khordad who find themselves in the ranks of the victims of this policy, were then part of the killing and suppression machinery of the Islamic Republic. They were organising and forming the Pasdaran (oppressive Islamic revolutionary guards), the ministry of information and the office of the 'cultural revolution' in the universities and were involved in the genocides of 1981 and 1988 directly and indirectly. Even today, with all their 'Voltaireism', they are proud of their past deeds.

The struggle against capital punishment is the playground of the Left. Yesterdays' executioners who have become unfortunate victims of the sword today cannot and will not be willing to play

in this ground. This is the scene for those who oppose capital punishment irrespective of opinion or any crime. Anyone who is a partner in crime of the regime's executions and is still defending those atrocities and today only opposes the death sentence of its own companions is not against capital punishment. Those whose only objections are that: 'He is not against the regime,' 'He has not blasphemed,' 'He is not a renegade,' and 'He does not oppose the system' are not against capital punishment, but are in fact passing death sentences on those who are opponents, renegades, blasphemers and infidels of the regime. They are passing death sentences on communists and progressives. They are defending their own past and genocide committed in 1981 and 1988.

The recent student movement has shown that this 2nd Khordad nonsense has no place in the student movement. The student movement went to welcome the movement for the overthrow of the regime with its radical and established Left slogans against capital punishment and oppression. The abolition of capital punishment, unconditional freedom of expression, and unconditional freedom for political prisoners found their way in the students' movement and became popular.

Aghajari received a death sentence in the factional fighting and the 2nd Khordad and its students' branch

protested against the Right faction for this reason. But the starting point of the student masses was not this. In the death sentence against Aghajari, they found a window of opportunity to confront the policy of terrifying the people and to protest against oppression, suppression, and the totality of the regime in general. Their banners and slogans showed this clearly. In this process, the student branches of the 2nd Khordad and the 'Office of the Consolidation of Unity' were forced to distance themselves from their mainstream and adapt themselves to the Left slogans. Today, the 'Office of the Consolidation of Unity' has declared the demand for 'unconditional freedom of political prisoners' as the students' main slogan. This, before anything else, indicates the power and influence of the Left in the recent struggles and must be seen as a step forward. At the same time, one must be cautious that this slogan is not turned into an empty shell like other demands which have been used in the inter-factional war in a limited sense. As, for example, what they have done to the terms secularism and separation of religion from the state (Ganji Manifesto) or what they have done to unconditional freedom of expression (conditional on avoiding insulting the sanctities) or political freedom (in the framework of safeguarding the system). The 2nd Khordad is an expert in turning radical slogans into its 'own' and making them meaningless. The Left students must not allow the 2nd Khordad

students' branches to use these trick again.

Freedom for insiders and within the system is not freedom but slavery. Freedom of press means freedom of all publications including those of the Left and the communists, freedom of expression and thought means freedom of belief in any conviction including godlessness and the right for expressing it. Opposing capital punishment means abolition of execution even for blasphemy and 'insulting the sanctities and the clergy', the very thing that the people of Iran are doing everyday. This is the meaning of freedom for the Left and the people. These are the freedoms that the movement for the overthrow of the Islamic Republic demand; any movement, which does not want to oppose the people, must demand these freedoms.

The feeble position of the 'Office of the Consolidation of Unity' and the 'Islamic Societies' in the universities

In an assessment of the recent student protests, the 'Office of the Consolidation of Unity' indirectly refers to the Left-wing students as the 'dear students who hold different views from the 'Office of the Consolidation of Unity' and take part in the protests' and asks them to act responsibly and 'all together bring about continuity and help institutionalise these protests'. Institutionalisation of these protests means expanding and deepening

them, that is moving beyond the universities and radicalisation of its content and slogans. This can only be guaranteed by the force of the Left; any other tendency and group who want to play a role in the future of the students' development and in general, the revolution in Iran, must accept this basic fact. The 2nd Khordad is exposed and totally bankrupt and the Left is fast gaining the centre ground. If the student branch of the 2nd Khordad, the Office of the Consolidation of Unity and the Islamic Societies are yet to be discarded, it is for two basic reasons: firstly their leaning to the Left under pressure from the Left in university and society and secondly, their legal and insider status that their association to the 2nd Khordad faction of the government has created for them. This contradictory tide has placed these bodies in a shaky and unsustainable state. They cannot both hang onto the ruling faction and advance with the students. The balance of forces between the Right and the Left in Iran will eventually resolve this contradiction. However, the fate of the student branch of the 2nd Khordad should be

the least of the Left's worries. The Left must be busy building its own future.

The Left and the question of the student movement's Leadership

The Left has had the upper hand in the recent protests politically but it has not been present in the practical leadership of these protests. The 2nd Khordad organisations have had the upper hand. The reason for this is clear. The Left has been deprived of its organisations and platform since both factions of the Islamic Republic have taken away their right to organisation. Institutions such as the 'Office of the Consolidation of Unity' and the Islamic Societies that are parading around today are historically and analytically the result of the suppression of the Left in the universities.

This must change. The political environment for the expansion of the Left's perspective, aims and slogans in society and particularly in the universities is ripe and ready. One must use this strength to remedy the weakness in organisation and leadership.

The first priority of the Left activist is to establish demands such as the abolition of capital punishment, unconditional freedom of political prisoners, unconditional freedom of expression and thought, separation of religion from the state and education and the abolition of sexual apartheid as the dominant slogans in the first instance in the universities. These demands, their justification and necessity must be turned into the general consciousness of the student movement. Thus, the Left activists in the student movement must organise themselves in clandestine communist groups and spread out their networks. One fundamental task of these groups is to spread the aspirations of worker-communism and its humanist and emancipative essence in the universities. In opposition to the Right wing and reactionary Islamic or semi-Islamic views of the 2nd Khordad or the contemporary reactionary pro-Western nationalism, the socialist outlook and freedom and equality of human beings from the viewpoint of socialism must be taken among the masses of

students. The student movement must be deepened and radicalised in its political perceptive and perception. When the next wave of student protests will come or whether the current protests will intensify is not something that can be predicted. Whatever the future holds, the Left must focus all its energy and strength to radicalise, deepen and organise the movement so as to be in a stronger position in the next round of upheavals and play a more central role.

The students' movement must deepen and radicalise its political perception. The Worker-communist Party of Iran, in particular the Young Communists' Organisation of the party, will be the basis and means of the realisation of this objective. Left wing students are deprived of their legal and independent organisations, but the Left can rely on a strong organisation and movement on a social scale. The activists and leaders of the Left students must rely on the Worker-communist Party of Iran, join its ranks and raise the banner of the party's aspirations, aims and programme as well as its policies. The future is ours.

Mansoor Hekmat and Women's Emancipation

Mansoor Hekmat and Women's Emancipation published in the last issue of WPI Briefing was written by Sohaila Sharifi for Medusa's English Special. The author's name was inadvertently left out of the issue, which has now been corrected. To see other articles in Medusa's English Special, please see: www.medusa2000.com.

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