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SOLIDARITY WITH THE IRANIAN PEOPLE



FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRACY

Editorial

The Middle East and Persian Gulf region remains the central focus of imperialism's global strategy. The occupation and war in Iraq, unconditional support for Israeli aggression and expansionism, as well as the destabilisation and threats against Iran are its 3 central characteristics.

For over half a century, the United States military-industrial complex and its allies have seen control of the Middle East/Persian Gulf and its resources as crucial to their own survival.

Access to oil supplies, cheap labour and an open market for the penetration to US commodities and culture guarantees US based profits and helps the United States maintain its hegemonic position in world politics.

Against this process, the forces of peace, working class emancipation, human rights and popular sovereignty have resisted US bullying, manipulation, bribery or coercion and opposition to one another. Divide and rule has historically served the US well.

Meantime, in Iran the theocratic regime has developed a hysterical anti US stance combined with domestic repression. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, with his roots in the country's religious elite and its demonic President Ahmadinejad, with his power base in the revolutionary guard, squabble amongst

themselves while successfully manipulating and plundering the nation's resources and peoples.

While tensions persist amongst the ruling elite, the Iranian regime seeks to maintain its anti American posturing, falsely presenting itself as the vanguard of anti imperialist struggle. However, the progressive credentials of the regime are paper thin, dependent on religious zealotry and political dictatorship.

Several aspects of the current position of Iran illustrate the regime's contradictions. Since his election President Ahmadinejad has spread havoc in the country's economy, squandered the nation's oil revenue, left ordinary Iranians without petrol and stimulated rampant domestic inflation. At the same time the regime has pursued a policy of oppression against democratic and working class organisations, women's organisations and protest bodies, increasing the arbitrary arrest of opposition leaders, while also pursuing a questionable policy of nuclear power, research and expansion.

Iran, of course, like any other nation has the right to develop a nuclear energy capacity and this should not be used as a pretext, on its own, to justify US or any source of interference or aggression. However, Iran's nuclear

policy like so many of the regime's policy positions is recklessly exploited by the religious clique in the leadership to give it anti imperialist pretensions.

Iran Today, has always defended Iran's right to self determination, however we are also clear that opposition to US aggression cannot be developed or sustained, or even regarded by peace campaigners as genuine, while it rests on domestic repression and denial of elementary human rights.

Global tension and regional conflicts are initiated by the US and used by multinational capital to secure its own interests. These can only be exposed and turned back on the basis of recognition and the rights of individuals and their freedom to organise independently. The Iranian regime seeks to portray itself as anti imperialist, while simultaneously pursuing the most repressive anti democratic policies against its own people.

In recent history the Iranian people have successfully resisted US threats and even US-British backed dictatorship. There is no question these struggles will continue, however the real allies of this fight are not the fundamentalist theocrats in Tehran.

Like the citadel of global domination in Washington, the dictators in Tehran are no friends of peace and progress.

26/03/08

Behind Iran's Sham Elections

Over the past year CODIR has been monitoring the build up to the 14th March parliamentary elections in Iran. *Jane Green*, for CODIR National Council, reports on the outcomes of the election and its implications for the politics of the Islamic Republic.

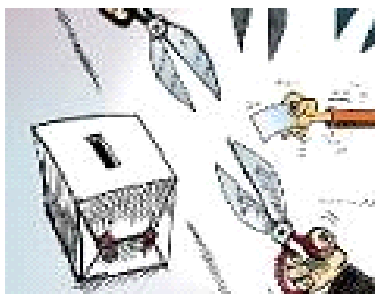
The predictability of the outcomes of recent parliamentary elections in Iran has long been discussed, as the various manoeuvres by the *Council of Guardians of the Constitution (CGC)* to manipulate the selection process began in earnest at least a year ago.

For a president and a regime which regularly proclaims its popular appeal, the election has been a further indictment of the lack of trust, in either people or the electoral process, in the Islamic Republic.

Openness, democracy and accountability do not require manipulation if they are to have any meaning. The recent elections effectively confirm that such concepts do not have any currency in Iran today. The actions of the regime are those of leaders both out of touch with and fearful of the voice of its own population. Indeed, there has been little, if any, attempt to disguise this sad reality.

The Executive Boards, which determine the

'suitability' of candidates, had initially permitted only 96 of nearly 3000 reformist or independent candidates outside of Tehran. At the second stage of the process this was reduced to 24 candidates. A third stage saw some higher profile candidates who had repented their reformist credentials reinstated. However, the fact of such a



centralised selection process brings into question the legitimacy of the elections at all. Any normal democratic process would leave candidate selection for competing parties to determine free from external interference.

Iranians people made their feelings emphatically clear - voters stayed away from the polling stations. In Tehran, only 30 per cent of the electorate turned out.

Not content with pre-election manipulation there is widespread evidence to suggest that pressure was applied in certain areas to ensure that the 'correct' candidates were elected. It

is alleged, for example, that workers in state owned factories were forced to vote for government candidates. Workers in Saipa, Iran Khodro and Pars Khodro auto assembly plants were provided with ruling party campaign material and 'encouraged' to vote. **In rural areas briefings were organised to convey the "Supreme Leader's wishes" suggesting that it was a religious duty to vote for administration candidates.**

Such actions to limit the opportunities for reformists were entirely predictable but it appears that the regime has also attempted to silence other hard line critics. The hard line Broad Coalition, in opposition to the administration backed United Front, complained to the Council of Guardians (CGC) of vote rigging and election fraud. The final outcome of the regime's manoeuvres was such that Interior Minister, Mostafa Pour Mohammadi, was able to announce that "of those elected to the Majlis, 71% are principalists and support the country's current policies."

The position of the regime has clearly been to prevent a return to the Khatami period when

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Against War, For Democracy

Opposition to the threat of foreign interference in the internal affairs of the country and solidarity with the people of Iran, in their struggle against the ruling regime, are two sides of the same coin.

Recent events highlight the danger that outgoing US president, George W. Bush, instead of learning from the disaster of his invasion of Iraq, is planning to spread the conflict to include Iran. The Bush administration has for some time been making 'hawkish' noises about a "preventative" attack on Iran. The possibility of such action is underlined by the fact that the U.S. now has more firepower stationed in the Persian Gulf than at any time since the beginning of the Iraq war. Recent comments by General Petraeus, commander of US forces in Iraq, suggesting that Iran is directly responsible for killing American troops in Iraq by providing arms to Iraqi insurgents, have added to the tension in the region.

Further indications of U.S. pressure include sending a second aircraft group to the Persian Gulf and minesweepers to the Straits of Hormuz; arresting Iranian officials in Iraq; and continuing pressure in the U.N. to expand sanctions against Iran. As CODIR has consistently argued, any intensification of military or political conflict in the region will not only be against the interests of the people of Iran, but a threat to the Middle East region and global peace.

On the domestic scene, the Iranian regime's rhetoric mirrors that of the U.S. in order to escalate tension for its own purposes. The current tense conditions have led Ahmadi-Nejad's government to justify the suppression

of all opposition forces. In recent months, as the tone of US language towards Iran has become more hostile, the violations of human rights in Iran have intensified. The trades union, women's and peace movements have been attacked; a large peace movement in **the West needs to be clear about the anti-democratic nature of the Iranian regime. This is a regime that has caused the deaths of many who struggled for peace and democracy, and has imprisoned many others.**

CODIR works to support those fighting for increased democracy in Iran. CODIR has



worked hard to expose the reactionary nature of the ruling regime of Iran.

CODIR has been involved in organizing public meetings and briefing sessions, launching petitions and

informing the labour movement about the true nature of the regime and its policies. In addition to online publications on <http://www.codir.net> CODIR publishes Iran Today, which explains the reality of life in the country.

The solution to the current crisis is not to escalate it. No amount of evidence could justify a military solution. The only way forward is through negotiation and dialogue. The imposition of further sanctions against Iran would only harm ordinary Iranians who are suffering under the economic, social and political policies of the present Iranian regime.

More US Threats

At the time of writing (mid-March 08), it is unclear whether the US is going to launch a murderous bombing raid on Iran or not. Admiral William Fallon, the top commander of the US forces in the Middle East, abruptly resigned on March 11 after a profile in Esquire magazine accurately or otherwise reported that only he stood in the way of such plans, ostensibly to counter a nuclear build-up of Iran's military. (Needless to say, Israel's nuclear build-up goes unremarked; and the US itself shows not the slightest sign of moving towards keeping its signed commitment to nuclear disarmament.)

The Ahmadinejad government does have the excuse for refusing

UN nuclear inspectors that accepting them did not protect Iraq against US aggression - even though the political balance of forces has since turned somewhat more against US imperialism, bogged down hopelessly in Afghanistan as well as Iraq.

Experts (and even the CIA) say Iran appears to have closed down its military nuclear programme after Iraq did, and, in any case, it would be too geographically dispersed and "dug in" to eliminate from the sky. The human and economic destruction of aerial bombardment would be enormous, however.

As recorded in history, the USA launched its most humanly devastating bombing against North Korea just hours before

the Korean War cease-fire came into effect; and again, in Vietnam, the US felt it necessary to flex its muscles lethally with super-heavy, though militarily useless, bombing on the eve of its negotiated defeat there.

The allies of the USA (Israel aside) appear horrified at the unfavourable political-military consequences bombing Iran now, would produce in eastern Iraq and throughout the world, but something murderous does seem to impel at least one faction in the waning Bush Administration.

As the Second World War neared its end in Europe, Nazi Josef Goebbels wrote in his diary: "If we have to leave the scene, we shall at any rate, slam the door behind us".



THE WOMEN WILL NOT SUBMIT TO INJUSTICE!



A powerful, strong and vibrant mass women's movement, unique in the Middle East, is day-by-day and month-by-month gathering momentum in Iran.

Inspired by an ever more widely-shared vision of a society in which women and men equally enjoy civil, economic, human, political and social rights, women throughout Iran, from every walk of life, are insisting that they be accorded justice under the law and freedom from centuries of oppression and discrimination.

What is making this possible? Why is it happening now? Where will it lead? These are crucial questions for everyone from those who are most threatened by it, the hardliners in of the theocratic regime in Tehran, to all who are struggling together for justice and human rights.

The systematic struggle for justice for women in Iran has roots in the early twentieth century in the years following the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 that abolished absolute monarchy and gave wider though limited rights to all citizens. From this time women organised, often in secret, to raise awareness of their situation and demand and promote for themselves the right to education, access to healthcare, freedom from violence at home and in the wider society,

equal treatment under the law and the right to participate alongside men in social, economic and cultural activity beyond the domestic environment.

As the century progressed, women's voices were increasingly heard. They participated en masse in the 1979 revolution. Following suppression by the conservative regime during the 1980s, women found even greater strength at the time of the May 1997 elections that brought the reformists to power. But while this experience taught and strengthened the movement, the theocratic government has at no point even approached bringing equality and justice for women.

Far from allowing women to take their rightful place in society and ridding Iran centuries of gender oppression, the Islamic regime reinforced the patriarchal society, suppressing women's civil and legal achievements prior to 1979 and imposing restrictions that caused disproportionate suffering to women of religious and ethnic minority backgrounds. Misogynistic articles rooted in the medieval practice of Islam were included in the Constitution and *Shariah* (canon) law was imposed as the national legal code, making it quite clear that women were to be regarded and treated as second class citizens and forcing them so far as was possible out of the workplace and public environment into the home.

But the regime was unable to set the clock back. *There are now thousands of women activists and women working in influential positions as writers, poets, teachers, researchers, journalists and translators.* They are producing hundreds of periodicals, books and columns in widely read papers, while electronic media have enabled mass communications through blogs, e-mail and websites. Women have access to information



and ideas and the capacity as well as the will to organise as never before.

At the same time, the regime's future also depends on women being economically active alongside men. They are working in key sectors of the economy in science, engineering, technology, commerce and industry. **65% of university students are women.** The future prosperity of the country and its international standing is intrinsically linked with full participation of women.

To solve the dilemma of being able to use women as it sees fit without according them an equal voice and equal rights with men, the regime is trying to prevent the leadership of the women's movement from linking with the masses of women across the country. In this it is manifestly failing as women increasingly campaign, celebrate occasions such as International Women's Day, use the internet, petition and engage in peaceful protests on a mass scale to give voice to their demands.

The regime responds by restricting the work of certain bodies, including NGOs, banning organisations, censoring the media, filtering websites, forbidding public gatherings of women and accusing women activists of being 'instruments of foreign powers' for the overthrow of Iran. It is attempting to intimidate women the length and breadth of Iran by challenging women in the street about their dress code, on occasion arresting women and imposing punishments such as public lashings and imprisonment. It is putting activists on trial and imprisoning them and brutally suppressing peaceful protests against this oppression.

All this is, of course, to no avail. Despite the fact that many arrests were made and publicised at the time of International Women's Day 2007 and that public gatherings of women were banned, women all over Iran celebrated IWD 2008 in private events with greater resolve, as messages of international solidarity poured in. Despite the physical violence towards women gathered to protest at every trial of women activists that takes place, women peacefully and resolutely

assemble the next time to get their voices heard. And most significantly, despite the fact that Parvin Ardalan, the founder of the '**One Million Signatures**', the mass campaign to fight for justice for women under the law, was dragged off a plane at Tehran airport as she was leaving for Stockholm to collect her Olaf Palme Award in March 2008, the campaign goes from strength to strength, supported by many thousands of women in every town and village and including internationally-known figures such as Shirin Ebadi.

It is the success of this and other mass campaigns, such as that demanding the presence of women in Iran's sports stadiums and that calling for the abolition of death by stoning and hanging, that makes Iran's women's movement unique. As well as demonstrating to the regime and the world the strength of women's feeling about continuing medieval injustice, the sheer scale of the campaign gives women confidence, increases their experience of mass and systematic organisation and provides a platform for the education of women through door-to-door, face to face discussions, as well as through the internet, conferences, meetings and word of mouth.

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CODIR Supports the National Peace Council



The proposal to launch a National Council for Peace announced recently by Iranian Nobel Peace Laureate, Shirin Ebadi, is a welcome move towards uniting Iranians against the drive to war. On behalf of CODIR, Jane Green assesses the prospects for the new initiative.

The message which Nobel Peace prize winner and human rights activist, Shirin Ebadi, has sent out to the world is a clear one: **“The United States cannot have the right to deal with Iran outside the framework of international law, and Iran cannot build a wall around itself and say, ‘I have nothing to do with international law’, and pay no attention to the (UN) Security Council resolutions.”**

Both sides in the looming conflict are being urged to respect international law. Iranians in particular are being urged to take a stand against current danger as characterised by veteran political activist Ezatullah Sahabi that, “provocative statements from extreme right politicians are putting Iran in real danger.”

Ebadi has made it clear that participation in the Peace Council requires only two criteria; to be Iranian and to say ‘no to war’. On this basis the initiative has already attracted the support of the poet Simia Behbahani, filmmaker Rakhshan Banietemad, veteran activist Ebrahim Yazdi and university lecturer Hussein Rafiei. Organisationally the support of the ‘Iran Participation

Front’, close to former president Khatami, the Teachers Union and university lecturers have been pledged.

With Ebadi in the forefront the new initiative has the backing of the Centre for Defenders of Human Rights in Iran and is aimed at uniting Iranian civil society against the prospect of war as well as educating the public about the potential consequences. The existing body sees itself as a transitional one with a formal organisation being launched at a National Peace Conference which will elect officers and determine the organisation’s structure.

The urgency of extending the message of the organisation was stressed recently by human rights activist Narges

Mohammadi who stated that the success of the organisation will,

“...rely on the power of the people. We have to spread this message however small the movement. We want to rely on the help of popular organisations and international peace movements to raise the sensitivity of the Iranian public to this issue.”

The new movement has already shown sensitivity to the popular mood that Iran has the right to develop civilian nuclear energy and has stressed that this right should be acknowledged. However it has been equally clear that this right should not prevail over that of the right to peace and security. To that end calls from the influential student’s movement, the Office to Foster Unity, have focussed upon steps which will build trust in the international community. The right-wing oppositionist stance taken by President Ahmadinejad is regarded as being a barrier to meaningful negotiations and a route to international isolation for Iran.

Under such circumstances the National Peace Council initiative is one which must be welcomed as an attempt to send a different message to the

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In Defence of Human Rights in Iran

The 8th of July became famous as Student Day in Iran following the death of a student in 1999, when students in Tehran demonstrated against the closure of a newspaper. The image of one student, Ahmad Batebi, became famous around the world following the publication in the West of a photograph of him holding the bloodstained shirt of a fellow student.

Jane Green considers whether the treatment of students and political prisoners has moved on since that period.

In a recent interview with Iranian newspaper Rooz online, Ahmad Batebi reveals how he became involved in the events of 8th July 1999, events which resulted in him spending the next nine years in prison. The picture Batebi paints is one of a studious young man concerned about the obvious injustice he saw around him and being prepared to act.

Batebi reveals that he had been arrested three times before the events of 8th July 1999.

Firstly, on 6th March 1998 for participating in a protest in support of political prisoners; secondly, during a student demonstration on 3rd May 1999; and thirdly, during further student protests on 25th May 1999. Batebi's actions at this time were no different to those of thousands of other students, prepared to speak out against the injustices of the Iranian regime and defend the right to free speech. There is certainly no indication that his actions warranted any special attention. However, the famous 'bloodied shirt' photograph changed all of that. As a result of the abuse suffered in prison Batebi has problems with his kidneys, back and head.

In spite of his experiences over the nine years he spent in the notorious Evin Prison Batebi comes across as a young man (he is only 29 years old) still able to be philosophical about life and prepared to look for the positives and possibilities in Iran's future. Asked if he will

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PAYING WITH THEIR LIVES TO ORGANISE INDEPENDENTLY

By: Jamshid Ettehadieh.

In May 2005 the former president (Khatami) reached an agreement with the ILO to align the Labour Code with the ILO's fundamental principles.

On 14 March 2007 the security forces in Tehran arrested more than 1000 teachers who had dared to stage a peaceful protest



demonstration to demand their basic rights including higher salaries and better conditions of service. The riot police and security forces using batons violently dispersed thousands of teachers and arresting many. The brutal action was the regime's response to two weeks of continuous protest in front of the Iranian parliament. ILNA news agency reported that plain cloth police arrested Ali Akbar Baghani, the head of Iran's Teachers Union, while he was teaching.

The teachers' experience is not unique or isolated. Members and activists of The Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Sherkat-e Vahed) "SWTSBC" received the heavy hand of the law enforcement agencies of the theocratic regime just for demanding their rights to

organise their own independent trade union. The president of SWTSBC, Mansour Osanlou, has been arrested and beaten up on many occasions and is currently languishing in Evin prison since 10 July. His only crime is daring to campaign for the formation of independent trade union rights.

SWTSBC was formed in 1968 but was disbanded by the Islamic regime in the early 1980s as part of an anti labour drive. Instead, a Workers' House and Islamic Labour Council were formed by the government and the company. **In 2003, activists began to re-establish their independent union. The majority of the employees of the Bus Company (Sherkat-e Vahed) support SWTSBC. In January 2006 hundreds of bus workers and their trade union leaders were arrested for staging a peaceful strike demanding better pay and recognition of their trade union. The entire leadership of SWTSBC were arrested.**

International trade union organisations have repeatedly criticised the Iranian regime for its total disregard for international conventions including Conventions 87 and 98. Absence of independent trade union organisations in Iran has repeatedly attracted criticism from the ILO and international trade union organisations. In 2004 the government of Mohammad Khatami concerned about international criticisms about regime's undemocratic practices in relation to workers organisations signalled a change of attitude. It started formal negotiation with the ILO and undertook to recognise its key conventions guaranteeing Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (Convention 87) and Application of the Principles of the Right to Organise and to Collective Bargaining



(Convention 98). During the negotiations with the ILO, spanning 2004-5, the two sides agreed that the sixth chapter of the Iranian Labour Code is in contravention of ILO conventions guaranteeing freedom of association and right to organise in the workplace, and should be amended. The 1990 labour code stipulates that ‘the workers ? may establish Islamic Societies and associations’ at a workplace. The regime only tolerates the operation and activities of the Islamic Labour Councils, which consist of representatives of the workers, management and the ministry of labour. Once an ILC is organised in any workplace, then no other workers’ organisation can be established. The ILC is essentially a body for the management and government to exercise control in the workplace.

The other ‘workers’ organisation tolerated by the regime is the ‘Workers House’ which provides a channel for the government to control the workers and their demands. The activities of ILCs and the Workers House are designed in order to contain and control workers’ discontent. There have been numerous occasions when officials of ILCs and Workers House have openly cooperated with suppressive organs of the regime to oppose independent worker actions and suppress trade unionists.

An official ILO delegation which visited Tehran in 2004 noted the absence of trade union freedoms in the country and in its report stated: “Islamic Labour Councils”.. could not be regarded as genuine trade unions”.

The ILO delegation further reported that article 131 of the Labour Code and its appendices should be amended to prevent undemocratic and monopolistic practices in matters concerned with the workers organisations. They argued that in order for the Labour Code to be aligned with the specific provisions of ILO Conventions 87 and 98, a number of articles of the Code should be changed. One such change recommended was

amending the note No. 4 of Article 131 of the Code concerning workers organisation. The other recommendations concerned Articles 135 and 137 that implicitly give representation rights to ILCs. In May 2005 the former Iranian reformist president, Mohammad Khatami, reached an agreement with the ILO to amend the Labour Code in order to align it with the ILO’s fundamental regulations. During a visit by Juan Somavia, ILO Director General, to Tehran, the Iranian government undertook to incorporate the right to form independent trade unions in the Labour Code.

However, the change of government in June 2005 aborted the process of aligning the Labour Code with the ILO conventions. The new government has shown itself hostile to any meaningful role for trade unions and workers organisations and has declared a war against any form of effective workplace organisation. The brutal break up of the peaceful protest demonstration of teachers earlier this year and the arrest of well known trade union leaders are designed to frighten off workers. Even ILCs and the Workers Houses have been put under pressure by the government. The regime has tried to establish its own ‘Islamic Workers Associations’ with functions of reporting suspicious activities and acting as the eyes and ears of the government to guard against any form of industrial action.

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We are against War!

We support the struggle in Iran for peace, democracy and social progress



On the occasion of the 5th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Iran Today publishes the text of an interview with Andrew Murray, chairman of the “Stop the War Coalition”. StWC has been campaigning against the US policies in the Middle East and for the withdrawal of foreign armies from Iraq.

Q: Five years have passed since the criminal US war against Iraq and the subsequent occupation of that country. We all know of the consequences of this disastrous adventure worldwide and in the Middle East. What in your view were the main reasons for the US to embark on this policy?

AM: Firstly, as part of a global programme of imposing direct or indirect US hegemony on every part of the planet. Secondly, to ensure strategic domination over the resources of the region and provide a permanent base for the US among the larger countries of the Arab world. Thirdly, to improve the position of Israel.

Q: Have these reasons disappeared?

AM: The disaster of the occupation, including the brave resistance of the Iraqi people has obviously

complicated the situation for the USA. However, I believe its strategic aims remain unchanged, even if divisions within the US establishment caused by the Bush-Cheney policy may lead to a shift to less overtly aggressive ways of pursuing these aims in future.

Q: What are the prospects for the future in the Middle East?

AM: It is evident that the Iraq war has solved none of the deep-seated problems in the region. The Palestinian people continue to suffer intolerable oppression, and a peaceful settlement of the Israel-Palestine issue is no nearer. Most of the region is in the grip of tyrannies of one sort or another closely aligned to US and British policy. There is a real danger of the war in Iraq spreading to elsewhere in the region. Peace depends on a full withdrawal of US and British troops from Iraq, an end to

the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, leading to a genuine settlement there, and a people’s movement for democracy throughout the region.

Q: StWC has undoubtedly played a significant role mobilising public opinion against the war and invasion of Iraq . How would you describe StWC’s influence within British politics and the public’s conscience?

AM: The Stop the War Coalition has been the strongest and longest-lasting anti-war movement in British history, and it has played a substantial part in shifting British public opinion into a position of firm opposition to the occupation of Iraq. Our continuing struggle has helped ensure that the “war issue” has not gone away, despite the support for the aggression in both the main political parties.



Q: Late last year you mentioned in an article in The Guardian that STW Coalition is attacked for supposedly giving political support to the Iranian Regime. Who are the critics and how does SWT Coalition's reconcile its opposition to attacking Iran with not being seen as endorsing the policies of the repressive ruling regime in Iran

AM: The critics are mainly among pro-imperialist elements of the ultra-left, who are anxious to divide the movement. Our position in relation to Iran – as it was in relation to Iraq and Afghanistan – is that regime change must be the work of the people concerned in each country. As Iraq proves, democracy cannot be imposed externally. The only change that lasts is that which comes from below. Certainly, the anti-war movement is in support of all those working in Iran for such change, while our main focus remains on stopping any attack on the country – an attack which would almost certainly have the effect of strengthening the most reactionary elements in the regime in any case.

Q: Since the departure of Tony Blair has there been a shift in the British position towards supporting the US policy in

regard to Iran?

AM: I do not believe that there has been any substantial change in the British government's attitude on this issue. I believe it would not welcome a war, for reasons of electoral expediency if for no other, but that it is so tied in to Bush's Middle East policy that it would be hard for it to avoid involvement.



That is one reason why we continue to push so strongly for a full withdrawal of British forces from the region.

Q: Under what circumstances do you think the US may attack Iran and would the British government play a part? How could we prevent this?

AM: All the reasons advanced by the US to try and justify attacking Iran have been shown to be threadbare. However, "hot pursuit" from Iraq after alleged "terrorists" or some other form of border provocation, at land or at sea, remains a real danger and could lead to an escalation

which would inevitably involve British forces to some degree or other. Again, the best way to avoid this danger is the full withdrawal of the occupying troops from Iran's neighbour, Iraq. Of course, other forms of attack are still possible – aerial bombardment by US or Israeli forces aimed at nuclear power facilities in Iran. Under such circumstances British involvement would be less. Public opinion in Britain, aware of the lies told by the government in relation to the aggression against Iraq, is deeply hostile to any attack on Iran and that will most likely remain the case, unless the war is dressed up as a response to some Iranian "provocation".

Q: Do you have any message for those progressives campaigning for peace, democracy and progress in Iran?

AM: I have always been proud to be associated with all those fighting for peace and democracy in Iran. This connection goes back for more than a quarter of a century now. Your readers may be assured that all those working for social progress in Iran have our full sympathy and support. We hope that by our efforts to prevent an extension of the war to Iran, we may make the conditions for their struggle easier.

Sham Elections (from p.3)

reformists dominated the Parliament and a hint of liberalisation was in the air in Iran.

The hard line response to that situation was to engineer the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005. As the 2009 presidential election comes into view, the characterisation of the Khatami period as an 'historical error' which presented threats to the 'system' is being raised more loudly in hard line circles. The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ali Khamenei, has asked for reformist candidates to 'recant' their past deeds. Such language is clearly designed to convey the impression that the popular desire for reform, made explicit in the Khatami period, is an aberration which should not be tolerated.

The desire of the ruling clique to maintain their grasp on all of the institutions of the Islamic Republic is reflected in the comments of Chief Commander Jafari of the Guards Corps (Sepah) who has been quoted as stating,

"Sepah is categorically fundamentalist and will be on the side of fundamentalists....How could you be the guardian of a revolution with all of its

political charge and not be political"... The fact is that we entered Sepah for ideological and political reasons and all of the founders of Sepah and its commanders have come to Sepah with revolutionary and political-religious holy war (Jihad) motivations."

None of this should come as any surprise. However, it does underline the fact that the presidential election in 2009 is likely to be even more closely manipulated than the recent parliamentary charade. The March elections have been described in opposition circles in Iran as a 'puppet show', an apt characterisation of a process in which the strings of the key players were all being pulled elsewhere.

The popular desire for reform remains strong in Iran, especially amongst the young, who feel increasingly constrained by the political and social diktats of an ageing clergy out of touch with modern realities. A tremendous amount of effort has been mobilised by the conservatives to maintain the status quo in the recent elections. Whether the people of Iran will tolerate being hoodwinked into accepting a second term of Ahmadinejad in 2009, however, remains to be seen.

CODIR Supports the National Peace... from p.8

international community and to the people of Iran. The voice of the Iranian government is not representative of the whole country and the opposition of many within Iran must be taken into account in the deliberations of Western governments. As importantly, the peace movements and human rights organisations must show active support for the new organisation, both to put pressure on the West and to show the Iranian regime that its views do not represent the majority view in Iran.

As the longest standing human rights and solidarity movement with the Iranian people internationally, CODIR welcomes the formation of the National Peace Council. As its leaders have made clear, the success of the Council will rely both on internal and international support. For this reason the open commitment of the peace and human rights organisations internationally is vital in order to send a message of solidarity to the Peace Council itself, but also to send a message to the warmongers that the momentum for peace is growing.

Such declarations of support will assist those inside Iran to step forward and add their voices to those calling for negotiation over conflict and will ensure that with elections scheduled in the coming months in Iran, peace will be one of the main issues of debate. Jane Green is CODIR's Campaign Organiser.

Human Rights in Iran (from p.9)

leave Iran he responds,

“No, I prefer to stay here. I have a lot of things to do. I can’t just get up and leave. I like to study and I like to see the world and experience new things.”

The publication of the interview with Batebi precipitated a flurry of letters to Rooz from students who had suffered at the same time in the notorious ward 209 of Evin Prison and the torture ward of ‘Komiteh Moshtarak’ prison in central Tehran. Former students have highlighted physical beatings, video confessions and psychological torture as being typical of methods used against prisoners alleged to have committed crimes against the state.

One prisoner in particular has not emerged with the same degree of equilibrium as Batebi. Writing to Rooz, he states, “When these methods of physical torture failed, they would resort to psychological torture. They would keep me undisturbed in my cell for months, while I could hear the yelling and screaming coming from the tortures of my parents. Or they would play audio tapes of torture of my friends. At one time the recordings of torture of men and women were so effective that they almost had their intended effect on me. Which is why I am now undergoing psychological treatment.”

It would be bad enough if these experiences were

confined to the past but the evidence from Iran under the regime of Ahmadinejad suggests that human rights abuses of students and other political prisoners continue to be the rule rather than the exception. Imprisoned journalist Emadaddin Baghi, for example, remains in a poor state in Evin prison without proper access to his family and uncertain access to medical care. Baghi’s wife, Fatemeh Kamali, has not been able to ascertain the exact state of her husband’s health in spite of repeated attempts.

With the elections to the Majlis (Parliament) coming up in March the question of the treatment of political prisoners is beginning to gain ground in the limited forums for political debate allowed by the regime. There remains hope, expressed by such figures as dissident cleric Hasan Yousefi Eshkevar, that the elections may bring some limited gains for the reformists and pave the way for further change in the Presidential elections scheduled for 2009.

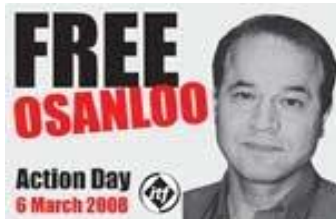
While the pressure from inside Iran mounts it is imperative that international solidarity with the Iranian people continues to be a priority of the labour, trades union and peace movements in the West. Both the Parliamentary and presidential elections over the coming year will increase the sensitivity of the regime to criticism. Ensuring that human rights and the treatment of political prisoners remains high on the political agenda is vital.

TO ORGANISE (FROM P.11)

Despite these difficulties, the long struggle of Iranian union activists for their rights has continued. A number of independent unions have started organising workers and continue to demand changes to the labour code. The Board for Establishment of Trade Unions, formed by experienced and well-respected union cadres and leaders has spearheaded the campaign for the formation and development of independent union organisations in the country. It has called for the recognition of the activities and functioning of unions and workers representatives in all industrial, agricultural and services industries in chapter 6 of the Labour Code. Furthermore it has called for important changes in article 136 of the Labour Code to reflect the principles of freedom of association (Convention 87) and the operation of collective bargaining (Convention 98). The board demands that the code should stipulate that the representatives of Iranian workers in ILO and all other national and international bodies should be elected by workers and free from any manipulation by the government or the management. It considers any interference in the affairs of unions by government or the management as contrary to ILO Convention 87 and calls for an end to all such practices.

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Global Action Day in Support of Workers Rights in Iran



On 6 March 2008, hundreds and thousands of trade unionists and human rights activists across the world took part in an Action Day to express our solidarity with the Iranian workers. Organised by the ITUC and ITF and fully endorsed by Amnesty International, participants in more than 35 countries called for an immediate and unconditional release of Mansour Osanloo and Mahmoud Salehi, and demanded that workers' rights be respected in Iran.

Actions included protests at the Iranian Embassies, mass rallies, leafleting and lobbying the government. This is the third time that the Global Unions have organised a worldwide protest to promote workers' rights in Iran. As the joint statement by the ITUC, ITF and Amnesty International cites, "this will not be the end. Our message of solidarity with the Iranian workers is loud and clear. It will continue to resound until our objectives are achieved".

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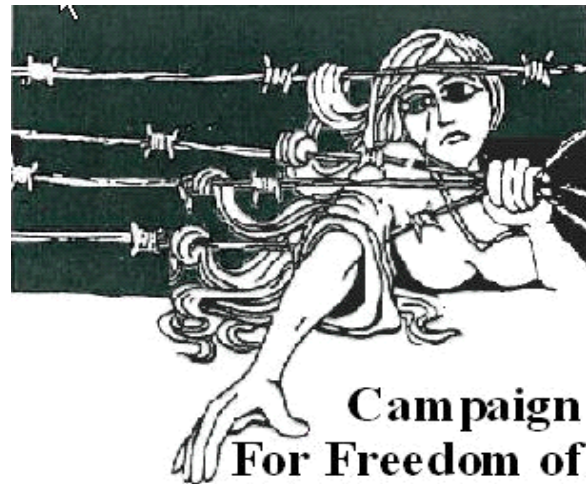
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Campaign For Freedom of Women Prisoners In Iran

THE WOMEN... FROM P. 7

What is now very clear to all is that the united voice of the women of Iran will not be suppressed until its demands are met and that each time the regime moves against women, its actions will only serve to strengthen their resolve. The women of Iran have also made it plain that they will stand alongside all others who are suffering injustice in their country – students, workers, the poor – to fight for a free and democratic Iran. They draw strength from knowledge of the growing list of the achievements of women's and all progressive movements worldwide. It is crucial that we respond in solidarity.

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