

“Letter Against US Imperialism” Damages Left by Supporting Iranian Regime Against a Popular Uprising

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A “Letter Against U.S. Imperialism” has been circulating in leftist circles. It views the protests in Iran in a reductionist manner and unequivocally rejects them.

The Letter has been signed globally by well-known leftist organizations, activists and academics including Vijay Prashad, Angela Davis, Doug Henwood, and others. The stance they take on popular revolts in Iran is depressingly one-dimensional and expresses disunity with starving and poor working folk in Iran.

They remind the Iranian people that U.S. sanctions are starving them, an undeniable and important fact. They fail, however, to mention the callous economic and social conditions exacerbated by the ruling/religious elite who have consolidated wealth over the past 40 years over the necks of the Iranian working people. They fail to mention the mode of financialized capitalism established by the Islamic Republic, which has imposed devastating neoliberal policies and austerity measures on the people. They dismiss, therefore, some essential economic and social measures, which, together with imperialist U.S. sanctions, have squeezed Iranians so tight that anger and eventual revolt were made necessary for the people.

Over 100 cities in Iran, including Tehran, witnessed mass mobilization and protests. The government reports that close to 200,000 hit the streets, which only means we should assume a larger number. The protesters, initially adamantly nonviolent, were met with brutal force by the state. This quickly changed what looked like a reform movement to a radical revolt against the Supreme Leader and his system. Their slogans were “down with Khamenei,” “no Mullah, no Shah, yes for council democracy,” “freedom and justice for women of Iran,” and “no to the execution of political prisoners.” Others expressed solidarity with revolts across the world, including in Lebanon, Iraq, Chile, Hong Kong and elsewhere, citing the fight against neo-liberalism as the uniting agent. It has been reported that most of the mobilizers—being predominantly working class—live under the

poverty line. They clearly and en masse expressed disapproval of the status quo, the state capitalist establishment, and its violent mechanisms of rule.

The Letter fails to show solidarity with these oppressed working people. The only time it mentions anti-regime protesters is to label them as imperialist functionaries. They never mention the bravery of protesters who burned down over 700 banks, over 150 governmental offices, and in the case of hundreds of people, gave their lives in the face of murderous regime violence. They never mention women's liberation or queer liberation under a state which has violently repressed rights of those groups. They fail to mention the environmental problems in Iran, the deforestation and water and air pollution, which affects the whole country. It seems that for some so-called socialists, these are not important issues. For them, Iranians are simply concerned with U.S. imperialism, and a lack of basic needs and services is a cost worth paying in the fight against it. The Letter claims the Iranians want "economic and political stability" and that they "stand by them and their calls for domestic reform." How is that possible when at least two hundred thousand who demand change on the streets are dismissed as "native informants and cheerleaders"?

The Letter's dismissal of the Iranian regime's oppressive and violent influence in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq is also infuriatingly disrespectful and contemptuous of the left in the Middle East, to say the least. If their conceptualization of imperialism does not include and condemn the sub-imperialism of Iran, then it is faulty and constitutes an apology for gross crimes against humanity. The Iranian state manages to oversee its interests by spending hundreds of millions in the Middle East, all the while oppressing and repressing liberation struggles of all sorts in the region. At the same time, it fails to provide basic services to its own people inside Iran. The fact that it shoots down those who demanded these services, including children, already tells us enough to understand the nature of the regime. It serves capital and growth and profit, not the people.

Those of us who have lived under similar repressive states and conditions understand the direct violence perpetrated by the Islamic Republic. We understand that unemployment, lack of services, and absence of essential infrastructure is a form of violence that has immediate, catastrophic influences on day-to-day life. We understand police and military brutality, because we and our families have been imprisoned, killed, and exiled. It is bewildering, therefore, when Lebanese and Iraqi names are on this statement, as they are at this very moment fighting the same fight against their own states which are aggrandized by Iran itself.

Is such a state really the left's friend in the fight against imperialism? Is the international left again embracing Stalinism/campism in its most violent forms?

This will not be allowed to pass if an intersectional, matured and organized global left exists and can express itself.

All power to the people of Iran and to the people of Iraq, Sudan, Chile and Lebanon, and all people everywhere who struggle against societal and economic violence by their states!

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