

# Communists, the Working Class and the Election Issue

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*The elections for parliament are to be held in December '99. At present, the media is bombarding the working class with the propaganda of the various bourgeois factions, all telling them to get involved in these elections in one way or the other. Some have rejected participation on the basis of the absence of political freedom. Others have called on workers to actively join in on the basis of the threat of the right wing gaining the upper hand.*

*Today these basic questions are before the communists and the working class: What is the communist position regarding elections? Can the working class defend its interest against the bourgeois assaults through parliament or by becoming involved in the election process?*

The unprecedented hype of the parliamentary election in recent months, has been intensified even further. The ruling factions who have organised themselves into two, “reformist” and “conservative” fronts are trying to strengthen their power and position within the state, by gaining the majority in parliament.

Elections are due in December, but factional battles began a while ago when the reformists’ candidate, Khatami, was elected as President. In recent months conservatives have tried to halt the reformists’ chances of gaining a majority in the next parliamentary session. To do this, they have used the judiciary, the present parliament and the Council of Guardians, which they have in their control.

Using its courts and with the armed forces, the judicial apparatus prosecuted the student movement and the press — the two major spearheads of the reformist front. As a result five newspapers were banned and their editors sent to prison whilst verdicts setting the execution of a few students were also issued.

Parliament, by passing new press legislation, altering the election procedure, reducing the quorum in the first stage from a third to a quarter and extending the power of the Council of Guardians, tried to ease the election procedure for the conservative candidates. The Council of Guardians, which is the sole validator of candidates’ nominations, completed this scenario by rejecting some reformist candidates.

Similarly, the reformist front tried to use these events and unpopular actions of the conservatives to their own benefit. Being aware of the role of the press and propaganda, for every one of their newspapers banned a new licence for a new paper was issued by the Ministry of Guidance, which is under reformist control. Students, by organising various gatherings and meetings, displaying photos of those who have been arrested, such as Abdullah Noori, are trying to ensure the reformists' victory.

World capitalism, with long-term political and economic interests in mind, sees the reformists' platform as closer to its own logic. By inviting Khatami to make visits abroad, by improving trade relationships, and setting up massive oil contracts, a massive propaganda effort for the victory of the Khatami Front has been launched.

The Islamic Shoras (councils), and in a word, the Islamic Labour Party of the reformists, with their extensive activity among workers, are trying to control and use workers' protest for their own ends. Their recent tactics are focussed on showing how the failure of Khatami's policy to improve the overall economic situation and raise workers' living standards, reduced wages, mass redundancies, inflation, crisis in national health ... are on one hand, due to two decades of Rafsanjani's economic policies and on the other hand due to obstacles which the conservatives are placing in the way of the reformists. The main purpose of organising May Day events for the workers, opposing the taxation of small factories, changing the Labour Law and the assault on the Chamber of Commerce is to give the false idea that the conservatives are the main reason for the economic crisis.

## **Opposition Groups and Elections**

Once again, the parliamentary elections, just like the presidential election issue, have played an important role within the legalised and illegal opposition groups. The vast majority of the opposition groups have called on the workers to participate actively in the elections, so that, by voting for the reformists, they will undermine conservative conspiracies and activities. The left wing of the capitalist apparatus, which had praised the presidential elections with such statements as "the correct evaluation by the people"<sup>1</sup> or "this massive movement brings to mind the 1979 revolution"<sup>2</sup> as usual spoke of the importance of this election too. This time, again, the opposition were split into two camps of those who advocate participation and those who advocate boycotting the election. Some groups, like Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar) unashamedly told workers to vote for the independent individuals of the Khatami front. However, Fedaiian (minorities), Trotskyites, Maoists and the neo-Stalinists boycotted the elections. Their reasoning, however, gives away just how far they are part and parcel of the political apparatus of the capitalist system. Fedaiian (minority) have summed up all the boycotters' points in their press release by stating the following:

*...Within the Islamic Republic, there is no real election. There can be no real election if people and political organisations are not free to nominate the candidate whom they can trust. The Islamic Republic regime via the Home office and Council of Guardians choose their own trusted individuals and tell people to choose one of them... this is not an election ... the Iranian people should boycott it. (Fedaiian, Kar No. 333 Year 21)*

The defenders of these positions are clearly stating that they are not taking part in the election because it is not a free election. The Islamic Republic has not provided the necessary free conditions for all the political parties to participate in the election. They have only picked “their own trusted individuals” and look for people to vote for them. In other words, they have boycotted these elections because they have not been permitted to nominate their own candidates. These people have no objection to parliamentary elections, they only protest about the conditions and the manner in which the elections are held. This is like the first few years of the Islamic Republic’s coming to power when, with a little political freedom, the very same people either nominated their own candidates or supported the one who was closest to them. Thus, both the participators and boycotters of the left have this in common, that, given a ‘free’ election they would participate in parliament and try to win the leadership within it, as if capitalism could overcome its own contradictions and also display a better and more humane face for itself. As a result, despite all their prating against capitalism, they are in the capitalist camp and are spreading confusion within the proletarian camp.

Whether “conservatives” stop the reformist victory or they themselves leave the scene or whether power hangs in the balance between them, the ultimate aim of the capitalist class as a whole, with their right and left wing oppositions, is to involve the working class in elections and give parliamentarism a fillip. They are trying to hide the obvious fact that, even in the most democratic parliamentary election, workers and toilers have no power and influence on the process of implementing any legislation or making any decisions.

## **Communists, the Working Class and Elections**

While the working class is bombarded by the radio, television and press of all the bourgeois factions to intervene in the elections, while all the political parties and organisations, intellectuals and students are inviting us to participate in the elections, while the murderous supporters of the Ayatollah, organisers of the cultural revolution and founders of the security forces are preaching about civil society, what are the communists’ positions? Can workers defend their interests against the assault of the bourgeoisie through parliament or by getting involved in the electoral process?

Communists do not choose their positions on empirical or moral bases. The starting point for their positions and political tactics is based on their scientific analysis of the objective conditions and the trajectory of historical events. In the progressive period of capitalism, the Second International tried to impose some reforms on the capitalist system by participating in the electoral process. However, with the development of capitalism and the beginning of the First World War, capitalism entered into a new era, the era of imperialism, leaving capitalism with no other alternative but war. With the emergence of imperialism and the war, reconstruction, crisis cycle, a new epoch of revolutionary activities opened up. The use of such reformist tools as parliament were no longer relevant and direct militant revolutionary action was on the communists’ agenda. It was on this basis that the 2nd Congress of the Third International, in the theses on parliamentarism, referred to the new era of capitalism, the era of war and revolutions and stated:

*Parliament has become a tool for lying, deceiving, violence and a tedious nagging. With looting, destruction, invasion, militarism and imperialist destruction, parliamentary reforms without any sustainable gain have lost any meaning to masses of workers.*

This revolutionary position was changed and distorted to 'Revolutionary Parliamentarism', the 'destruction of parliament from within', or a place for 'communist propaganda' by the opportunists. Workers were called on to participate in elections to vote for the so-called workers' parties. It was only the left faction of the Italian communists, with Bordiga's leadership within the International that opposed these tactics and declared:

*In the new era, there is no possibility of using parliament for revolutionary communist tasks.*

Today, like then, it is the communist task, on the one hand, to fight against the confusion that the left wing of capitalism has spread within the working class, and on the other hand, to put forward the class struggle against electioneering. For long since parliamentary democracy has been:

*... only a fig leaf to disguise the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The real organs of power in democratic capitalist society lie outside Parliament with the state bureaucracy, its security forces and the controllers of the means of production. Parliament is useful to the bourgeoisie in that it gives the illusion that workers choose who is to misrule them. As such revolutionaries oppose parliamentary elections by calling for the workers to fight on their own class terrain. It is up to the party of revolutionaries to show that only through the destruction of capitalism and its state organs is it possible for the working class to secure complete freedom of expression and organisation.<sup>3</sup>*

Today, our class is not torn between the fake alternatives of participation and boycott. Our class is faced with the question whether, by taking part in the parliamentary election process, we can defend our class interest against the capitalist assault or not.

To answer this question we should refer to our own historical memories as a worldwide class. Workers' experience in other countries, the experience of the 50-year rule of the Shah's monarchy and 20 years of the Islamic Republic indicate clearly that there is no possibility of improving the basic living standard of workers through the election circus. Experience shows that all the bourgeoisie factions, no matter how sweet their promises when they are in opposition, once in power have attacked the working class more viciously than their predecessors. With Khatami's victory, not only has there not been an improvement in workers' lives, on the contrary real wages have been reduced. National health provision has been reduced even further and masses of workers have been made redundant. The defenders and the ideologists of the reformists defend these policies by referring either to problems they have inherited from the previous Rafsanjani government, or to the obstacles that the conservatives put in their way, as Rafsanjani did exactly when he used the destruction of war as an excuse to attack workers' standard of living. This is the usual con trick of the ruling factions.

From this basis, we can say one thing with certainty, that with Khatami's victory or the victory of any other faction, unfinished assaults on workers will continue even more vigorously. The reformist alternative, which manifests itself in Khatami's economic programme, like all other capitalist regimes, aims for the revival of the Iranian "sick" economy which can only be improved by increasing the profitability of capital and further undermining workers' terms and conditions. For these reasons, the working class and its vanguards should be aware that participating in elections will only increase the isolation and atomisation within our class and will weaken our class unity. We have only one choice:

Common struggle against wage reductions, mass redundancies and against the whole capitalist state. Only through this can we defend our class interest.

Participation in elections can only lead us into illusions concerning bourgeois parliamentarism. This, however, proves that, so long as the International workers party has not been formed, so long as the proletariat has not spread its struggle with a revolutionary programme on an international level and scale, and so long as the class struggle is not heading towards destroying capitalism and taking power, this illusion will remain.

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### **Footnote**

1. *Workers Communist Party Of Iran*
2. *Organisation of Revolutionary Workers of Iran (Rahe Kargar)*
3. *Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*