

## COMMUNISTS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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K. Abraham – 9 July 2009

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The conduct of the recent presidential election in Iran once again provided an opportunity for a grooving popular protest against the ruling regime. Regardless of whether some people who participated in the election were aligned with different factions of the Islamic Republic by illusion, or whether vast numbers participated because of their opposition to the Ahmadi-Nejad/Khamenei ruling faction, their participation in the election demonstrates the extent of the vast discontent of the different classes and strata of the people who suffer under exploitation and oppression in Iran. That discontent with the existing ruling government has caused volcanic uprisings to erupt. Youth, and especially young women, have been fearless in confronting the threats of death and imprisonment issued by the Islamic Republic regime – despite the absence of any distinct program of action to guide them in this confrontational opposition, beyond Mousavi/Karroubi faction.

In order to perceive the essence of these protests, it is necessary to review past popular movements in Iran. In July 9, 1999 students protested the total disregard of democratic rights, including the freedoms of speech and press, by the ruling Islamic Republic. This year marks the tenth anniversary; the student protests were fully supported by the masses of the people. After six days of heroic battle and protest by the students, the protests ended in bloodshed and ashes due to violent attacks by the authorities – a collaborative effort of the “reformist” faction under the leadership of Mohammad Khatami and the hardliner faction led by Khamenei. Some students were brutally killed. Hundreds of students were arrested and tortured. Some of them lost their lives while in prison. Eventually this movement was suppressed.

But despite this defeat, this movement produced certain achievements: First of all, it exposed the essential demagoguery of the “reformists” in who were in power [an inseparable part of the ruling supreme power in Iran] and secondly, the slogans of the movement such as “Freedom of thought is not possible under a theocratic rule!”, “down with despotism!”, “down with Master jurisconsult (velayat- e- faghih!)” Showed that the student movement has entered a new stage of its struggles against the ruling system. This movement, which until that time, had accommodated the ruling power, began to dispel its illusions regarding the “consolidation of democracy” within the framework of the Islamic Republic system; it came to see clearly that the Islamic Republic is a die- hard supporter of the decadent capitalist system of exploitation. The vanguard section of this student movement demanded an end to the capitalist system. The growth of the Left student movement; its tendency toward communism; and its activism on university campuses in Iran can be attributed to a great extent to the 1999 protest movement.

Unfortunately, these achievements came at a dear price- a price paid by the students’ blood, torture and their imprisonment. And in the absence of the vanguard leadership of the working class, these achievements have not been converted into an effective weapon in the hands of working class forces against the exploitation and oppression of capitalism. Neither from the students nor from working class forces did there emerge a common and practical program to end exploitation and class oppression in Iran.

In addition, this consciousness among the entire student movement did not rise to the point that there is recognition that “freedom” is not a separate category from the society’s economic base,

in any society, and that under the conditions of the reign of global monopoly capitalist relations and its effects in Iran [which suffers under a moribund capitalist system], the quest for freedom for the masses of the workers and laborers is impossible so long as the ruling capitalist relations persist – relations which have descended into barbarism. The revolution of February, 1979 also demanded “independence, freedom and social justice!” – but the bourgeoisie usurped power. Under the guise of the Islamic Republic and Velayat-e-faqih (supreme Islamic leadership), freedom loving people and communists were defeated in a sea of blood, and the revolutionary demands did not materialize. In the absence of a powerful workers movement in Iran, the demand for democratic freedoms, only becomes a tool in the hands of the different factions of the bourgeoisie, whether ruling or in opposition. In this manner, the people who are pro-freedom and pro-democratic rights become simply a means for this or that faction of capitalists to come to power.

After a lapse of 10 years from the defeat of the July, 1999 movement, during the recent presidential elections, Iran’s university students harbored the same illusions about the reformist factions. Widespread, medieval-style of repression by the hardliners, headed by the Khamenei/Ahmadi-Nejad faction and fueled by the excuse of the danger of foreign interference, was brought down on workers, laborers, women, students, writers, journalists, and national minorities residing in Iran. This repression created the conditions for the emergence of the “holly alliance” of “reformers” [joined by those hardliners who are more lenient toward “reform”] who, under the cloak of the Islamic Republic and the Velayat-e-faghih, raise the banner of bourgeois democracy in order to safeguard the survival of the Islamic regime. In this manner, they competed against the hardliner faction to gain the upper hand for power and to bring the people to follow them.

A section of the student movement forgot that ten years ago the slogan, “Freedom of thought is not possible under a theocratic rule!” was also shouted, and that students then experienced the treachery of the ruling “reformers”. And this time, more than 50 student organizations all over Iran, under the guise of opposition to the dictatorship of Ahmadi-Nejad’s government, were fooled into choosing between the lesser of two evils: they issued a common statement throughout the country attacking Ahmadi-Nejad, but without clarifying that by not electing Ahmadi-Nejad, how the doors of freedom would be opened for them and the masses of people. How could those doors possibly be opened by another faction of the ruling bourgeoisie that supports the Islamic Republic system?

The communists, including Iran’s Ranjbaran Party, months before the start of the election campaign, warned the people that elections in Iran have an anti democratic nature. Women – half the population of the nation – as clearly stated in the constitution of the Islamic Republic, have no right to become candidates for the presidency. In addition, the Guardian Council, armed with “selective supervision” of elections, only approves the qualifications of candidates from within their own circle; other candidates are disqualified for the irrational reason of “lack of competence”. Under such conditions, the only option is to actively ban the elections as “unlawful” and to isolate the regime in the eyes of the Iranian people and the world. That is the only option which strengthens the working class / laborers position in their struggle against the regime. Participation in the elections and perpetuating the illusion of democracy only lead to the consolidation of the Islamic Republic and the rise of this or that faction to power.

While the boycott of the elections by opposition organizations intensified, the ruling elite of Iran, fearful of isolation and infamy in the eyes of public opinion in Iran and around the world, started widespread preparations for the conduct of a tenth round “successful” presidential elections:

There are two principal ruling factions: the supporters of big, private capital under the leadership of Rafsanjani, Khatami, Moussavi and Karroubi [capital which is tied internationally to the imperialists in the west] and the Khamenei / Ahmadi-Nejad faction [the supporters of bureaucratic and commercial capital, which internationally cloaks itself in the guise of defiance against imperialist interference in the affairs of Iran and the Middle East]. This second faction is also characterized by the tendency toward collaboration with China and Russia, sympathy toward Chavez –type populism and participation of the military-financial mafia. These two factions entered into a rivalry in the arena of “showpiece elections”. The common basis for each of these two factions is the defense of the Islamic Republic – which was under attack by the rise of the widespread protest movements of workers, women, students, teachers and others. Their rivalry expressed itself in their mutual accusations – accusing each other of being responsible for the eventual collapse of this system by their adopted policies and programs.

For the first time, the public campaigning by the rival factions in the elections reached such dimensions that along with the televised debates between the candidates more than ever before exposed the decadent nature of the regime in the eyes of public opinion. The conflict of interests between the two factions had intensified to the point that they could not do anything else beside unmask each other.

While all of this was going on, the imperialists pursued all precautionary measures so as not to be accused of fomenting the outbreak of a “velvet revolution”. But, considering the fact that Iran plays a major decisive role in the Middle East for or against the influence of the imperialists, they put all their means to work in the service of stopping the Khamenei/Ahmadi-Nejad faction from winning the sham elections or, at the very least, of weakening that faction to the point that their influence on that faction could be greater – with the ultimate goal of bringing them to their knees as supplicants before the imperialists.

In this manner, the players on the stage of Iran’s sham elections were: the two rival factions of the Islamic Republic, the imperialists, and the Iranian voters (including the Iranian opposition forces aligned against the regime). From among these forces, the decisive force could have been the Iranian people, IF they had had a revolutionary leadership. They could have transformed the election histrionics into a great, forceful defeat of the two factions, of the imperialists, and also of the regime’s bourgeois opposition.

The full extent of the election frauds and the stuffing of ballot boxes are not known. But in any event, the truth is that because of the publicity campaign launched by conservatives, “reformers” and hard-liners, a substantial number of people were hoodwinked into participation and did not follow the active boycott of the election espoused by the communists. The events and the aftermath of the election showed that the participation of the people in the election was little more than a mirage. The conclusion that the masses of people consciously voted for Moussavi in order to get rid of the ruling faction is a symptom of incorrect analysis of the nature of the recent mass movement. This merely perpetuates the illusion that the struggle can take the form of electoral politics.

The early announcements of victory by both Moussavi and Ahmadi-Nejad on the day after the June 12, 2009 Election Day, showed that the two rivals had each programmed the results long before election and that they each believed with certainty that they would win the election. In fact, after the “clear” victory of Ahmadi-Nejad, protests from the rival faction began. They talked about the election being a coup d’état, and called upon the people to “peacefully” protest. Voters who had bought into the illusion that the presidency could be changed by voting for Moussavi, took to the streets [with or without the green signs, which the supporters of Moussavi chose to

distinguish themselves from others] protesting with the slogans of “Moussavi, take back my vote!” and “Where is my ballot?”

Once the street protests began to face off with repressive action by the authorities, gradually the people’s protest movement grew to the millions – beginning with the middle and upper strata of Iranian society alongside youth. With this swelling of the ranks, protests became “disruptive”; the slogans of “Down with dictators!” and “Down with Khamenei!” came to dominate the student demonstrations against election fraud. But the slogans of this protest movement were generally no more advanced than those of ten years before, nor more advanced than the slogans of the February 1979 Revolution! On the contrary, under the direction of the losing faction and through copying patterns of the February 1979 Revolution, the slogan of “God is great” was shouted from roofs at night. Despite the occasional shouting of slogans like, “Down with Khamenei!”, or “Down with the Islamic Republic!” no revolutionary alternative slogans relevant to the working class and to the defense of the impoverished people were provided. And in the same manner that we mentioned above, also the demand for democratic freedom within the framework of the Islamic Republic is no more than a mirage – and the shouting of slogans eventually subsided.

The confirmation of Ahmadi-Nejad by Khamenei on June 19, 2009 was accompanied by the threat of suppression of any kind of protest activity regarding the existence of massive fraud and vote-tampering which aided Ahmadi-Nejad. This created the pre-condition for the subsequent, even more savage suppression. According to the statements of regime officials, the number of casualties had reached 20; according to the news reports from the opposition, this figure is a lot higher: more than 200 casualties. Thousands of people all over the country also have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured. Some have died – yet the authorities of the regime are not willing to give the corpses to their families!

It was this desperate desire to preserve of power at the level of the presidency by the Khamenei/Ahmadi-Nejad faction which provoked the bloodshed among the millions of protesters who gathered on the streets of Iran’s cities. Finally after nearly three weeks of political struggle, activity temporarily tapered off but without even the fraudulent ruling faction being able to completely stabilize the situation. The fragile fortress of the Islamic Republic is so damaged that it is no longer repairable. After the order of Khamenei, the Guardian Council, having investigated 10% of the votes cast to determine the degree of accuracy of the vote count, declared on June 29, 2009 that there is no mistake in the counting of votes, and placed its confirmation stamp on the validity of the elections. In this manner it then responded to any kind of protest with the threat of further repression and showed one more time the summit of disgrace of Islamic regime institutions.

The question that is posed by any serious observer is, “How is it that according to the claims of the rulers, more than 80% of the eligible voters participated in the elections and “approved” the policies of the ruling faction?” Khamenei himself mentioned this as a sign of the solidarity of the people with the regime, and that 63% of the votes cast were for Ahmadi-Nejad. Despite this “solidarity”, Ahmadi-Nejad called his oppositions “dirt and rubbish”, and while claiming that the people are on his side, he then organized a savage campaign of repression!?

The eminent points in this event were the weak participation of the working class in this sham election and the subsequent protests. These points show that in the absence of a progressive worker alternative, the working class (despite its class instinct) did not recognize that participation in the election would only serve to support the interests of one of the two ruling factions. Both factions during the last 30 years of Islamic Republic rule, have proven their lack of loyalty and benevolence to the working class, and in one word, have widened the gap between

poverty and wealth. They have targeted the working class and laborers with violent repression by bullets, torture, imprisonment, expulsion of workers from their jobs etc; they have done nothing to serve the deprived people of our society who are the main producers of material and intellectual wealth in our society. The working class with its strikes at the threshold of the 1979 Revolution practically paralyzed the monarchy in place. But even the symbolic gesture of sending a working class representative to the "Revolutionary Council"- established at that time by mullahs – was rejected. Therefore, in practice this class had learned that without its powerful unity of action, it is not able to guide mass movements and gain political power; and eventually, its struggles would lead to benefit the non-proletarian classes.

In the wake of the events of the elections and the widespread mass protests that followed, it is useful to review different viewpoints – whether from Islamic Republic authorities or from their oppositions, or even from among the left or right opinion makers abroad – which were expressed in various media, analyzing a few of these examples will help us to find the correct communist approach toward mass movements.

The ruling faction, beginning four years ago, blamed mass protests on the intervention of foreign hands. It routinely cites foreign intervention as the cause behind "velvet revolutions" in the world, repeating daily that foreign operatives are the organizers of these protests. At a staff meeting for Iran's Ministry of Information, Ahmadi-Nejad said "Despite the covert and overt conspiracies of our enemies, the plan to overthrow the government was defeated and they could not achieve their aims"(BBC, June 20, 2009). This propaganda had advanced to the point that Hossein Shariatmadari, the chief editor of Keyhan newspaper, printed in Iran, claimed that "irrefutable evidence" exists that Moussavi and his supporters organized protests in response to American authorities and they are mentioned as "the American fifth column". He has demanded their prosecution and condemnation. Sadegh Mahsooli, Ahmadi-Nejad's Interior Minister also announced on Wednesday, July 5, 2009 that: "Britain and the US as well as the usurper regime of the Israeli Zionists are the main agents behind the recent disturbances in Tehran".

This is the easiest and the cheapest way to justify the brutal crackdown against the people. We must ask from these ignoble dictators how the foreign hand could be so influential in the determination of the Iranian people's fate as to mobilize millions of people in the streets to protest fraudulent elections, without fear of death? This alone shows the depth of the people's dissatisfaction with the existing regime. What, then, is your claim about masses of people supporting the Islamic Republic regime? If millions of protestors poured onto the streets, why did you not bring on your tens of millions of supporters and prove that the people are on your side?

Dr. Firooz Raeis dana, during an interview with the Voice of America, mentioned that the struggles of the people are related to the two ruling factions, and demanded of the people to not participate in protests but he also reject the rigged elections. This assessment which is an example of the trend among some "Left" forces following the June 12, 2009 election is a matter of being "Left" in appearance while "cleverly" defending from the ruling faction. This smacks of the unconditional reliance on the type of regime which from day one of being in power after the February, 1979 Revolution until now has sought to deceive the people with superstition, magic, hypocrisy and lies in an Islamic disguise. Regardless of the nature of the Moussavi/Karroubi faction, when millions of people gone to the streets and demanded recounting of ballots, how could this "Doctor" not defend their right to demand this? This epitomizes the "Doctor's" lack of confidence in the democratic rights of the people and the existence his distorted view! If there were no misdeeds on the part of the ruling power, wouldn't the easiest and clearest way to end

these protests be to select a council that is neutral to take on the responsibility of recounting the ballots and prove that Ahmadi-Nejad is the real victor in this election?

In the same manner, a retired professor, James Petras, this time from New York, has laid claim to the proper class analysis of the elections and writes: "The majority of the supporters of Ahmadi-Nejad were the workers and the working women at home who have little time to get involved with street politics; instead they expressed themselves at the polls....wherever they (the American Left, Right and centrist commentators) have erroneously perceived a fraudulent election... we see a class war. Wherever they see election fraud, we see instability caused by imperialism". (Edalat website -"Followers of Scientific Socialism").

Our "professor" seems to have forgotten that in Iran where the workers do not even have the right to form their own unions, and that their protests are met by the bullets, imprisonment, and terminations. Their meager back wages are not being paid. How dare he totally disregard the struggles of the workers, women and youth – and assert that the protests mainly originated in the well-off parts of Tehran. He presents Ahmadi-Nejad as the representative of the workers, women and youth -and cites the destabilizing activities of imperialists to condemn these protests. Did this professor of ours ever hear one word in defense of the rights of the workers, women and youth from the lips of Ahmadi-Nejad? Can he not see that this brand of "class analysis" only serves to defend the repressive factions of the Islamic Republic?

On the flip side of the "professor's" analysis, in an article from the new publication Streets, number 18, entitled "Think of Action", Milad S. has gone so far as to interpret the slogan of "Allah o Akbar" (god is the greatest, in translation) as being "not the acceptance of the supremacy of Islamic political teachings but rather the people's belief in the necessity of changing the ruling system" (!) This is presented along with quite a bit of reformist interpretations of Marx and Lenin! But after all, did the change from the Shah to Velayat-e-faqih solve any of the people's problems? Must we repeat the same errors?!

George Friedman, (Stratford-Global Intelligence, 06/29/2009) wrote that: "Within the regime, there is at center an economic war...the key basis for this perception is that last week's movement was not a rebellion against the regime...the number one objective in Tehran is the survival of the regime...the era of velvet revolutions has passed"

Mr. Friedman only expresses half of the truth. The economic warfare is not limited to the ruling factions. The imperialists also have a great interest in bringing Iran under their full economic and political influence. This is true not only of Iran, but of the entire Middle East. They would never abandon the policy of interference in the internal affairs of Iran. What evidence is there that imperialist interference, whether in the form of "velvet revolutions" or in the other forms, has ended? Does he believe that the imperialists have learned their lesson and have done away with interference in the internal affairs of other countries? If that is the case, where is the evidence?

We are also faced with a range of eclectic opinions regarding the recent movement among Iranian Left forces. Taghi Roozbeh writes: "One of the lessons of this experience (which) in my opinion is also the most important, is that we must avoid the overemphasis on unity of word and action in order to reinforce and stabilize the character of the movement's pluralism: unity in multiplicity...a mature democratic movement must be able to reflect all of the diversity reflected in class, sexual, national and religious... oppression. Without a doubt, the emphasis must be on unity in general and common demands. But recognition of diversity does not weaken that unity;

it provides consideration of the diverse pluralistic character of these very general and common demands”.

The art of the eclectic in this synopsis has reached to its climax by Mr. Roozbeh's pen. Class oppression, sexual oppression and the oppression of national minorities in the present world situation are not ultra class concepts that every social class or strata has its own views about them, but according to all the contemporary experience can only be ended by the proletariat through a victorious socialist revolution. In plurality, among those individuals in the opposition are die-hard monarchists or national chauvinists (in power or oppressed), or those who still seek “democratic” Islamic rule: individuals who share no common ground with the working class and the communists? Each one of them is seeking the realization of their own ideal society. Mr. Roozbeh, who seems to have a thorough understanding of European countries, must also, know that in these countries, none of these types of oppression, even after more than 200 years of bourgeois rule, have been eliminated. It may be that for the sake of fighting religious or national oppression, one may join in a movement and not be an obvious impediment if that movement does not have its own proletarian leadership. But those namely who seek to defend the rights of national minorities will go from the frying pan to the fire in most cases, and will never be able to realize their demands. A model of this is right in front of us, in Iraq and Afghanistan. The abuse by the imperialists of the desire for the right for self determination is starkly evident: transformation of these countries to slaughter – house! The problem with these movements is not necessarily “the unity in word” (unity in tactic and strategy), in which case, they would have been able to act in a much more orchestrated manner. But it is the lack of a progressive revolutionary leadership for which the recent movement of the people in Iran, one more time, has suffered. Sectarian views die hard. There is a well known proverb which says: “Thieves love disturbances in the bazaar”. And Mr. Roozbeh provides a guide to disturbances in the bazaar! Even an ordinary Iranian resident has written in a letter that: “In this mass movement in which he participates every day, there is no leadership that can even determine the location for the people to gather” (Bani Sadr, “Characteristics of Mass Movements”) or, “People are talking about the need for a leader” (Darnaye now parvaz, Street (Khiaban) publication # 19, article, “The Revolution is Dead; Long Live the Revolution”). Roozbeh argumentation guides us to nowhere.

Roozbeh's article is contradictory in itself. He pretends on the one side there is non unity of word in movement and on the other side proposes that people with different views had same parole! Certainly, they said: “take back my vote!” And that is the tope of his aims!

Some of the other Left organizations see the solution for the advancement of struggle as being the organization of a widespread general strike, and then establishing a system of ruling council. These are advocates of “Action for the sake of action” and of waiting for the miracle to occur after the spontaneous action. Such a solution, without the existence of an organized leadership of the working class, is not possible, even if hypothetically power falls into the hands of a bunch of newcomers as leaders right away and they will usurp power. (They too will promise the formation of a system of ruling council; but, right away they will usurp power.) This has happened over and over again; it shows why for years the movement has been fascinated with the idea of leadership!

In the “analytical statement” of the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist- Maoist), despite incorrect analysis in relation to the structure of society, with its misplaced emphasis on “Wide diversities of the class tendencies on the battlefield”, it says: “The revolutionary communists must quickly, with the accumulation of initial forces in the middle of the storm, be ready for the transition to the hurricane. They must put forward their definitive solution, meaning revolution,

and not only in the range of slogans...but, in practice and in the mobilization and organization of the revolutionary masses, and finally starting the revolutionary and people's armed struggle. The wide diversity of the class tendencies which stand in one rank on the battlefield, one more time shows us that without the hegemony of the proletariat among the widespread and miscellaneous folks, the path toward revolution cannot be followed". Or, "Today's first immediate question is not that when the working class and its vanguard party will put the imprint of the communist leadership on the present uprising? The question is: what policy must be adopted, what activities must be carried out, for the communist movement to stand in such a position as soon as possible?" And at the end, it introduces the slogan of "Let us endeavor to form a single policy and a single will, and take action in the communist movement of Iran!" In this manner all the antagonistic and contradictory discussions were mentioned.

The authors of this "analytical statement" know quite well that within the communist movement of Iran, in the present situation, the number of organizations and individuals which support the Iranian revolution, having a democratic and practice-oriented character, (except their own party) are very few. Therefore, their unity through a single policy and a single will and action, would practically keep a big part of the communists out of the arena. On the contrary, by proposing the concept of a "big tent" covering widely diverse people, they have sought unity with non-proletarian classes that are anti-communist, and they readily chose Moussavi as their leader. The comrades behind the "analytical statement", by declaring a Moussavi victory and taking up his slogans, have become caught up in a tactic which only creates illusions regarding the nature of the recent mass movement. Clearer, more explicit, more transparent and correct slogans could advance the class struggle, to increase the confidence of the working class and the impoverished masses. On the contrary, if the slogans of the movement are still more unclear and imprecise, the bourgeois factions in the Opposition will take advantage of this situation!

In addition, one must not be infatuated with a mass movement which was basically being advanced under the leadership of a faction of the ruling regime and suppressed. To conclude that "determining policy for this movement as the urgent response to the question of the class struggle", shows that these comrades, instead of eliminating a serious shortcoming in the working class movement that one of its duty is to put forward long range and tactical policies and day by day slogans, have chosen to pursue a "magical" policy in the daily struggle and this only by one group of revolutionary communists. And they believe that this will open the road to proletarian revolution! These comrades reduce the objective material element that is the lack of single organizational leadership of the movement, to the subjective element that is the lack of "policy". It is not known why so far these revolutionary communists have not formulated such magical policy of guiding the movement and why they are not proposing any policy in this regard!? So, the problem is somewhere else. In order to have the right concrete policy, one needs such vanguard fighter organization with well tide inside working class and toilers and able enough to analyze carefully the situation and qualitatively able to apply them in practice inside the movement.

Communists are not infatuated with mass movements. Communists must respond to the proclaimed specific demands of any movement with sensitivity. In the event that these demands are revolutionary in nature, communists must participate and help toward the advancement of those demands and the propagation and continuation of these movements. If they notice that a mass movement is following an incorrect line, communists by participating in the movement and explaining the shortcomings / defects of that line to the other participants in that mass movement, thereby preventing the masses from becoming human cannon fodder to the benefit of the various reactionary factions. At the same time, they must believe profoundly that a mass movement without revolutionary leadership can not go any further.

If we can sum up the experience of this recent movement in one sentence, we must say that other than the revolutionary boldness of the participating of millions people and especially the youth in the past few weeks of protests, the absence of an authoritative, revolutionary and communist leadership armed with the correct strategy and tactics was the greatest shortcoming of this movement. For the elimination of this shortcoming, communists must increase their unity of action two fold; they must send sectarianism to the trash bin of history. They must stand with the working class and mass movements in unity. And during the outbreak of a revolutionary crisis, they must skillfully guide them in the full range of class struggle toward victory. Otherwise, the vain pursuit of the mirage of the bourgeoisie's "demands for democracy" and ruling position will continue without any serious results to communists.