

# Iran protests: Reply to the WSWS response to my critique



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HELP ENLIGHTEN YOUR FELLOWS. BE SURE TO PASS THIS ON. SURVIVAL DEPENDS ON IT.

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Iranian mothers commemorating sacrifices of their sons. Iran is heroic, incomprehensible to Westerners, and

indomitable.

I would like extend my thanks and appreciation to the World Socialist Web Site [for publishing a response to my critical analysis](#) of their coverage of the recent economic protests in Iran.

I think readers appreciate open dialogue between journalists. Open dialogue is the foundation of diplomacy, and thus also the foundation of civilized politics. Dialogue means increasing understanding - not bickering - and I think we all agree that increased leftist unity is certainly lacking in the post-Soviet world.

The WSWS is a deservedly-appreciated site around the world, but their work in the English language is especially needed: true leftism is extremely difficult to find in the language of Shakespeare. I am not here to complain or make a laundry list of contradictions to their response: The WSWS is a group of professional journalists and/or committed activists, and readers will determine for themselves both the overall and the point-by-point validity of their response to my critique.

Calling me an apologist of a regime (Headline: *The working class unrest in Iran: The WSWS replies to an apologist of the regime*) does not invalidate my criticisms. Perhaps this calls into question my reputation or integrity, but I assume readers are unconcerned with either, and are more concerned with the analysis of much larger issues.

What is certain is that the WSWS is an entire organ which acts as an apologist for Trotskyism - the last paragraph of every article expressly declares that. I do not criticise this defense of an idea, and this open propagation of an ideology.

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What Western leftists should finally learn from modern Iran is

that a Muslim society has not (and probably cannot) swallow European socialism without modifying it to the national tastes...but this is not appreciated by Trotskyism in general and perhaps the WSWS specifically. However, this is appreciated—or simply accepted—by Maoism, Stalinism, and other schools of leftist political ideologies.

Indeed, I appreciate the openness. I think my support for an idea and ideology (more than one, of course) is self-evident in my journalism as well.

What I believe with certainty is that neither of our biases - declared or not - are unclear to our readers. Indeed, readers SHOULD be looking with a somewhat-jaundiced eye at all journalism which claim to be totally unbiased.

But pejoratively calling it the Iranian "*regime*" shows a fundamental rejection of the democratic, popular nature of the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, and this is something which should be remedied on the WSWS. Fox News, the Economist, The New York Times, etc. - I do not expect them to stop calling us a "regime", but the WSWS is doing great damage by misleading so many interested, learning, growing leftists about Iran. This not only more disharmony and damage - worldwide, and not just for Iranians - but it also makes non-Iranian leftists poorer and less able to wage their leftist struggles because the WSWS are encouraging them to dismiss one of the very, very few working socialist-inspired countries in the world.

Practically, this means they cannot implement some of our innovative policies steeped in the economics and democratic ideas of socialism: countries in earthquake-prone regions will not discover our [democratic, highly-developed and highly effective approach to earthquakes](#), one of our major curses; or they must wait very long to find out about our leftist policies, [such as rural health care](#), and thus denying their own societies an effective solution.

I can list other such positive policies, but instead I am often slowed down by the fight to disprove the false notion

that Iran is a "regime".

**I stand by my fundamental criticism of the WSWS's coverage of the recent economic protests, which I feel the WSWS did not address: At a time when the imperialist world was salivating at the prospect of regaining imperial control over Iran, the WSWS also adopted an anti-Iranian line because they seemingly believed that the economic protests were but a hair's breadth away from turning into a Trotskyist revolution.**

I will not list the many reasons why that is an incorrect view, and why such an editorial line was rather short-sighted, as that would be tedious to the reader. The reality was that the counter-revolution of a popular revolution was far more likely than a victory of any of the various 4th Internationals.

I believe the WSWS generally extends conditional support to Iran; I think they should extend far more support overall, but certainly when the forces of imperialism are making political and covert manoeuvres to implement the long-awaited neo-colonialization of Iran.

[dropcap]T[/dropcap>his led to the second, related key critique which the WSWS also did not address: why they did not engage in the socialist practice of "auto critique" instead of piling on Iran during the recent protests.

This point on criticism - and the time and place to do it - is something which I hope the WSWS discusses because there will certainly be other opportunities around the world to either "pile on along with the capitalists for not being Trotskyists", or alternatively to "defend a socialist-inspired country under attack". Because what is certain is that the imperialists adhere to this practice: one such prominent example is Nikki Haley, the obviously reactionary—some would say with a high degree of accuracy vile— American ambassador to the United Nations. However, she at least shows the ability

to effectively practice auto-critique, as she never criticises the US on the largest global political stage; the problem is, of course, that her ideas are not based on democracy, facts or international cooperation.

Readers must judge if my two main criticisms are valid, and if the WSWS disproved them.

**Shariati is as Iranian as *ghormeh sabzi***

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Shariati

[dropcap]A[/dropcap] WSWS phrase which requires a bit of correction is "**Paris-educated** sociologist Ali Shariati".

[Shariati](#) and his political thinking was as fundamentally Iranian as *ghormeh sabzi*, perhaps our national dish. Yes, he

did do graduate work in Paris, but he is a product of Iranian lower and higher education, of Iranian religious culture and especially of his own father, who was an Islamic cleric and intellectual. Shariati proudly stated his father was his foremost intellectual influence, and there is absolutely no disavowal of any of these influences in his work. Therefore, I ask that Iran can please not inaccurately lose Shariati to France or the West in a "posthumous brain drain".

Shariati is a popular leftist name to drop, but I think that if many Western leftists would actually read his work...he might no longer be so popular with many of them!

The reason for that is because to read Shariati is to read far more about Islam than anything else. Certainly, reading Shariati is to find that he was 100% in favor of Islamic governance. How could anyone believe otherwise, if they had read this passage from "*Martyrdom and Martyrdom*":

*"Therefore, certainly **the Imam must** militarily or politically arise against the usurping government and destroy the powerful ignorance, **govern** through their revolutionary power, and establish truth in the community and keep leadership in his own possession."* (emphasis added)

And for Western leftists who favourably bring up Shariati, it's almost as if they think that because his economic view was against capitalism and in favor of socialism...that he was somehow also in favor of Western secularism and their separation between church and state? (Also from "*Martyrdom and Martyrdom*")

*"Let me add - not for the reason that, as some people say, it is a defect for Imam Husayn to attend to politics and undertake a political revolution. No. This is the duty of an Imam."*

I don't think Shariati could have been much clearer on either issue: the role of religion in government, and the role of



religious leadership in Iranian society?

In my original critique I mentioned a poll regarding the view of Iranians on essentially the same issue: they agree with Shariati in a overwhelmingly democratic fashion. The only dispute is over "how much", but that is an ongoing, shifting set of issues which Iran resolves democratically or with the aid of a religiously-inspired vanguard party explicitly promoted by Shariati himself.

I bring up Shariati because - now 41 years after his death - Western leftists still often cannot even comprehend the idea of a person being a devout Muslim and a devout socialist/leftist? This is not a problem just for the Iranian Islamic Revolution: this is a huge problem for nearly 2 billion Muslims. This is thus also a problem for the entire world, our peaceful coexistence and certainly the success of leftist economics.

Please, continue to popularise Iranian political thinkers like Shariati! But make no mistake that he would undoubtedly be supporting Iran in 2017.

I feel about Shariati the same way that Iranians tell foreigners about our beloved poets Rumi and Hafez (who makes Shakespeare look like a bucket of junk): You know, we have hundreds of other poets who write in the same style and are nearly as good?

Shariati is just one exceptional Iranian revolutionary thinker; for the WSWS and others to elevate him while denouncing wholesale his fellow revolutionaries Khomeini or Khamenei, as they did in their reply...appears a bit inconsistent to me, because they are all the same style: Islamic Socialism.

What Western leftists should finally learn from modern Iran is that a Muslim society has not (and probably cannot) swallow European socialism without modifying it to the national

tastes...but this is not appreciated by Trotskyism in general and perhaps the WSWS specifically. However, this is appreciated—or simply accepted—by Maoism, Stalinism, what I term “[Iranian Islamic Socialism](#)” and other schools of leftist political ideologies.

But beyond Shariati, Khomeini & Khamenei, there are many many other Iranian Islamic Socialist thinkers, millions of intelligent tea-house thinkers and many, many millions of Iranian people who democratically made and preserve their Islamic Revolution. Elevation of Shariati over the everyday Iranian is anti-socialist, and I denounced Lenin-worship (Trotsky too) [in this article](#).

The only role of non-Iranians is to support the democratic will of the Iranian people... this is not very Trotskyist, but in a crisis the WSWS should make an exception.

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**‘The Iranian regime is not anti-imperialist.’**

That is a quote from the response of the WSWS.

If I may be frank: No one in the Muslim world agrees with that. (And that is just one region of the world.)

In my visits, reporting and discussions with people of all religions living in the Muslim-majority states of the Middle East-North Africa region (and beyond, too), I am repeatedly told of their admiration for Iran’s hard line against American and Zionist imperialism. They are perfectly aware that Iran is extending moral, economic, military and political solidarity to places like Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan, and not without sacrifices from everyday Iranians.

And yet the WSWS continues: *“Rather, from the beginning its aim has been to establish greater freedom of action for the Iranian bourgeoisie within world capitalism, including by*



*seeking closer economic ties to European and Japanese imperialism."*

I think we can all rather easily list key proofs that Iran does not have this aim or seek these goals...certainly, the reality of the blockade campaign would suggest that if they are indeed doing that, then they have been terribly ineffective! I think such a claim is as easily ignored as the claim that Iran is "not anti-imperialist"; I also think that such claims are accepted only by devoted Trotskyists who subsequently get ignored for being so ideologically pure that they are out out touch with the masses.

To use an American phrase: such claims "won't play in Peoria". Or Palestine, or anywhere else.

Frankly, I found that entire section to be so rife with faulty claims, poor analysis, allegations of conspiracies, untrue accusations of racism and other errors that it would be mundane for readers to read a point-by-point rebuttal. However, may I add that if the WSWS wants to have any chance of winning over Iranian readers, I rather emphatically suggest that they not accuse Iran of starting the Western-foisted, -supported, (chemically) -armed and altogether horrific Iran-Iraq War. I think that is a rather enormous tactical error (and a factual/analytical error as well).

As far as my "*intimidating the working class*" - I had no idea I had such power! I imagine working class people worldwide quite disagree that I have that ability. Nor did I "*slander the Iranian working class*" - firstly because slander is spoken while libel is written - but I would like to publicly reject the assertion of such a libel. Regardless of my feelings, every journalist must ultimately rely on his work to prove or disprove an assertion that he or she is an opponent of the People.

But supporting the democratic will when it takes a nationalist

turn - i.e. Iran looking out for Iran - is not Trotskyism. This is one reason why I am not an apologist for Trotskyism. Nor will I apologise for openly defending the Iranian Islamic Revolution and trying to explain it to non-Iranians in my journalism: Iran has real, not theoretical, work to be done, and I hope my small contributions push that work forward a bit.

May I conclude with a return to Shariati: He was primarily a philosopher. That can make him occasionally a bit difficult to pin down, but it certainly freed him from the burden we journalists all share (and which we share with politicians): the need to suggest and defend policies *which must be made right now*.

Making policies *right now* - while under blockade, sanctions and Cold War - is the challenge faced by all Iranians. Iran's economic decisions have clearly been primarily based on Islamic morals and obviously-socialist ideology, but they may not meet the strict ideals of what non-Iranians think is possible (often quite mistakenly) or should have been done.

What admirable leftists like those at the World Socialist Web Site can do is to support Iranian society during those rare times of crisis when seemingly all other English-language media is, unexaggeratedly, fomenting a counter-revolution.

Now that the protests have stopped - and their message obviously made - all of us will be reporting on Iran's democratic response to the economic issues.

Again, I sincerely thank the WSWS, and also their reporter Keith Jones, for work that I have often found insightful and inspirational. I thank the anti-imperialist website [The Saker](#) and the resolutely leftist [The Greanville Post](#) for hosting my editorials.

## About the author

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