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Iran after Sham Parliamentary Elections of February 2004

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The 7th parliamentary elections held in February 2004 were a total sham.

Weeks before the elections, the ruling reactionaries, led by the regime's Supreme Leader (Veli-e-Faqih), embarked on the wholesale disqualification of thousands of legitimate candidates. They threatened the opposition, protesting MPs and those staging a sit-in in the parliament. They closed newspapers and blocked internet sites, making very clear their determination to purge the parliament of dissenters and "trouble makers", thereby establishing a homogeneous parliament aligned with the Supreme Leader and paving the way for returning Iran to the era before the presidential election of June 1997. The following points should be noted in evaluating the 7th parliamentary elections.

Elections of February 27 – anti-democratic and fraudulent

Although during the days prior to the elections, and even in recent days, the regime-controlled media launched an extraordinary propaganda campaign to create the appearance of "popular" and "enthusiastic" elections, as the scale of fraud in the elections has come to light and as a vast majority of people have boycotted the elections, it is now evident that these elections to the Islamic parliament were one of the most poorly supported of the regime's shows in its 25-year history. The statistical analysis of recent elections shows that voter participation in this one was even lower than that at last year's City Council elections, and that only the elections to the Council of Experts in 1998 had a lower turnout. According to the latest figures released by the Interior Ministry, the number of voters in many large cities was between 20 to 25% of those eligible to vote, even without taking account of the possibility of

hundreds of thousands of blank and voided ballot papers cast in the polls. For instance, people's participation in the capital, Tehran, was 85% less than the last (the 6th) parliamentary elections. Furthermore, the candidates winning the highest and 2nd highest number of votes in Tehran entered the 7th parliament having won only 10% of the possible votes.

Another point is that the election of February 27th was condemned by the widest spectrum of political and social forces in the country, as well as by progressive forces worldwide, as being an anti-democratic and anti-popular show in which a small group of reactionaries and dark-minded tyrants, make decisions for the people, depriving hundreds of thousands of people of their right to participate in the elections and allow the participation of only those candidates who sing the regime's praise or those who are the principal elements in the regime.

Such an election is devoid of legitimacy or legality in any normal and democratic framework.

The deceptively named "Cultivators" or the Joint Khamene'i-Rafsanjani list, is a cover for the plot hatched by the regime's leaders

Another important point in the February elections was the presence of the Cultivators Group as a joint list of candidates of the right, standing for the 7th parliament. Although the regime has spent a great deal of effort to keep secret the connection of this group with the ruling regime, it is clear enough that the 'Cultivators' group is the creation of Rafsanjani and other leaders of the regime, just as the 'Construction Agents' was. Our people remember well that in the run-up to the elections to the 5th parliament, Rafsanjani proposed to the Combatant Clergy that they should put forward a joint list of candidates for the parliamentary elections and it was only after their refusal that he set up the 'Construction Agents' group. The experience of the past six years has been a great lesson for the ruling reaction. They have found out that other forces can take advantage of their disunity. The setting up of the 'Cultivators Group' is the repetition of an experience that was first realized in the fourth parliament, broke down in the fifth parliament and was re-born in the seventh parliament. The similarity between some of the slogans and proposals of the 'Cultivators' in respect of

turning Iran into an 'Islamic Japan' and the normalization of relations with USA and the West is a combination of the same policies that Rafsanjani implemented in Iran during his two terms in office and left our country in the disastrous state in which it found itself.

Reactionary coup and elections

The events of the days leading to the elections were indicative of regime's immense readiness for violent and suppressive measures, even to the extent of a military coup, to forcefully implement pre-planned designs. The ever-increasing preparedness of the 'law'-enforcement and oppressive forces, active presence of para-military corps under the control of Veli-e-Faqih, in polling stations, the closure of Sharq and Yaas-e-now newspapers shortly before the elections, blocking Rooydad and Emrooz internet sites in order to silence the voices of opposition, along with the intense activities of club-weilding and armed mobs, were all indications of extensive pre-arranged plots by the Valayat apparatus to stage a parliamentary coup and achieve a homogenous 7th parliament.

During all these events, and in dealing with the conflicts between the parliament and the Guardian Council (of the constitution), the Supreme Leader (Valiy-e-Faqih) pretended to be impartial to both sides and in a manner more clear than ever before, threatened the opposition. He accused the state reformists for siding with "imperialism".

By these actions, it has become practically obvious that the regime's Supreme Leader and the Velayat regime, represent a symbol of medieval, absolute despotism in our country. It remains the major obstacle against the peoples' aspirations and against any effort for reform, however insignificant, in our nation.

The misleading "Revival" group, or a common list from Khamenei-Rafsanjani; a cover full of guile and deceit

One of the other important points in February elections was the presence of "Revival" group endorsing a common list of candidates of the right wing in the elections. Even though there was an attempt to hide the connection of this group with the regime leaders, it was clear enough that this group, like "Constructive Servers" was another product of Rafsanjani and other regime leaders.

Our people remember well that prior to the 5th parliament elections, Rafsanjani proposed a common list for the elections to "militant clergies", and it was after the rejection of his proposal that he organized "Constructive Servers". The experience of the events in the past six years has been a great lesson for the reactionaries; they realized that other forces in their favor could utilize the split between them.

Hence came the formation of the "Revival" group as a recurrence of the experience that was developed back in the 4th parliamentary elections, collapsed in the 5th

elections, again to gain currency in the 7th elections. Familiar slogans and theories of "Constructive Servers" regarding converting Iran to "Islamic Japan" and normalizing the relations with the US and west, are in line with the same policies that "Constructive Leader" of the regime (i.e. Rafsanjani) implemented during 2 parliamentary terms in Iran and put our country in the current catastrophic conditions.

Iran after the elections

The 7th parliamentary elections and the purge of the parliament from reformists still in government, is just the beginning of a process that will naturally reach its final chapter with the end of Khatami's term of presidency. The experience of the past six years offers an invaluable lesson for all forces who strive for freedom and reform in the country. Collusion and compromise with the reactionaries and prioritizing the regime's interests as opposed to that of the popular movement frustrated the historic opportunity that had arisen to do away with despotism and resulted in the reactionaries proceeding to revert the conditions back to pre-1997 election times with relative ease and at minimal cost. What is clear, however, is that the popular struggle for reform and rejection of the regime of supreme religious leader will not be extinguished. Movements, experience many ups and downs before achieving final victory, and the experience of the recent events in Iran is no different. What is important is to learn lessons from the events of the recent years, and particularly understanding the tyrannical structure of the Velayate-Faqih regime, i.e. the absolute, medieval despotism of one individual, cannot be reformed; only the complete eradication of this regime will pave the path for the future.

The popular movement of our people has great potentials. Nonetheless, the weakness of this movement is the disunity of reformist and freedom-loving political forces and the absence of an appropriate level of partnership in the struggle against the united front of reaction. Overcoming this weakness, along with fortifying efforts for organizing a broad social struggle against the regime's policies requires the joint effort of all the progressive forces in our country.

The experience of the past six years showed that by dividing and distracting the opposition, reaction can patiently and step by step challenge the movement and regain its lost positions. What is clear is that with the ruling reactionaries dominating the 7th parliament, the "legal ways" for reform have been severely curtailed and restricted now. The struggle has to be taken into the society. The social forces must be mobilized and a united front against despotism and dictatorship must be opened to prepare for the new phase of struggle to reject the Velayat-e-Faqih regime.