

Iran's Peculiar Election

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST SULTANISM

Akbar Ganji

Akbar Ganji, a leading Iranian dissident, is described by Azar Nafisi on the preceding pages. The text below consists of extensive excerpts from Ganji's "Republican Manifesto II," which was written prior to Iran's 2005 presidential election. A complete English translation of this work, which is more than twice as long as these excerpts, may be found at <http://freeganji.blogspot.com>. That translation has been amended in various places in the text below.

Political activism and the critique of the ruling system are important: Intellectuals have a moral obligation to reduce the pain and suffering of human beings ([Karl] Popper, [Richard] Rorty). Dictatorships and tyrannical systems impose pain and suffering on their people in various ways. The endeavor to rid people of the evil of authoritarian systems and to replace them with free and democratic ones is valuable in its own right. In today's world, dictatorship has become so infamous and the appeal of democracy so universal that even tyrants try to present their systems as a kind of democracy (indigenous democracy, religious democracy, Asian democracy, African democracy, people's democracy).

Intellectuals and the elite should not excuse themselves from their moral duty. The intellectual elite have been injecting disappointment and hopelessness, passivity and indifference into Iranian society during recent years, whereas one must create hope and inject life and passion and exuberance into the society. Doing this demands self-sacrifice, boldness, and intrepidity. History has shown that giant steps have been taken only by men who were brave, idealistic, and self-sacrificing. . . .

Yes, it is true that all problems and dilemmas are not going to be resolved by politics alone or solely through democracy. Neither is the ruling political system the only, or even the biggest, problem of society, so that by changing it all problems would be resolved. Cultural problems have cultural solutions. Economic problems have economic solutions. Social problems need social solutions. It is also clear that

neither our people nor our intellectuals are democrats [in the true sense of the word]. But from none of these correct premises can one deduce the false conclusion that political activity is useless, that fighting tyranny is a waste of time, or that the endeavor to establish a democratic system is futile. The same goes for the conclusion that, even if a democratic system were to be established, it could not achieve much since not all our problems are of a political nature, cultural tradition is the root cause of all our problems, and as a result one must instead change and correct the corrupt and incorrect aspects of our culture.

When we become disappointed and hopeless, we try to find excuses for our passivity. This goes so far that even previous struggles for freedom are regarded as those of mere dreamers. Anyone who accepts the ruling system in its totality and participates in the Iranian presidential elections has supposedly stepped out of this world of dreams, while those who pursue radical goals through nonviolent methods are just walking on clouds. So anyone who boycotts the presidential elections is supposedly a dreamer.

Some are of the opinion that people are through with politics and no longer pay any attention to the political battles between those in power and the opposition inside and outside Iran. People want to live, have fun, be comfortable. They want to be left alone. They do not want to be bothered. It is not important for them which system or which individuals are in power.

Let us suppose that this description of the social situation in Iran is accurate. What conclusion are we to deduce from it? Is the duty of the intellectual, the dissident, and the political activist to be a follower of the people on the street? Would such an approach not turn them into mere populists (those who follow the observations, beliefs, assumptions, suspicions, illusions, and imaginings of the masses)? What argument has been put forward that says all the thoughts and actions of the populace are correct? Are not all men full of faults? Then why are we to suppose that the masses are completely innocent and infallible? Their modes of behavior must be challenged and criticized in the same way that political systems are criticized. Not all problems come from the political system. One must criticize and judge the people (an intellectual is also one of the people). We must not look for what people like or dislike, but must defend freedom, democracy, and justice for the sake of the people. In this sense, one must be an idealist instead of a populist. If populism is condemned, as indeed it is, then the flag of political activism cannot be left in the hands of the masses who, in times of crisis, have no goal other than to destroy or take vengeance, and who think only of punishing former rulers instead of establishing and consolidating a democratic system.

If there is some rightful claim, it must be communicated to the people. If the struggle against authoritarianism in order to establish an open

society and a democratic system is just, then even if all the people of a country happen to be in favor of a tyrannical system or indifferent to its existence, a freedom-loving democrat still has the right (nay, the duty) to stand against such a system, alone and by himself. The struggle for freedom is always initiated by a few people. Others will eventually join them. A political activist cannot give up with the excuse that the people are not politically motivated or do not support the fight for justice and freedom. The dissidents in the second half of the twentieth century constituted a small minority, in all nondemocratic societies. But that small minority by its steadfastness and bravery in the face of suffering, opened up the difficult road to democracy.

On the other hand, even if the demands of the people are the ones proclaimed here, who says that the people have chosen the right way to attain them or that they can ever achieve their goals within the framework of the current system? In more technical language, who says that the best understanding of the collective actions of human beings is the one that they themselves have of their actions, and not that of the observer? Is not the meaning of pragmatic rationalism the proportionality between methods and means on one side, and goals and objectives on the other?

We must show the people that by adopting some kinds of methods and means they will not be able to achieve their goals. We must bring the people onto the scene. We must show them that running away from political struggle is not the remedy for their despair. The public arena is very important. Politics is a noble endeavor and all the people should be engaged in it, when it is understood to mean the creation and distribution of political power, the critique of the ruling power, collaboration in the public arena, and judging the ruling system and those in charge. A political activist and intellectual knows that he should not make a rash analysis of the public arena and should not expect tyranny to be overcome easily and in a short span of time. Democracy is a process that needs people who not only are democratic-minded themselves but can help others become democratic-minded as well.

Yes, democratic people build democracies. But history shows that democratic systems were not the product of societies whose members were all democrats. "Tolerating the other" and "trust" are necessary conditions for building a democratic system. But only out of necessity and after many wars and conflicts throughout history did human beings learn to tolerate each other, to acknowledge cultural differences and be respectful toward them, and not to deny the humanity of others because of their belief systems. So we should not believe that democracy is impossible until all the people become democratic-minded. . . .

A democratic political culture is the necessary condition for the establishment and consolidation of a democratic system. The sum of fundamental values and beliefs that give the political process its shape

and structure is known as the political culture. The political culture establishes fundamental principles for doing politics. It determines the common beliefs and visions that shape the main foundations of a country's political life. It is impossible for the political culture of all the people to be democratic, but the culture of the political elite, who push the process of democratization forward, must definitely be democratic. A political culture based on mutual trust, tolerance of diversity and difference, and readiness to compromise is a precondition for a stable democracy. According to learned opinions, a set of accidental historical and economic changes created such a culture in the West, and democracy appeared upon the basis of this culture in Western countries.

Our intellectual elite agree on democracy and freedom now more than at any other time in our history. Everybody wants a democratic system. But the point of greater importance is that all of them should agree to resolve political conflicts through democratic methods and principles. They should give greater significance to the democratic process of resolving conflicts than to the outcome of that process. Seymour Martin Lipset says: "In the democratic political culture, processes and institutions give legitimacy to their outcomes, even if the outcomes are unfavorable." It is clear, of course, that the process of getting rid of a tyrannical system does not need to have a democratic character or political culture. But establishing, consolidating, and stabilizing a real democracy needs a consensus of the political elite on democracy. Most scholars concur that agreement among the elite on democratic institutions and constitutional rules is the main condition for a stable democracy. The political elite must accept freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, and freedom of the press.

The process of creating a democratic system needs a program with its main steps laid out clearly. In our opinion, given the current state of affairs, the boycott of the presidential elections by the political elite and the people is the first necessary step in any program that will finally lead us to a democratic system.

Tyranny and Legitimacy

Democracy is a sign of the existence of a strong civil society that is based on various intermediary groups, from women's associations and labor unions to cooperatives and trade councils. Such groups serve as probably the most effective tools for communicating social demands to decision makers. They can also play an important role in explaining the meaning of democracy to their members. From the start, the theory of liberal democracy considered voluntary associations as essential complements to official representative political institutions such as political parties, legislatures, and elected executives. The freedom of citizens to organize in civil society provides a framework that allows them to ex-

press their diverse interests and opinions, and makes a multiparty democracy possible. A society of active, independent, and organized citizens is a guarantee that the government will not exceed its boundaries and will not infringe upon the powers and freedoms that individuals should be able to enjoy without any governmental intervention.

This is what Iran's current establishment does not allow and what cannot be attained through legal means, but only if truly independent associations are formed through civil disobedience. That, in turn, is inconsistent with the reformists motto of legalism [that is, remaining within the legal boundaries of the current system].

The path that the reformists have taken does not lead to a democratic system. A transition from sultanism to democracy requires the "delegitimization" of the ruling system and "noncooperation" with the personal ruler. But the reformists build domestic and international legitimacy for the tyrannical ruler by cooperating with him. The tyrannical system can be weakened through "continuous noncooperation," and in this way the conditions for a transition to democracy can be created. Democratic forces and groups must consciously and deliberately spread and popularize within society the idea of noncooperation. The entire elite must refrain from cooperating with the tyrannical system. There are thousands of different forms of noncooperation that could be effectively used in practice. "Human resources" are one of the important sources of political power. The number of individuals and groups that obey and cooperate with tyrannical rulers is crucial for stabilizing the tyrannical system. If noncooperation is engaged in by a vast proportion of the people, the tyrannical system will be faced with fundamental difficulties. Taking back "support" is the most important step in eliminating dictatorships.

In addition, the regime's moral and political legitimacy must be questioned. Any system should receive obedience and cooperation only to the extent that it is legitimate (has a right to rule). The more legitimate a system is, the more reliable is the obedience (submitting to its laws and decrees) and cooperation that it enjoys. The rulers' right to rule and the citizens' duty to obey are central to the legitimacy of political systems, so it is essential to take action to delegitimize the tyrannical ruler. The regime's level of legitimacy affects its official goals and principles, its way of policy making, and even its political structure. Lack of legitimacy forces tyrannical regimes to use relatively costly methods of commanding the government and the society. Undemocratic regimes use two methods to gain legitimacy: ideology and elections. . . .

The supremacy of democracy in our age has made the people's choice, the public will, or other democratic foundations the only source of legitimacy for governments. Semicompetitive elections are the most well-known method that a dictatorship can use to claim electoral or democratic legitimacy. Democratically disguised dictatorships use

semidemocratic elections to choose government officials with very limited powers, all of whom are approved by the regime. Rigged semidemocratic elections provide the window dressing of democratic legitimacy for tyrannical systems. Dictatorships that put on a democratic mask abuse public resources and state power to minimize the competition in elections. In fact, elections in these regimes are played with loaded dice. Lack of freedom, fairness, and impartiality in their conduct and execution is the main characteristic of these elections. . . .

Holding free elections is a necessary condition (but not a sufficient one) for the legitimacy of democratic systems. Democratic systems are legitimate because they accept the judgment of the people in the public arena, allow freedom of speech and assembly, respect human rights, officially recognize the rights of minorities and the separation of the public and private spheres, hold free and fair elections, have extensive civil societies, exhibit tolerance, do not punish individuals for their dissenting views and opinions, and so on. In these societies, given the power and stability of democratic institutions and the certainty that citizenship rights will always be recognized, it is possible for the majority of people to feel no need to participate in elections. Totalitarian systems, by contrast, are illegitimate because they violate human rights, the ruling tyrant acts like a god, there is no responsible government, and opponents are imprisoned and tortured. These kinds of systems and their tyrannical rulers need the image of receiving favorable votes from the majority of their people in order to legitimize their regimes. In such societies, therefore, it is quite common to witness claims of electoral participation by more than 90 percent of the population, all voting in favor of the ruling system. As a result, in such societies not participating in elections definitely constitutes an act of opposition to the ruling system. . . .

Distinguishing Among Dictatorships

Undemocratic regimes are of various kinds. In one sense, these regimes may be categorized as military, one-party, and personal dictatorships. In a military dictatorship, the armed forces rule. In a one-party dictatorship, a dominant (communist, fascist, nationalist) party rules. In a personal autocracy, the ruler is so arbitrary that he becomes a tyrant. Max Weber called this sultanism. Sultanism is a system in which the ruler enjoys maximum authority and discretionary powers. Juan Linz has identified four types of political systems based on personal rulership: modern sultanism, oligarchic democracy, military paternalism [*caudillismo*], and supremacy of local influentials [*caciquismo*] (rule of local political chiefs). He considers sultanism to be the most centralized and the most arbitrary form of personal rulership. Modern sultanism is based on modern organizations and officially or publicly

relies on bureaucratic norms. In the opinion of some thinkers, the lack of efficient political institutions results in the supremacy of personal power, which could only be checked by another power and not by already existing institutions. They believe that personal autocracy is a system of personal networks based on the relationships of the ruler with his collaborators, followers, supporters, and rivals. In personal autocracy, government positions and authorities are personal “properties” of the leader-for-life. In other words, government is the leader’s private domain.

Max Weber uses the term sultanism for a state in which absolute rule or supremacy reaches its maximum. Usually there are “structural” characteristics that result in the consolidation of the leader’s personal position in the regime—for example, the granting of vast legal prerogatives to the leader. Similarly, legal absolutism strengthens the leader’s position against legal procedures that could lead to his dismissal. (In Iran, the supreme leader picks the members of the Council of Guardians, who choose the members of the Assembly of Experts—that is, the supreme leader indirectly picks those who are supposed to supervise and impeach him.) Moreover, the autocrat is the commander-in-chief of the armed and security forces. So he does not feel threatened by the military. The ruling system in Iran is not totalitarian, but sultanistic.

In light of these considerations and the distinctions among different kinds of regimes, we must answer this question: How have specific kinds of regimes yielded to the democratization process?

Dankwart Rustow divides the transition to democracy into three phases:

- a. Long-term struggles between opposing political forces that are equal in power;
- b. Negotiations between the leaders of political forces in order to reach a compromise agreement that leads to the institutionalization of democratic procedures; and
- c. Adaptation to democratic procedures that gradually results in an increased degree and spread of consensus in support of these procedures.

The compromise agreement redefines the rules of the political game but also depends upon mutual commitments and guarantees to protect the vital interests of the parties involved. In such an agreement, military leaders usually give guarantees for citizens’ rights to be reestablished and free elections to be held. In return, the opposition leaders agree not to punish rulers who have committed extreme acts of repression (the principle of “forgive but do not forget”) and to advance the democratization process without violence and chaos. In fact, military and one-party dictatorships come to the negotiating table under huge social pressure. A negotiated transition is the result of a situation in which the two sides are equal in terms of political power. Negotiated transitions in authori-

tarian regimes are the product, first, of major differences between extremists (conservatives) and moderates (reformists) inside the regime, and then of a coalition of regime reformists and democrats outside the government to remove the regime's extremists.

The transition process is very different, however, in personal autocracies. According to Samuel Huntington, leaders in personal autocracies are less likely to relinquish their powers voluntarily than military or single-party leaders. Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter think that the only way to change sultanistic dictatorships, such as the Somoza regime in Nicaragua, into democracies is an armed insurrection. . . . In Richard Snyder's opinion, if the army lacks the necessary autonomy to remove the personal ruler (military or nonmilitary), then the only way to topple him is the formation of a revolutionary movement. Personal rulers not only do not wish to give up power, but also take lifetime control of it and use it arbitrarily. The problem of transition to democracy in this situation differs a great deal from such a transition in authoritarian military or one-party regimes. Here, cooperation with the personal ruler and legitimization of his rule do not help the democratization process at all. On the contrary, the democratization process is facilitated by noncooperation and delegitimization. Thus supporters of freedom must make it clear which kind of regime they are dealing with in Iran, and what type of process the transition from that kind of regime to democracy requires. . . .

Distinguishing Among Transitions

Observations of the countries that passed through the third wave of democratization point to three types of transitions and three kinds of dictatorships. Dictatorships come in three kinds: military, one-party, and personal dictatorships. Three types of transitions from dictatorship to democracy have occurred:

a. *Abdicated Transitions*: A weak dictatorship is forced to give up power to others.

b. *Dictated Transitions*: In this transition, the dictatorship is in a position of power, but widespread popular demonstrations make the regime think of consciously pursuing a dictated [top-down] democratization process. . . . Brazil, Taiwan, and Thailand are instances of this kind of transition.

c. *Pacted Transitions*: This kind of transition has two important characteristics. First, the ruling regime is divided into two sides, extremists (conservatives) and moderates (reformists). Second, the democratic opposition outside the regime creates a balance of power between itself and the regime through widespread popular demonstrations, strikes, and noncooperation. If the struggle persists or becomes costly and fruitless, the elites [on both sides] will be more interested in reaching an

agreement on their most serious disputes. Eventually, through roundtable negotiations between the democrats outside the regime and the moderates within the regime, a pacted transition takes place. The most important instance of this type of transition was Poland's transition to democracy in 1989.

In the negotiation process, the most powerful and experienced leaders of the most important groups first must cooperate in secret (or in public) to quickly achieve a mutual agreement that is acceptable to both sides. Then each side needs to convince its supporters to agree to the practical consequences of this agreement. In the end, they must practice mutual self-restraint to ensure that this agreement and this kind of political behavior becomes part of elite political culture. The establishment of the democratic system is achieved in return for immunity from vengeful and retaliatory actions.

Thus not all transitions are pacted (roundtable-negotiation) transitions. Second, a pacted transition does not mean a pact between the two sides of the ruling regime, but one between the moderate side of the regime and its democratic opposition. Third, the agreed-upon free and fair elections are held, making it possible for the ruling regime to be replaced by its democratic opposition, and not as a mere show. Fourth, the situation in a personal dictatorship is completely different from that of a military or one-party dictatorship.

The governmental reformists in Iran think that the only method of transition to democracy is to penetrate into the government, turn it into a dual government, create a balance of power between the two sides, and win an agreement on the transition to democracy. Even if this were true, the society must have a strong democratic opposition movement in order to force the regime to compromise and negotiate through demonstrations, strikes, election boycotts, and the like (pressure from below and bargaining from above, to use Saeed Hajjarian's metaphors). So even for reformists who want to play the role of regime moderates by taking part in elections and, if the conservatives allow, creating a dual government, it would be advantageous to let others establish a strong movement for demanding democracy through noncooperation, boycott, and delegitimization in order to make negotiation and compromise possible. Without pressure from below, there will be no bargaining from above.

We must note, however, that the regime in Iran is neither a military dictatorship nor a party dictatorship (where a single party is ruling). The ruling regime in Iran is a personal dictatorship. The process of transition in such a regime is different. This type of transition is often named by sociologists the "antipersonalist transition type." This transition usually requires the toppling of the personal ruler (Marcos in the Philippines, Ceaușescu in Romania, Stroessner in Paraguay, Saddam in Iraq) or his death (Franco in Spain). For example, a personal dictator

rules in Egypt. The democratic opposition asks for Mubarak's removal. A free and fair election would be one contested against Mubarak, seeking to bring him down, not to participate in power under him. It seems Mubarak has retreated and agreed to multicandidate elections. But in Iran, the supreme leader will not run even in a single-candidate election, let alone against rival candidates. It is clear that he does not have the people's votes. Some personal rulers hold single-candidate elections and make claims to have the support of 90 percent of the electorate, but here the supreme leader is not even ready to accept the risk of drawing his legitimacy through people's votes.

Revolution versus Reform

Some believe that boycotting elections, noncooperation, delegitimization, and the holding of a referendum are revolutionary and destructive actions and are thus irreconcilable with reformism. It should be noted that one can be a revolutionary in one respect and a reformist in another. What is important is to separate these two aspects from each other.

Human beings have goals, and to reach those goals they choose certain methods and instruments. Let us suppose that the goal is to change the tyrannical political structure and to replace it with a democratic one that would recognize freedom and human rights. To reach this morally laudable goal one can use two different methods: reformist or revolutionary. Someone is called reformist in method if he uses peaceful methods and instruments to reach his goals and objectives and pursues social reforms that are gradual, temporary, experimental, and technical. Someone is called revolutionary in method if he uses violent and aggressive methods and instruments to reach his goals and looks for explosive and sudden changes. Using bloody methods to reach one's goals is morally unacceptable and should be condemned.

All that has been said until now about revolutions and their negative consequences is true for classical revolutions that seek holistic or utopian changes through violent methods. The classical revolution was a completely new story, new in its entirety, even in its language. The goal of such a revolution was to change all political, economic, cultural, social, and military structures through political means. In other words, all problems were reduced to political ones, and the foundations of the society had to be transformed by political means in order for all the problems to be resolved at once.

But in the late 1980s, peaceful revolutions took place in the Eastern bloc countries. The ice of totalitarian regimes was melted by demonstrations of candle-holding men and women, and the age of freedom dawned. Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution became the symbol of modern revolutions without bloodshed. Then came the nonviolent revo-

lution of the people of Belgrade against Slobodan Milošević, and later the Rose Revolution in Tbilisi against Eduard Shevardnadze. Subsequently, we witnessed the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and the Yellow or Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan. Two major differences set these revolutions apart from the classical ones. One is that there was no trace of violence, bloodshed, or vengeance in them. The other is that the aims of these new revolutions were getting rid of tyranny and gaining freedom, not a holistic change based on a totalitarian ideology, which is an impossible and futile endeavor with a very high cost. Peaceful revolutions, aiming at freedom and the rule of the people, are both possible and desirable, and the critiques directed against classical revolutions do not apply to them. For instance, Karl Popper, who was against classical holistic revolutions, supported and defended the peaceful revolutions in the Eastern bloc.

It might be argued that revolutions involve two sides: the ruling regime and the people who are opposed to it. Modern nonviolent revolutions took place not so much because the people adopted nonviolent methods, as because the ruling regimes showed restraint and did not use force to crush the people. But in Iran, the leaders of the system have the will, power, and intention of using instruments of repression, and thus any widespread peaceful demonstration by the people will be brought to a bloody end by the regime.

This claim is based on two important but unsupported premises. According to the first premise, the ruling regime has the power to inflict widespread repression, and the new international and internal conditions allow it to do so. According to the second premise, the ruling system in Iran is worse than those of the former Eastern bloc, Yugoslavia, and Georgia, and the rulers of this system are more tyrannical and repressive than the rulers of the Eastern bloc countries and Milošević. If the ruling system is so unreformable that it cannot tolerate even peaceful demonstrations by its opponents and crushes them by bloodshed, and thus its opponents will not be able to express their opinions and gradually bring everyone over to their side, then the case is clear even to a liberal person like Karl Popper:

I am not in all cases and under all circumstances against a violent revolution. I believe with some medieval and Renaissance Christian thinkers who taught the admissibility of tyrannicide that there may indeed, under a tyranny, be no other possibility, and that a violent revolution may be justified. But I also believe that any such revolution should have as its *only* aim the establishment of a democracy. . . . In other words, the use of violence is justified only under a tyranny which makes reforms without violence impossible, and it should have only one aim, that is, to bring about a state of affairs which makes reforms without violence possible. [*The Open Society and its Enemies*, 5th ed., rev., vol.2, p.151.]

Based on what has been said, democrats advocate nonviolent means (boycotting of elections, holding referendums) for the establishment of a full-fledged republic and do not believe in the use of violence for reaching their aims. But since authoritarian rulers are not willing to hold a referendum, civil disobedience, which is a nonviolent method, is proposed. After victory, the principle of “forgive but do not forget” must be adopted by truth commissions. That is because democracy will not be established and consolidated by seeking vengeance. The people of Iran know that better now than they did in 1979. The revolution of 1979 was against modernity, but the current movement is modern and democratic. The fight for freedom and democracy is justified and desirable, but sacrificing human life at the feet of utopian ideologies and authoritarian systems, which has no other outcome but fear and violence, is wrong and unjustified. Every single human being made of flesh and blood is an end in himself, and the endeavor and struggle to prepare a free and democratic state of affairs, where individuals can reach their ideals by exercising their free choice, is allowed on moral grounds; indeed it is a moral obligation.

Theories, models, and ideologies are devised or invented to solve theoretical problems and resolve practical difficulties. If a theory or ideology claims to be able to solve theoretical problems or practical difficulties but cannot accomplish this, there are two options: One is to change the world, society, and human beings until they fit that theory and ideology, and the other is to discard that theory or ideology. Theories and ideologies are devised to solve problems. They exist in order to serve man, not the other way around: that is, for men to be their servants and to be obliged to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the ideology.

Popper’s methodology, which is adopted in the present essay, is based on the “revolutionary use of trial and the elimination of error through criticism. Thus we can get rid of a badly fitting theory before the adoption of the theory makes us unfit to survive. *By criticizing our theories we can let our theories die in our stead.* This is of course immensely important.” [*The Myth of the Framework*, p. 7. (Emphasis in original.)]

The revolutionary rejection of theories, doctrines, and schools of thought that do not succeed in practice in solving men’s problems and resolving their practical difficulties, instead of the violent elimination of humans, is rationality itself. The growth of rationality hangs on the collapse of the most admirable and beautiful theories and doctrines:

In this way we arrive at a fundamental new possibility: *our trials, our tentative hypotheses, may be critically eliminated by rational discussion, without eliminating ourselves.* This indeed is the purpose of rational critical discussion. . . . If the method of rational critical discussion should establish itself, then this should make the use of violence obsolete. *For critical reason is the only alternative to violence so far discovered.* It is the

obvious duty of all intellectuals to work for this revolution—for the replacement of the eliminative function of violence by the eliminative function of rational criticism.” [*The Myth of the Framework*, p. 69. (Emphasis in original.)]

The truth is approached through bold and genial acts of revolutionary criticism of old theories, and bold and genial acts of creatively devising new theories: “This is not only true for empirical sciences, but it is true for all fields of knowledge.” In Popper’s view, the most advanced form of rationality is to be prepared to critically discuss your beliefs, to correct them in the light of critical discussion with others, and to eliminate in revolutionary fashion those beliefs that are not able to solve the problems.

Being revolutionary in this sense has different consequences in the field of politics that must be noted. At this level, we face two problems, one theoretical and the other practical:

- *The theoretical problem*: Is the regime of the Islamic Republic reformable or nonreformable (if the aim of reform is for the established political structure to evolve into a democratic one)? A nonreformable system has to be set aside.

- *The practical problem*: What are the methods of transition from the current system to a democratic one (the tactics and strategies that would lead us to that goal)?

The theories and models that have been proposed by reformists up to now in order to solve the problem of tyranny and transition to a democratic political structure have not been able to solve that problem, and so it is necessary to reconsider them and devise new models. The topics of the boycott of elections, noncooperation, civil disobedience, and delegitimization have been presented in this framework. . . .

Yes, violence is the red line of the republican democrats. They will never resort to violence. The limit of noncooperation is civil disobedience, not violence. Civil disobedience is the conscious and deliberate violation of cruel and unjust laws. One consciously accepts the punishment (cost) for breaking the law. Disregarding unjust laws in practice and enduring punishment is a method that facilitates and strengthens the democratization process. . . .

Democratic Diffusion

Samuel P. Huntington is of the opinion that democracy has spread in three waves. In the opinion of Philippe Schmitter, the spread of democracy has been accomplished in four very compressed waves. The third (or fourth) wave began on 25 April 1974 in Portugal with a coup that succeeded practically without bloodshed. The reach of the fourth wave from a global point of view has been wider than that of previous waves. This wave has affected more countries and has been much more far-

reaching in its local influence than its predecessors. Countries engulfed by the fourth wave so far have had to deal much less with the return of tyrannical and totalitarian regimes than countries affected by previous waves.

How is the third (or fourth) wave of democracy to be explained? The most straightforward hypothesis is that the waves of expansion of democracy are formed through diffusion processes. The successful example of a country's transition to democracy establishes it as a role model for other countries. Once a region is saturated with democratic political regimes, the pressure reaches its peak and the remaining tyrannies are forced to adapt themselves to the newly established norm. The advance of supranational communication systems has brought with it high confidence that the mechanism of diffusion and spreading is effective. Countries that join this wave late are influenced more every day by countries that are ahead of them. Latecomers can adopt the methods and values of their forerunners without having to pay some of the costs of discovering them and starting everything from the beginning.

Iranian democrats must not focus all their attention solely on structural factors. The theory of diffusion presents us with a different image. Recent developments in the Central Asian republics demonstrate this. Similarly, Middle Eastern rulers have been forced, one after the other, to adopt a "controlled reform from above" in order to prevent Rose revolutions. . . .

Some think that actions such as boycotts, hunger strikes, referenda, and the like, must not be aimlessly wasted. They must be saved for a rainy day. But we should notice that we will not achieve anything if no hunger strikes are staged and matters are left at the level of mere threats. If elections are not boycotted (I mean unfair elections, of course) and we participate in elections in the hope that we could use this lever at a more opportune time, the weapon of boycotts will become useless. One who does not play soccer will not learn how to play it. Any sport is made into a skill only with practice. If the people of a country never play American football, they will never learn it.

The transition to democracy is like a game of chess where dictators are sitting on one side and democrats on the other. We must enter the game and use all the pieces in order to check and mate the opponent. Hunger strikes, election boycotts, protests, noncooperation, and the like are tactics to attain the goal, not things never to be used. . . .

The uneven path to freedom will be opened by our efforts. Freedom is not free.