

Beware of the religious leaders - no to an Islamic republic

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No democracy for workers in Khomeini's proposed State

The Ayatollah Ruahollah Khomeini has said that he regards the mass demonstrations in December and January as a referendum in his favour and as a mandate to name the members of a provisional council made up of 'Moslem believers', a new premier and a provisional government. This government would prepare elections. Khomeini, in an Interview with a Beirut newspaper, has indicated that he does not accept the idea of a one party system (Economist 13.1.1979). Further he proclaims that "an Islamic government is not backward looking. We approve of civilisation but not that which goes against the interests and dignity of our people." Does this make Khomeini a democrat? Far from it.

The Shia hierarchy, of whom he is the spokesman, have as their ideal a Moslem theocracy. Over the last fifty years the Mullahs have lost control over education and the law which have been secularised. They have lost the 'waqf' lands which financed the mosques, and they have lost all influence over government policy-most notably the power to enforce Islamic precepts with regard to women and family law. Empty of progressive content as most of the Shah's 'reforms' were, the restoration of the hierarchy's power in all these areas would clearly be a reactionary act. The complete separation of Mosque and State is a measure in the direct interest of workers, poor peasants, students and intellectuals, women and the national and religious minorities.

At the level of state power Khomeini wants to build in a veto, or the power to nominate candidates, for the Shia clergy at all levels. In an interview with Le Monde (10.1.1979) he makes this clear, "We will charge a committee to proceed with consultations to form an Assembly. The people have already pronounced their will to have an Islamic government. But if a referendum is necessary on the legal basis for it, we will not refuse this. The Committee would consist of believers. It could include ulemas either with full or with observer status. We will propose a candidate for the presidency of the Republic. He would have to be elected by the people, once elected we would support him. The lava of an Islamic government would be the laws of Islam." Asked what the attitude of such a government would be to non-believers, Khomeini replied, "We would try to show the way to salvation to these people. If they do not want this they will be free in their daily life providing they do not forment plots harmful to the people and the country."

Khomeini's closest political ally in secular politics is the politician Mehdi Bazargan, head of the Iran Liberation Movement which stands outside the National Front and is opposed to the inclusion of social-democrats in any future government. Bazargan's party is avowedly Islamic. Thus the goals and political allies of the religious opposition are far from consistent democracy. Indeed an Islamic Republic designed according to their wishes would be a plebiscite Bonapartism, albeit with a populist and anti-imperialist colouration.

The structure of the Mullah-led opposition is powerful and dangerous. Its main social base, the bazaar merchants of Teheran, dispose of an efficient organisation headed by five leaders each of which has a network of sub-leaders. These can mobilise gangs of lumpen-unemployed youth, bazaar porters and labourers. Each major leader is reported as being able to mobilize 5,000 'luti' within half an hour; This 'Militia' can be a serious threat to the working class.

The religious opposition itself is also increasingly well organised. Teheran is subdivided into nine districts each headed by a Ulema, controlling the base organisations officered by Mullahs. The nine ulemas form a council in daily touch with Khomeini. According to the Ulema Moussadeh the Shi'ite hierarchy aims to form such councils in every town. Moreover, "these will be permanent councils which will occupy themselves as much with political life as with religious, since in Islam the two are tied up together." (Nouvel Observateur 15-21.1.1979).

Despite Khomeini's declared support for the oil strikers and despite the undoubted fact that most Iranian workers have massive illusions in the Ayatollah, the forces he heads-the Bazaar and the Shi'ite clergy-are and can be only temporary military allies of the Iranian working class in the fight against the Shah and the Generals. The hostility of the religious activists to the class interests of the workers is already manifest in the Mullah-provoked attacks on demonstrators who carry red flags and in their strident anti-communism. Le Nouvel Observateur (No.740) reports the following, "The left milieu is beginning to get alarmed A few days ago, at the Behecheste Zahra cemetery near Teheran in the middle of a crowd listening attentively to the mullahs a worker stood up to speak on the problems facing the proletariat. He was shouted down with cries of 'Death to the Shah! Death to Communism.'

The task of revolutionaries, of Trotskyists, in Iran is to raise the alarm in the working class, difficult as this task will be. To warn worker militants, to win them away from the Ayatollah and the Mullahs and to resolute opposition to an obscurantist Islamic 'Republic'. The masses, including the workers, follow the Mullahs because they have illusions in the democracy and national freedom that they believe this republic could bring and because Khomeini appears to want to smash the Shah's Savak tyranny. The religious leaders and their National Front hangers on must be exposed by mobilising workers around real democratic demands centring on the call for a constituent assembly unfettered by eetos and elected by universal suffrage. To fight for this, class organisations of the proletariat free from Mullah tutelage must be formed, factory committees, workers councils, trade unions and the militia necessary to protect these. Above all a revolutionary political party is the central need, one which can spearhead these organs of struggle and workers' democracy. A party pledged to fight for democratic rights: against an Islamic Republic and for a Workers and Peasant State in Iran.

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