



Fedayeen defending Khomeini not the revolution

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From Workers Power 19 by Charlie Shell

Wars in general expose with unprecedented sharpness the weaknesses of self-proclaimed revolutionary organisations. As far as the war between Iran and Iraq is concerned, the political short-comings of the Iranian Left have been exposed with a vengeance. WORKERS POWER No 18 carried a detailed account of our understanding of the tasks facing revolutionaries during this war.

To briefly restate: In the war between Iran and Iraq we are not neutral. We favour the victory of Iran. This is not because we believe the Khomeini regime to be in any way progressive. The two regimes are both reactionary, Bonapartist dictatorships. What we defend within Iran against the Iraqi invasion are the historically specified gains of the revolution.

That is, the overthrow of US imperialism's puppet and bastion of stability in the Gulf area, the Shah of Iran and the tremendous impetus this has given anti-imperialist movement in the region; the self-organisation of the working class through its Shoras and strike committees, and the ability of the Iranian left to arm and organise itself. We recognise that victory for the Iraqis in the present conflict would mean the rolling back of these gains, the establishment of Iraq as a new policeman of the gulf for US imperialism and the re-imposition of a reliable imperialist backed regime in Iran. But in carrying through the war we place no confidence in Khomeini. We call for independent mobilisations of the left, of the workers and peasants to drive out the Iraqi invasion. We use the war to propagandise for the overthrow of Khomeini and stand for the continuation of the Kurdish war of national independence. Only in this way, we would argue, can the Iraqi invasion be rolled back and the masses prepared to overthrow the Khomeini regime.

Thus our position does not flow from the nature of the regimes involved in the war, they are both reactionary. But the Khomeini regime is forced to mobilise and arm the population against the counter-revolutionary intentions of the Iraqi invasion. Here we say to the Iranian masses we must fight alongside the Pasdaran and the Iranian army to drive out the Iraqis, but at all times you must defend your independent interests and prepare to overthrow Khomeini who is himself a wing of the counter-revolution. The Bolsheviks followed a similar course of action in relation to the attempt by the reactionary General Kornilov to overthrow the Kerensky government, despite the fact that the would-be Bonaparte Kerensky was gaoling Bolsheviks and attempting to cripple the soviets, Lenin advocated a military united front against Kornilov. This didn't mean for one moment giving support to the Kerensky government, Lenin was clear what the united front meant,

"We are changing the form of our struggle against Kerensky. Without in the least, relaxing our hostility towards him, without taking back a single word said against him, without renouncing the task of overthrowing him, we say we must take into account the present situation." (Lenin to the Central Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP)) This method stands in sharp contrast to the positions adopted by sections of the Iranian left.

Of all the organisations of the Iranian left the Fedayeen (Organisation of Iranian Fedayeen (Guerrillas) have proved the most heroic defenders of democratic rights and hard won freedoms against both the Shah and the Khomeini regime. Alongside other left forces they defended the universities against Khomeini's savage 'Islamicisation' campaign. They have stood arms in hands with the Kurds against the murderous attacks meted out to the resistance fighters. While recognising the heroism of the Fedayeen fighters we have always pointed out this organisation's political weaknesses. At the centre of this is its view of the anti-imperialist democratic struggle as a distinct stage of the revolution. This

analysis has led the Fedayeen in the course of the present war to virtually abandon its last remnants of political independence in relation to the Khomeini regime and thus turn its cadres into cannon fodder for the regime's war effort.

The Fedayeen (majority) have adopted a clear and unequivocal position in defence of the Islamic Republic. This is not a defence of the tangible gains of the Iranian revolution but a defence of the regime which throughout its existence has sought, to roll back those gains. In the November 1980 KAR (English Language bulletin of the Fedayeen) they argue: "Today to be true to revolutionary honesty, it is necessary to give an unambiguous answer to the question: In the present circumstances can defence of the country be separated from defence of the Islamic Republic? Revolutionary honesty obliges us to put this fact to the masses decisively and unambiguously for their judgement. In its telegram of 26th September to Ayatollah Khomeini our organisation states clearly that, in present circumstances, to defend the country's independence has no meaning but to defend the Islamic Republic of Iran... We tell the masses that the claim, 'defending the country against the Iraqi regime's aggression' is only meaningful if it leads to the defence of the Islamic Republic from the aggression of the Iraqi regime and the plots of US Imperialism." (Page 10. Emphasis in the original).

The Fedayeen take this support of the regime so far that they even chide the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) for sowing mistrust in it. They say of the slanders made by the IRP against the Fedayeen "when they reach the masses especially in the war zone [they] incite mistrust and suspicion towards the Islamic Republic itself." (November 1980 KAR).

The fundamental error of the Fedayeen is to develop their position on the war not from the point of view of its impact on the Iranian revolution and the masses hard won freedoms but on the basis of the nature of the regimes involved. On the one hand they characterise the Iraqi regime as the product of the degeneration of an 'anti-imperialist' revolution which is now objectively pro-imperialist and 'anti-popular'. On the other they see the Khomeini regime as generally progressive and anti-imperialist if inconsistently so. Thus describing the regime of Khomeini and the IRP the Fedayeen argue that: "Despite all its contradictions and inconsistencies its main aim was to fight against the oppressive domination of imperialism over Iran and the rest of the region." (KAR November 1980) and therefore: "Iraq's war against Iran is a war between the Iranian revolution and the Iraqi counter-revolution, between a regime that is moving in the direction of fighting against dependence on imperialism, between a regime that during an anti-imperialist revolution and in its further developments has defeated the worst enemies of the people, confronting them directly, and a regime that has distanced itself from the camp of the masses and is totally antagonistic to it." (ibid).

This position means that the Fedayeen sink all their political and class differences with Khomeini. It can only mean the cessation of class struggle for the duration of the war and a vote of confidence in Khomeini to defend the Iranian masses against imperialism.

The Fedayeen have arrived at a position at complete variance with the Marxist attitude toward war as a direct consequence of their false analysis of the nature of the Iranian revolution and the role of the working class in that revolution. Whilst the Fedayeen have made a partial break with the politics of the major Stalinist practitioners in Iran, the Tudeh, by arguing for the independent and leading role of the working class in Iran the break remains partial precisely because they view the present 'stage' of the revolution as 'democratic' or 'anti-imperialist'. During this 'stage' it is, for the Fedayeen, the anti-imperialist petit-bourgeoisie who will lead. Thus the Fedayeen argue: "They (the petit bourgeoisie) can take political power if they develop from a conservative and backward petty issue to a forward looking and revolutionary one," (Imperialism and the Class Struggle in Iran p.30).

Forward looking denotes, for the Fedayeen, a willingness to form an alliance with the working class. But while the Fedayeen view the Khomeini regime as tending towards conservatism, the way was always left open for an alliance because circumstances could push it to turn to the working class for support. Thus in the course of the present war the Khomeini regime can be characterised as one which has defeated the 'worst enemies of the revolution'.

The Fedayeen turn the Marxist position on the petit-bourgeoisie on its head. The petit-bourgeoisie can become an ally of the working class but only when it is under the leadership of the working class. Left to itself the petit-bourgeoisie is incapable of developing an independent course and without the leadership of the working class, defends the interests of the bourgeoisie. Thus the state in Iran is not petit-bourgeois as the Fedayeen characterise it, but bourgeois through and

through. Khomeini and the IRP hold political power in conjunction with the bourgeoisie through their major representative Bani Sadr. The dominant mode of production in Iran is capitalist and Khomeini defends capitalism. This is why he attacks the minorities, the left and the workers organisations.

We argue that the unfinished tasks of the bourgeois revolution i.e. freedom from imperialism/national independence, the question of the nationalities within Iran, the expansion of the Iranian productive forces etc. can only be carried through if the working class seizes power. Thus the fundamental task in Iran is to bring the working class to the head of the struggle against imperialism, to direct that struggle toward the overthrow of Khomeini and establish a workers dictatorship of the proletariat. There is not, and cannot be, any intermediate, stable 'anti-imperialist government' between now and the socialist revolution. Lenin expressed this point with his usual clarity writing in relation to Russia in September 1917: "It is impossible to stand still in history in general, and in war-time in particular. We must either advance or retreat. It is impossible in twentieth-century Russia, which has won a republic and democracy in a revolutionary way, to go forward without advancing towards socialism without taking steps towards it... Imperialist war is the eve of socialist revolution. And this, not only because the horrors of war give rise to proletarian revolt, but because state monopoly capitalism is a complete material preparation for socialism, the threshold of socialism, a rung on the ladder of history between which and the rung called socialism there are no intermediate rungs." (?The Impending Catastrophe and How to Combat It?).

Against this position of Lenin first elaborated in the famous April Theses, the Fedayeen advance Lenin's pre-March/April 1917 position of the 'Democratic Dictatorship of the Proletariat and the Peasantry.' In other words they fail to understand the significant advance made by Lenin in arguing for no confidence in the bourgeois-democratic government of Kerensky. It was in this period that Lenin solidarised with Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution in recognising that between capitalism and socialism 'there are no intermediate rungs.' Indeed Lenin recognised Stalin and Kamenev's willingness to cede power to the bourgeois government in February 1917 for what it was-a betrayal of the interests of the working class. But still the Fedayeen insist that the major question is not the seizure of power by the proletariat but the defence of democratic rights-not realising that you cannot have one without the other.

The whole development of Iranian capitalism testifies to the fact that it cannot break loose from imperialism. Under the Shah the Iranian bourgeoisie developed via its oil revenues, on the basis of complete integration into world imperialism. Iran will have no independent development until the role of the bourgeoisie is broken, and the rule of the bourgeois will only be smashed when state power is in the hands of the working class. Khomeini came to power, not on the basis of the abolition of capitalism, but on the basis of its continuation. His power base lies without the bourgeoisie, a section of petit capital crushed by the Shah. In order to hang onto power Khomeini balances between the masses who have illusions in him and the big bourgeoisie who realise that Khomeini provides a safeguard against their expropriation. But Khomeini dare not unleash the power of the masses because he realises that that would bring his own destruction. As such Khomeini has no progressive mission in Iran, he stands for the smashing of the mass movement, and above all he is a component of the counter-revolution.

Unless Khomeini's rule as an agent of capitalism, albeit in contradictory fashion, within Iran is understood, no revolutionary organisation will be able to defend the interests of the working class. And this is the problem for the Fedayeen. They want to fight imperialism but they believe it can be done without overthrowing capitalism, thus they can paint pro-capitalist forces as consistent anti-imperialist fighters. Thus they fail to call for the overthrow of Khomeini, even outside the situation of war.

In the course of the war with Iraq, Khomeini has been forced to struggle against the counter-revolution to save his own skin. But he does it, only to safeguard his own power, the better to turn on the masses in the aftermath. Trotsky explained this well in relation to Chiang Kai-Shek during the war against Japan: "But Chiang Kai-Shek? We need have no illusion about Chiang Kai-Shek, his party or the whole ruling class of China... Chiang Kai-Shek is the executioner of the Chinese workers and peasants. But today he is forced, despite himself, to struggle against Japan for the remainder of the independence of China. Tomorrow he may again betray. It is possible, it is probable. It is even inevitable. But today he is struggling. Only cowards, scoundrels or complete imbeciles can refuse to participate in that struggle."

(Trotsky on China).

It is on that basis and on that basis alone, that we side with Iran in this war. The comrades of the Fedayeen, by their capitulation, are strengthening the hand of Khomeini. In doing so they are signing their own death warrants as surely as if they laid down their arms and allowed Iraq to annexe Khuzestan.

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