



Iran: key task to break the Army

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The continued savage repression since the Shah's flight has written in the blood of hundreds of courageous Iranians the truth that the military Bonapartist tyranny still exists, it merely has a new and pathetic 'Bonaparte'. The Bakhtiar regime balances precariously on the temporary impasse between the rabid reactionaries of the High Command and the mass movement on the streets, the bazaar merchants, the students and the striking workers, who have made Iran 'ungovernable'. Bakhtiar may well be, as the American Magazine Newsweek puts it 'philosophically a Swedish style Social Democrat' but he is tied, not to a mass reformist workers organization in a stable metropolitan capitalism, but to the Iranian High Command in the middle of a revolution. The Paris daily 'Le Monde' is nearer the mark when it points out that Bakhtiar is a great admirer of General de Gaulle, and regards himself as a 'man of decision'. Clearly he would like to play the role of a 'democratic' Bonaparte.

The slogans of the demonstrators however go to the heart of the matter - Bakhtiar-lackey without power'. Bakhtiar is in the least instance a pawn of the generals. He issues orders for the soldiers to guard Teheran airport and they do it. He issues orders for 'no shooting' and 30 are gunned down as the Imperial Guard runs amok. The Generals would like to smash the whole opposition, to slaughter all its leaders and activists. They would, in such an event, no doubt happily add Bakhtiar's head to the pile. But the Shah and his uneasy American masters urge caution. They fear that in any attempted solution the military machine might disintegrate. Nevertheless they will let them off the leash if Bakhtiar fails to blunt the masses' offensive. Bakhtiar's role is to pacify the generals on the one hand and come to an understanding with the religious leaders on the other-hence his attempted flight to Paris to talk to Khomeini.

Khomeini, as leader of the Opposition, is subject to massive pressure from the varied forces making up the anti-Shah coalition. Over the past month his refuge in Paris has been the scene of many deputations urging compromise. The National Front sent Danus Farouhar to Paris in mid January. At the same time Khomeini received a flee man delegation from the Teheran Chamber of Commerce and Industry which complained of the industrial and commercial ruin facing them if the strike continues. Khomeini nevertheless refused all compromise before his return to Teheran, though there was vacillation amongst his advisors over Bakhtiar's projected visit. Khomeini has throughout the struggle called on the army to desert the regime. Initially he appealed to the generals to 'rally to the cause of the nation' (Le Monde, 31 .10.76). In the few days since his return, Khomeini has made it dear that he is not committed to breaking up the army and the power of the Generals. In fact there are serious signs of an attempted deal with them against Bakhtiar.

The mobilization of all the oppressed classes and strata in Iran, though directed against the Shah and mystified in religious ideology presents an enormous threat to private property whether sacred or profane. For the masses, most immediate vital needs will not be met by a regime however 'Islamic', which is based on its preservation. On the other hand it is in the direct interest of the masses that the discipline and cohesion of the army disintegrates completely from the ranks upwards. Not one stone of the fortress of repression must be left standing upon another. But why has this fortress remained fundamentally intact despite all the massacres?

The Iranian army is massive between three and four hundred thousand men. The military command pursues the policy of keeping the army constantly on the move by means of massive helicopter fleets. Soldiers are thus protected from 'contamination' by being stationed for long among civilians. In addition Turkish-speaking soldiers from Azerbaijan will be used for repression in Teheran; Shirazi soldiers in Mashad etc. In addition there are elite sections highly

privileged and indoctrinated troops like the 10,000-strong Imperial Guard whose Haridan Brigade was paraded for journalists at the Lavizan Barracks in late January. But even this hardened corps is not immune to the effects of what they are doing, in December three enlisted men burst into the officers' mess and sprayed them with machine gun fire.

The Iranian army remains the sole solid 'social base' of the Imperialist Regime. Its strength between three and four hundred thousand represents 3% of the employed population. The average soldier is paid considerably more than the masses of urban and rural poor, though less than a skilled worker. As far as possible they are isolated from society, serving hundreds of miles from their area of recruitment. They are themselves riddled with agents and informers of Military Intelligence. The disaffection of the troops used to slaughter demonstrators has reached fever pitch at various points. Units have joined demonstrators or refused to fire, but the prevalence of incidents where soldiers have shot themselves or the events at the Lavizan Barracks outside Teheran in December, where three enlisted men burst into the officers' mess and sprayed its inmates with machine gun fire, indicate the still isolated nature of these outbursts. Army morale is uncertain but not broken.

The Officer Corps is an elite even more divorced from society. Some military schools take pupils at 7 years of age. There has been little contact between the Officer Corps and the Opposition either civil or religious. The high command consists of ferocious loyalists to the Bonapartist regime. Although two of the most blood-thirsty reactionaries General Gholam Ali Oveissi, ex-administrator of mental law in Teheran and General Khosrodad, chief of the 'air cavalry' have been removed or posted to distant garrisons, the outlook of the High Command is well summed up by a spokesman for the pro-Shah politicians, "At the moment the commanders don't know whether to chop (Khomeini) up for dog meat or to use him for target practice," (Guardian 22.1.1979).

Most of the Generals and the Officer Corps know that they have little to expect except popular vengeance once the weapons of repression slip from their grasp. They have no perspective except to attempt to drown the movement in seas of blood. The masses of rank and file soldiers, on the other hand, can be won over; the isolated mutinies reveal this. But to produce a massive breakdown of morale such that the soldiers break ranks and join the masses, pass arms to the workers, peasants, and students, arrest their officers etc requires decisive organised action on the part of the masses.

There can be no doubt of the heroism and willingness to sacrifice of the masses in the streets. The crucial question is leadership, strategic goals and specific tactics. The bourgeois oppositionists in the National Front fear the collapse of the Army more than they fear a military dictatorship. The highly socially conservative goals of the religious opposition offer little to the concerns of peasants and workers in the army. Neither does Khomeini wish to launch an insurrection. He hopes that mass demonstrations plus the creation of a shadow provisional government will be enough to win over a key section of either the high command or the Islamic nationalist colonels. Nor is Maoist guerrillarism appropriate to these tasks. Strategically it rejects the goal of proletarian revolution and thus subjects the working class to an alliance with the national bourgeoisie' and the 'progressive alliance'. It elevates guerrilla struggle itself to a strategy and thus has not built its base in the factories and workplaces and does not base itself on the self-organisation and self-activity of the working class. Workers' councils, a workers' militia, the turning of the general strike into an insurrection, require a party with a completely different perspective.

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