



Iran: Mullahs' new offensive

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From Workers Power 15 by Dave Stockton

The vicious attacks on the left and the Kurds in Iran still do not denote a finished character to the Iranian revolution. In fact the major social forces in Iran have still as yet failed to forge society and politics in their own image. Such a situation poses ever more acutely the need for a revolutionary workers party to lead the workers, poor peasants, minority nationalities and the intelligentsia out of the bloody trap into which the Khomeini regime is dragging the country.

The leading forces of the Iranian state are still in disarray. President Bani Sadr, despite his massive electoral victory has failed to block the clericals in the Islamic Republican Party-who, as a result of the second round of elections to the parliament (with attendant ballot-rigging and coercion) have at least 130 out of the 170 seats. The 'Bani-Sadrists' have only 41. With Admiral Madani, the butcher of Khuzestan refusing to take up a premiership which he claimed was "shrouded in ambiguities"; Bani Sadr has to wait the further moves of Khomeini and Beheshti.

The reasons for the curious relationship of forces since the overthrow of the Shah lies in the manner of that very overthrow. The working class played the decisive role with a general strike which shut off the oil flow, paralyzed the administrative machine and immobilised transport and communications. The left Islamic and quasi-Marxist guerrilla organisations, and to some extent the members of the Tudeh precipitated and led the armed insurrection that cracked the morale of the Shah's army and led to the arming of the masses. But the leadership of the movement remained in the hands of the mullahs around Khomeini - a leadership that neither the bourgeoisie nor the proletariat has since been able to dislodge.

Both the liberal and conservative clerical wings of the bourgeoisie have been unable to establish a firm grip on political power. The National Front of Sayjabi and Farouhar has been unable to reconstitute the state machine, restore labour discipline and control over the economy and re-establish stable ties with the Imperialist powers. The army remains disorganised and 'demoralised'. The officer corps has been partially purged (30% of its numbers removed).

Unemployment stands at nearly 30% of the active wage earning population. Industrial production is running at only 30% of capacity. Oil output is only one third that of the Shah's period.

Workers have in some sectors forced the concession of the 40 hour week and attempts by the oil minister Ali Akbar Moinfar and Bani Sadr to break the Shoras (workers councils) in the oil fields and elsewhere have failed miserably. In the countryside the seizure of lands belonging to the court circle, the large pro-Shah landlords and the agribusinesses has partly alleviated rural distress - a process aided by food price rises on the internal market due to the interruption of food imports and the abandonment of price controls. This has fuelled the roaring inflation rate, increased the misery of the urban poor but temporarily raised the income of the peasantry.

The bourgeoisie and the big bazaar merchants looked first to Bazargan and then to Bani Sadr to provide 'strong government'. They have both failed. Why? Basically because they have been forced to share political power with the petit bourgeois bloc dominated by Khomeini and the Ayatollahs Beheshti, Khalkhali and Co. The mullahs are armed with a reactionary utopian ideology based on Shiite Islam and a demagogy aimed at the small bazaaris, merchants, artisans and the massive sub-proletariat - the moustazzifin. They have been able to dominate the masses and block bourgeois normalisation and economic reconstruction and prevent the proletariat and the popular democratic forces (the nationalities in particular) from seizing power and expropriating the bourgeoisie. But even the immensely influential

Imam and the sinister Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammed Beheshti have not had things all their own way.

They cannot dispense with the expertise and political economic knowhow of the bourgeoisie because they cannot create an 'Islamic economy'. Much as these leaders would like to create a society, dominated politically by the clergy, based on traditional rural society and small merchants, such a society is impossibility in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Neither have they been able to decisively crush the left or the nationalities. This has not been for lack of trying. In July and August of '79 they attempted to crush the Fedayeen and the Mujahidin groups, banning their papers and meetings and turning the Pasdaran (revolutionary guards) and the lumpen gangs (the hezbollahis) loose to murder and intimidate them. This offensive was checked and driven back by the elemental resistance of those it was aimed at. The Kurdish peshmerga routed the army and pasdars. The revolts in the Caspian ports, in Tabriz and the mass demonstrations in Teheran opened up rifts among the Ayatollahs and forced a demagogic 'left turn' to anti-imperialist rhetoric and the re-legalisation of the left groups and papers.

This disarray was evidenced in massive abstentions in the referendum on the constitution and in the collapse of the Islamic Republican Party's candidacy for the President. Yet the mullahs have been able to return to the offensive. By late April they felt confident enough to launch a massive attack on the Kurds and to drive the left from the universities.

On 20th and 21st April Islamic radicals launched an offensive to 'reform' the universities. Perhaps some of the so called Islamic student groups were sincere in believing that the campus could be put 'at the service of the people'. Their utopian populist-Islamic ideology can, however, be no more than a stalking horse for the reactionary anti-democratic, anti-communist moves of Khomeini and Beheshti. On the pretext that 'Marxist' students had prevented the right wing cleric Rafsanjani speaking on the Teheran campus Khomeini denounced the universities as 'colonized and westernised from the beginning and useless', as 'nests of spies and American agents' and encouraged the hezbollahis to clear them out. After two days of fighting which spread to other cities and which left 27 dead and hundreds wounded the Fedayeen, the most intransigent of the left groups, were finally forced to withdraw when Bani Sadr ordered the Pasdaran to intervene to 'restore order'. Khomeini's 'Islamicisation' means the destruction of the universities as well as the crushing of the left groups right to hold meetings and conduct propaganda.

Simultaneously a murderous offensive against the Kurds was launched. 'Kurdistan must be combed and purged of all the anti-regime elements' thundered Khomeini. This time it meant mass slaughter directed against the unarmed civilian population. In the third week of May, fighting around Sananday left 1,500 Kurds and 500 government troops dead. Indiscriminate strafing by helicopter gunships and phantom jet-strikes turned Saqqez, a city of 40,000 people into a ghost town as the population fled to the mountains. Le Monde (16th May) reports the appeal of a Kurdish fighter in a hospital in Boukan, suffering from horrible napalm burns, "For the love of God, because you are a foreign journalist you must tell the whole world what you have seen and what we are suffering-How can Khomeini, that fascist that dares to speak about God, let such things as these be done. The truth must be known in Iran and outside Iran-everywhere! "

The May Day demonstrations of the left were brutally harassed by the hezbollahis using knives and throwing stones. What can turn the tide against this brutal offensive? Only the mobilisation of the working class-their winning away from the mesmerising effects of the mullahs.

Here the role of a Trotskyist revolutionary party would be crucial. The semi-Guevarist, semi-Stalinist politics of the Fedayeen-despite the marvellous heroism of their fighters-is of no use. Whilst the Fedayeen have protested against the anti-democratic attacks of the clericals, whilst they have stood arms in hand in the front ranks of those defending the Kurds, whilst they have defended the universities against the 'Islamic' thugs, they concentrate their political fire on the bourgeoisie and Bani Sadr, passing over Khomeini's role in silence. This is to disarm the working class against its real enemies. Anti-imperialist rhetoric is cheap and indeed confusing when "the main enemy is at home".

However the so-called 'Islamic Trotskyists' of the HKE (Iranian Revolutionary Workers Party), sponsored by the US Socialist Workers Party, have adopted a position far to the right of the Fedayeen. They fail to raise the slightest

criticism of Khomeini. This rank opportunism has borne bitter fruit in the recent struggles around the universities, showing that the HKE cannot even defend democratic rights. Supporting the Islamic Student Organisations' criminal muddleheaded project that "the campuses should be closed down and the students sent out to work on revolutionary projects", the HKE played into the hands of the reactionaries. Too late they pleaded that "This action (the hezbollahi and government attacks - WP) which was against freedom and against freedom of speech was not what the ISO's wanted". Indeed - the way to hell is paved with good intentions.

But what follows - from so-called Trotskyists - is a terrible confession of bankruptcy. Turning on the courageous Fedayeen, who defended the Universities, they are reported (by Intercontinental Press May 5th) thus: "The HKE also pointed out that by opposing the ISO's occupations, the leaderships of the Tudeh Party, Fedayeen and Mujahedeen not only "showed their bankruptcy" but also played into the hands "of the 500 capitalist families and their underground hit squads"."

The wretched 'Intercontinental' continues: "Contrary to press accounts, the HKE says there is no escalating anti-communist campaign or witch-hunt against the Mujahedeen or Fedayeen in Iran today". On the contrary we are faced with 'a deepening of the revolutionary process". The HKE and its SWP (US) mentors cannot tell the difference between revolution and counter-revolution. Tell that to the Kurds, tell that to the families and friends of the twenty seven killed, and tell that to the 17 students expelled from a teacher training college in Avak for being 'Marxists'. The 'Islamic cultural revolution' is the real tool of reaction.

The measuring rod for a genuine Trotskyist party in Iran must be its advocacy and defence of working class independence from all brands of Islamic obscurantism. Its key task is the struggle for a militantly secular revolutionary workers party, for soviets, factory committees and trade unions free of the mosque. The mullahs must be discredited and driven out of the workers' ranks. On democratic demands, real Trotskyists must be clear and uncompromising - Down with the reactionary paraphernalia of the Islamic Republic! Down with the Bonapartist roles of the Velayat-e-Faqih (Religious Guardian of the State) and the Presidency! Down with the Revolutionary Council!

Dissolve the fake Parliament, elected by corruption, coercion and ballot rigging. Dissolve the Pasdaran and arm the workers. For soldiers' councils in every unit, and for the election of officers. For a united front of workers to smash the hezbollahi black hundreds!

Trotskyists must fight for the right of all the nationalities to self-determination, which is meaningless unless it includes the right to separation. Focussing all these democratic demands - including equal rights for women and an end to censorship and the Islamic Tribunals - is the demand for a sovereign Constituent Assembly elected by universal, equal and secret suffrage. Only the workers, peasants and soldiers councils could convoke, guard and supervise such elections.

A Trotskyist party must set as its goal the defeat of clerical reaction, as well as of the Iranian bourgeoisie and its Imperialist backers. No such defeat can be decisive until full power rests in the hands of the workers and peasants? Shoras.

The alternative, as recent rumours of a military coup in Teheran indicate, is eventually the triumph of black reaction in one form or another. Either the black hundreds of the right wing of the Islamic Republican Party will smash the left and the workers organisations, and consolidate their power with the military and bourgeois support, or a General or Admiral, probably in Islamic guise, will organise a military coup that the Imam or his successor will bless. Time is running out on the two bedrock alternatives - full counter-revolution or working class power.

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