



Khomeini's dictatorship rocked by anti-imperialist storm

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From Workers Power number 11 by Andy Smith

As the anniversary of the great mobilisations which drove out the Shah and cracked his blood-soaked dictatorship approaches, the mullah-dominated clericalist regime faces its most profound crisis yet. Khomeini's project of an Islamic Republic, despite his overwhelming personal influence is still far from any form of stability. Iran faces economic collapse and massive unemployment. The problem of the non-Persian nationalities and the agrarian question are both far from any solution. The total wave of anti-Imperialist feeling generated by the occupation of the U.S. Embassy and the holding of fifty hostages whilst, in the short term, acting as a rallying point behind Khomeini, is already allowing the forces opposed to a theocratic dictatorship to mobilise for the first time since the repressive coup of July/August 1979.

The repressive measures, which included the closing down of the liberal and working class press, the arrest of scores of left wing militants and the banning and harassment of their meetings and demonstrations culminated in the proclamation of a holy war (jihad) against the Kurdish people - Khomeini, appointing himself commander-in-chief of the army sent squads of revolutionary Islamic guards (pasdars) to subject the region to a vicious dictatorship. Ayatollah Khalkhali, the Imam's prosecutor, sent dozens of Kurds a day to the firing squad.

Rabid

The Kurdish resistance fighters (peshmerga) were forced to withdraw from the cities including the 'capital' Mahabad. But they easily regrouped, gaining massive support from the population including the peasantry, who clearly saw the pasdars and the pro-Khomeini committees not only as a rabid Persian-chauvinist army of occupation but as the backers of the land owners, feudalists and semi-bandit elements who exploited and batted on the meagre resources the land yielded them-on the 12th October the police chief in Mahabad was shot. On 16th the Prime Minister's special envoy was kidnapped. By October 21st the peshmerga were reported as controlling Mahabad once again.

The result of the expulsion of the pasdars, the surrounding of a number of towns and garrisons and the rupture of government communication lines, was that the inflexible and infallible Imam changed his mind. The 'worst of the sons of Satan' suddenly became legitimate negotiators on behalf of the Kurdish people. Khomeini promised the progressive withdrawal of the pasdars and the cessation of the murderous activities of the revolutionary tribunals. At the end of October the Minister of the Interior announced the end of hostilities and the suspension of military operations. The jihad was over for the time being, and Islam was far from victorious.

Eruption

October also saw the eruption of social tensions within other parts of Iran. In Teheran itself two large demonstrations of the unemployed took place in successive weeks and spread to other cities. Revolutionary guards had to fire into the air to disperse them.

In the Caspian Sea ports of Bandar and Euzeli, in mid October, demonstrators burned the police headquarters after pasdars had shot at crowds of fishermen protesting at a government monopoly of fishing rights. Khomeini was forced to rescind the government ruling.

In Tabriz, capital of Azerbaijan, open conflicts erupted between the populace and the revolutionary guards. The Imam's personal envoy, Ayatollah Quzi Tabatabai, sent to investigate the nefarious doings of the revolutionary committee and the pasdards, criticised them bitterly as "conducting themselves like Savakis." (He was shot leaving the mosque in Tabriz) (Le Monde 3.11.1979).

In Teheran leftist demonstrations began to be held again at the University. On 29th October 25,000 students demonstrated demanding the authorisation of political activities in educational institutions and the reinstatement of all those purged from July to September. Tudeh (the Iranian CP) and the Fedayeen-e-Khalq have held rallies of up to 40,000.

Even more ominous for the Ayatollahs, the peasantry, hitherto relatively quiescent since the seizure of Pahlavi lands in February and March, have begun to organise peasant committees in southern Kurdistan and in Azerbaijan.

The burgeoning social and political conflict resulted in a major political crisis among the leading cadres of the Islamic Revolution. In mid-October Khomeini's son, Ahmed, exclaimed that "The Imam is totally alone today - just as he was in Qom in 1963. The Imam sees that he is surrounded by enemies, coming from all tendencies, parties and 'types'".

Khomeini, as the lynchpin of the conflicting factions and cliques within the clergy and their professional politicians was obviously feeling the strain of the tug of war between them.

The first victim of the faction fight was the largely pensioned off Bazargan Government. On November 4th the 'Modern Students Faithful to the Imam Khomeini', occupied the United States Embassy and took 63 hostages. On the 6th the Bazargan Government resigned and Khomeini handed power directly to the Revolutionary Council. The 'students' were and are in fact, a tightly organised grouping led by Asghar Moussari Khoeni, holding the rank of Hojatolleslam the first step on the ladder to becoming an Ayatollah. Khoeni, closely allied to the powerful general secretary of the Revolutionary Council, Ayatollah Mohammed Beheshti, has controlled and directed the occupation. The slogans prominent on the walls of the embassy, besides the demand for the Shah's return and the threats to try the American spies included the calls, 'No to negotiations' and, 'a second revolution greater than the first has begun.'

Symbolic

The Imam swung to the side of these 'radicals' and began to voice their slogans and programme. What does this amount to? Firstly, vigorous anti-imperialist and anti-American rhetoric, centring on the return of the Shah. Much as this butcher deserves his fate, totally justified as this demand is, as a political demand it is merely symbolic, a pulling of the American vulture's tail feathers.

It is a diversion from the real fight against Imperialism, away from the chronic problems that face the peasants, workers and the oppressed nationalities of Iran.

Using the grief and rage felt by millions of Iranians who lost their children, relatives, friends and comrades in the Anti-Shah struggle, the mullahs hope to divert the masses from the agents of oppression and exploitation who constitute the Iranian government and ruling classes. Sayed Hussein, Khomeini's grandson, explained this role in an interview with 'Le Monde'. This paper summed up his position thus, 'The blows of American Imperialism have pulled together all the internal tensions which were undermining the Islamic Republic, regrouped the whole population in all its component parts and political tendencies under the Imam's banner. The occupation of the embassy was the most popular event which has occurred since the overthrow of the monarchy.'

Khomeini himself has added to his support for the hostage taking certain of the Islamic radicals' demands. He charged the incoming government with three priority tasks, to purge the administration, so assure the welfare of the mustaziffin (the disinherited - Iran's 5 million unemployed, the poor, the peasants etc and to proceed to, 'a new and profound agrarian reform.')

Concessions

The Imam and the Revolutionary Council have been forced to make a series of concessions to the masses whose

confidence, expectations and demands have been encouraged by the huge mobilisations and the mullahs' demagoguery. The unemployed have continued their demonstrations. The oil workers have formed a national union and forced Islamic officials and management to re-instate sacked workers. 'Shoras' (councils) have been set up in many factories. In Teheran, in a clothing factory, the workers' committee has won a reduction in hours (half-day working) with no loss of pay. Peasant committees continue to be formed. The demands and expectations even of the peasants who have gained land continue to grow in scope and confidence. The Times (1.12.1979) reports a village headman as saying, 'We want industrial agriculture. We want a doctor in the village. We want health insurance and another school.'

The expectations of the mustaziff in of the Teheran slums have, likewise, been raised. Journalists of the 'Herald Tribune' (30.12.1979) report the outspoken comment, 'They (the Islamic Council) had better look after us better or we will make a second revolution!'

Even with regard to democratic rights certain concessions have been made. Papers banned in August have been legalised. The organs of the Tudeh, the Mujahedeen-e-Khalq (the Islamic guerrillas of a leftist orientation) the Fedayeen-e-Khalq and the HKS (Iranian Socialist Workers Party) have resumed publication. The state newspapers like Ettela'at have carried reports of protests against repression. On November 17th, Khomeini acknowledged on television that the Kurdish people had been wronged and that negotiations with their leaders were progressing well.

Rivalries

The Revolutionary Council is still riven with rivalries and contradictions. Abolhassan Bani Sadr who initially held both the Foreign Affairs and Economic Ministries advocates a policy of economic nationalism. This involves repudiation of foreign debts, attempts to break free of the dollar as the means of payment for Iran's oil and reduction of oil production to raise prices via OPEC. Yet, Bani Sadr was hardly discovered by the Western media as the 'new strong man' before he lost decisively on the Revolutionary Council over diplomatic concessions on the question of the hostages. He felt obliged to resign the Foreign Ministry to his long-time rival Sadegh Ghotbzadah. Bani Sadr recognises the dangerous game the grouping around Beheshti and Khoeni are playing. He noted the fragmentation of the Iranian state, 'the multiplicity of the decision-making centres and the government's impotence to control even a single avenue of the capital' Moreover, 'the absence a strong central government, the expansion of anarchy will not end until it has challenged the authority of the Imam Khomeini himself, can't govern a country by means of permanent popular spontaneity.' (Le Monde, 7.11.1979)

Sweep

Of course Ayatollah Beheshti and the Islamic "radicals" don't intend to do that. They hope that the Imams' prestige, anti-imperialist demagoguery having helped them so carry the profoundly un-democratic constitution, on December 2nd, will enable their Islamic Republican Party to sweep the board in the elections to the parliament, and win the Presidency. The constitution itself is a violent affront to all democratic rights.

In the notorious section five, drafted by Ayatollah Beheshti himself, the religious guardian (Fahgib) can dismiss the elected President, appoint the chiefs of the judiciary, the army and the revolutionary guard, and the members of Constitution Protection Council (a minority of whom can veto any law proposed by parliament). Thus not only will Khomeini's personal dictatorship be assured but it will be handed down to a successor in the Shiite hierarchy.

Opposition to the constitution has increased substantially among the forces prepared to challenge Khomeini. In Kurdistan the boycott was almost total with few polling booths being open. In the Turcoman and Baluchi regions the turnout was low. In Tabriz, capital of Azerbaijan, where the Muslim Peoples' Party linked to the senior Ayatollah Kazem Shanatmadan, condemned the constitution as "ushering in a dictatorship as bad as the Shah's" a demonstration of 30,000 protested the ballot and called for a boycott. The Mujahidin and the Fedayeen organisations issued a similar call.

The advocates of an Islamic Bonapartism, based on mosque dominated plebiscites and demagogic "anti-imperialism" whatever their short-term successes, are caught on the horns of a dilemma. Iran faces an economic crisis of catastrophic proportions. An economic blockade by US imperialism will aggravate this to an unbearable degree. The aspirations of

the working class, the "disinherited" urban sub proletariat, the peasants and the nationalities as well as the students ('Islamic' or otherwise) will clash ever more sharply with the chaos presided over by the Revolutionary Council.

Utopia

The Shia hierarchy and the mullah caste cannot establish a stable or homogenous block. A theocracy in the last quarter of the twentieth century is a utopia - and a black reactionary one at that.

One option is a 'left' course. This was voiced most clearly by Khomeini's grandson Sayed Hossein. Referring to the anti-imperialist "turn" he said: "It allows us to open a way to a strategic alliance between the Islamic movement, the lay organisations and the Left as well as a tactical alliance with the Soviet bloc," (Le Monde 30.11.1979.)

The influential Ayatollah Montazeri - the head of the so-called Libyan faction, advocates an orientation to the 'radical' Arab states. The Tudeh party, shameless in their toe-ing the Khomeini line could act as a 'go-between' should Iran need covert Soviet assistance faced with an American blockade or punitive military action.

Whichever faction within and outside the Revolutionary Council wins out, temporarily, before being ousted in its turn, the working class and oppressed masses have nothing whatsoever to gain from them or their fake 'anti-imperialism'. The working class above all must be won to an independent class programme and party which certainly must relate to the deep anti-imperialist aspirations of the whole Iranian people, to the democratic aspirations of the nationalities, women, the students and intellectuals, to the desperate need for land and agricultural machinery that the peasants express. But none of these goals can be met without the central leading role of the working class, organised in workers councils and led by a party that can make Iran's "second revolution" a proletarian one.

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