

The Iranian Revolution, Its Aftermath and the Left

by L. Shirazi

Events move with lightning speed in Iran these days. Just over five months ago, President Bani-Sadr was still in office: visiting the war front, debating the new budget on television, and engaging in polemics with his opponents entrenched in the Prime Minister's office, the Majlis and the Islamic Republic Party. Since then much has happened. Not only was Bani-Sadr quickly forced into exile, impeached by the Majlis, disowned by the Imam and adopted by some of the opposition (particularly Massoud Rajavi—a leader of the Mujahedin), but his principal rival, Ayatollah Beheshti soon after, suddenly and violently, entered the realm of "martyrdom" along with tens of other members of the IRP (including at least four ministers and more than twenty Majlis representatives—a good part of the brains and cadre of the Islamic Republic).

Amid the chaos and uncertainty that followed, a new President was "elected": Mr. Rajai. Mr. Rajai had to vacate the post of Prime Minister to be able to accept his new position. His old post was filled by a certain Dr. Bahonar who had just weeks before been assigned to Mr. Beheshti's old position—the head of the Islamic Republic Party. The musical chair scenario of shifting public officials inspired by Bani-Sadr's departure and the explosion at the IRP headquarters has once again been set into motion with the most recent outbreak of political assassinations. Both Mr. Rajai and Dr. Bahonar have followed Mr. Beheshti to the realm of martyrdom. In the last two months, scores of the other officials, members of the ruling faction of the clergy have been assassinated.

Since Bani-Sadr's circumstantial falling out with the clergy, to all appearances, the "coalition" government of Iran's Imam Khomeini is in shambles. Under the strains of relentless financial crisis, social unrest and an insatiable lust for power on both sides of the ruling coalition, the post-revolution partnership has finally exploded, as it had threatened to do so many times in the past. Frantically, the fanatical victors lash out at their opponents, real and imagined, in a life and death struggle to establish their shaky hegemony. Initially they sent their lumpen cadre, armed with clubs, knives, and guns into the streets for revenge and to intimidate the public. At first haphazardly, then

methodically, hundreds of men, women and children (many supporters of the Mujahedin, the communist organizations or simply participants in the June 20th demonstrations) were summarily executed. A widespread witch-hunt was begun against the Mujahedin and the communists as well as anyone unwilling to bow to the tyranny. Behzad Nabavi, the government's spokesman, informed the nation on public television that, "we want a country of 36 million *SAVAKis* (members of the Shah's secret police)," before he announced the phone numbers that people should call to report suspicious activity on the part of their relatives, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

In Iran, a continuous wave of violent repression is spreading, this time at the hands and under the direction of the 'holy' men. Everyone is in agreement that even the Shah was not this ruthless. At least there was a definable logic behind his madness.

Since June of this year, the repression has become more systematic, more organized and savage. More than 2000 have died by execution alone and it is no longer just a government spokesman who asks the people to become Islamic "Savakis"; Ayatollah Khomeini himself has filed a personal request for the people to do so.

In Tehran, rumors spread like wild-fire after the bombing of the IRP headquarters: sometimes the expression of fear for what was to come, but most often that of hope for what could come. There was unending expectation everywhere. Could the ruling faction—the IRP compensate for its losses? Would the army break its silence and intervene? But most important could the opposition put a stop or at least show the way to resisting the ever-growing tide of repression? And what about the left, could and would it finally provide a viable alternative? Fortunately and unfortunately these questions still remain to be answered.

What follows is an attempt to make sense of the events in Iran from a Marxist perspective. In summary form, it represents the analysis of the Iranian revolution based on views of one of the communist organizations active in Iran today, the Organization of Communist Unity.

Background to the Iranian Revolution of 1979

The emergence, growth and expansion of capitalist relations in Iran did not occur as a result of the growth of the

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local productive forces in the society, but rather through commercial capitalist penetration determined by the needs of the world capitalist system. In the early 19th century, the rival colonialist powers, Britain and Russia, sought to gain control of the country through economic, political and military maneuvers.¹ Throughout the 19th century, Iran's growing involvement with these colonialist powers had profound consequences on the nature of economic and political development.

Economically, specialization in the production and export of raw materials increased. Cheap foreign goods flowed in, resulting in the deterioration and in cases elimination of home industries and handicrafts. Backed by the power of their governments and in collaboration with the Iranian landowning ruling class, British and Russian merchants received remarkable advantages, such as tariff and toll exceptions, the freedom to operate anywhere in Iran, and access to large amounts of capital for investments. The process was accompanied by some state and colonialist initiated reforms such as the installation of modern communications (e.g. telegraph, the printing press, road construction), the commercialization of agriculture, and the development of certain industries (e.g. hand-woven carpets). Once incorporated into the world capitalist market, the Iranian economy became susceptible to worldwide fluctuations in the prices of metals (especially silver which affected the value of its currency drastically), and of the prices of its cash crop products for export.

With the decline in the power and importance of local markets, there emerged a dependence not only on western products for consumption, but also on western merchant capital. The extraction of loans with preposterous terms, the granting of numerous concessions and the policies of capitulation pursued by the Iranian government in the second half of the century attest to the growing western capitalist control over all major economic institutions (e.g. banks, customs) of the country.

The encroachments and manipulations of the colonialist powers changed the nature of class relations in the society. Predominantly concerned with maintaining their control over land and wealth, the ruling landowning class gave way to British and Russian political and economic pressures and often benefitted from mutual commercial ventures. Thus, in this period, we can observe the intertwining of exploitative and colonial relations in emerging alliances of rival elements within the ruling class with either British or Russian merchants and politics.

The growth of commercial relations with the colonialist powers also led to changes in the structure of the traditional merchant class. The proportion of the population engaged in commerce and services increased considerably during these years. A central economic market was created, linked by the new communications systems, and an urban bourgeoisie emerged, which, given the dominant power structure of the court and state bureaucracy, received little benefit from the emerging economic system. This bourgeoisie began to become aware, on the one hand, of its potential and opportunities, and on the other hand, came to regard the immense advantages of its foreign counterparts with resentment.

Before going on, it is important to observe several characteristics of the Iranian clergy (ulama). The Shi'i ulama occupied an important position in Iranian society

since the 16th century. They derived their power from their traditional jurisdiction over the religious, educational, juridical and charity institutions which brought them in close contact with all levels of the population, and from the fact that they received the major portion of their income directly from the people through religious taxes and endowments. This relatively independent position from the state, as well as certain basic tensions between Shi'i doctrine and the institution of monarchy often created tensions between some elements within the ulama and the state. The economic development of the 19th century, including increased foreign influence, and efforts on the part of the state to take educational and juridical institutions under its own control, undermined the position of the ulama and further antagonized them against the late Qajar monarchs. It is very important to note, however, that it is correct to refer to the ulama as a distinct group, separate from the class structure of the society. Although their common religious training, a segment of their income, and a desire for increased power and influence in the society linked them together in many ways, class and even doctrinal differences existed within the ulama hierarchy. Some prominent members of the ulama were wealthy landowners and/or directly connected to the court and state power structure. A large number participated in trade, money-lending and speculation, had family connections with the petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie, and perhaps more importantly, most of the income of the ulama came from contributions in money or kind, or endowments from various factions of the bourgeoisie. We can observe the external expression of these splits within the ranks of the ulama in the contradictory positions they took in the mass movements of the late 19th and early 20th century.

By the end of the 19th century, with the economy in a state of disarray and an increasingly corrupt, exploitative but weakened central government, the people rose in rebellion against the established power coalition of the landowning ruling class and their colonial supporters. The Tobacco Rebellion of 1891 was the first successful movement in the modern history of Iran which involved the mass participation of the population. Its immediate cause was the popular reaction against a concession which the reigning Shah granted in 1890 to a British subject for the production, sale, and export of all Iranian tobacco. The concession antagonized all factions of the bourgeoisie, from wealthy wholesale dealers and investors in tobacco cultivation, to retail shopkeepers. An alliance was thus formed between the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, ulama dissatisfied with the state both through their links with the factions of the bourgeoisie and by the undermining of their religious power base, reformist intellectuals (predominantly with class links in the bourgeoisie), and the growing mass of impoverished unskilled urban population. After waves of mass demonstrations and nationwide participation in a boycott of all tobacco products, the Shah was compelled to repeal the concession.

Between 1892 and 1905, economic conditions continued to deteriorate; severely threatened by the success of the Tobacco Rebellion the Qajar rulers turned, on the one hand, to soliciting loans from Britain to deal with the bankruptcy of the treasury, and on the other hand, welcomed Russian political support. Meanwhile, public discontent increased. The success of the alliance between the bourgeoisie, ulama

and modernist reformers in pressuring the Shah to cancel the tobacco concession gave hope to these respective forces in their efforts to organize a more widespread and radical movement against the prevailing regime and its Russian supporters.

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution broke out in 1905. Its principal aims were to curb the despotic and arbitrary powers of the monarch through the establishment of an elected representative body and an independent judiciary, and to terminate the blatant and persistent foreign colonial control prevalent in the country. This revolution was led by the alliance of a disaffected bourgeoisie, ulama and modernist reformers, each of whom were pursuing different and sometimes contradictory interests, but who were united in their distaste for the ruling Qajar dynasty's corruption, incompetence and collaboration with colonial commercial and political interests.

The forces against the constitutionalists consisted of most wealthy landowners and elements connected to the court, including certain prominent ulama. In rivalry with the Russians who had the upper hand in influencing the court, British policy was in support of the constitutional movement. After waves of demonstrations and street battles in 1906, the reigning Qajar Shah gave in to popular demand and agreed to sign the decree for the establishment of a constitutional regime.

However, the apparent success of the Constitutional Revolution was short lived. In 1907, Britain and Russia signed a mutual agreement dividing Iran into 'spheres of influence'. Britain withdrew its support from the constitutionalists. Although the court and the forces of reaction were finally defeated in 1909, the country was thrown into a state of political chaos and economic and national disintegration. This state of affairs, constantly aggravated by Russian and British intervention, continued through the First World War.

It must be noted that, through this period which we have discussed, although capitalist relations of production had been established and were in a state of interaction with the world market, a substantial part of the Iranian population—the peasantry—was still isolated from the cities where these new relationships were burgeoning. Thus, in the articulation and interplay of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, the former was just beginning to play a leading role.

In the aftermath of World War I and the Russian Revolution, the Soviet regime renounced all the previous claims of the Tsarist regime on Iranian political and economic affairs. The British, however, remained with the intention of establishing a centralized government to preserve their interests in the country and to contain the southward spread of revolutionary movements.²

In 1921, a coup d'état led by Reza Khan, the commander of the Iranian Cossack Brigade deprived the Qajar dynasty of any remaining power. After having suppressed the popular revolts, Reza Khan consolidated his power, and with British support, took full control of Iran as the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925. During his reign, Reza Shah initiated and implemented reforms which resulted in the establishment of a modern, centralized army and state bureaucracy, the development of modern industry, heavy investments in a modern infrastructure (railroads, communications, etc.), and the establishment of modern,

secular educational institutions. Without attempting to alienate the landowners, these reforms made a significant contribution to capitalist development and further class differentiation in Iran. The politically ruthless reign of Reza Shah, along with his economic and social modernization policies were seen as a natural barrier against the spread of revolutionary movements from the Soviet Union, and were thus desired and encouraged by the West.

Reza Khan's reign ended during World War II, when as a result of his rapprochement with the Axis powers, the Allied powers occupied Iran in 1944 and forced him to abdicate. His son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was made Shah by consensus among the Allied powers.

Between 1944 and 1953, Iran enjoyed a period of relative freedom and democracy. In fact, the rivalries between the victorious powers, the vicinity of the Soviet Union, the rise of national liberation movements throughout the colonized and semi-colonized world, and finally, the weakness of the new Shah—all contributed to prevent an abrupt return to dictatorship. Moreover, the blow incurred to European capitalism during World War II and the concentration of their economic and social resources in the war economy and post-war reconstruction, presented the opportunity in many societies, including Iran, for further indigenous or "national" capitalist growth and increased control over their national market. Thus, the Iranian national liberation movement with its culmination in the struggles for the nationalization of oil was able to gain tremendous support among the population. Under the leadership of Mossadegh, the people achieved a victory against British imperialism by nationalizing the oil industry. This movement was bourgeois in character and hence contained its own limitations: while going as far as challenging the court and forcing the Shah out of the country, it still sought the preservation of the existing state structure. But the strategic and economic (in this case oil in particular) interests of the western capitalist powers were too important to allow them to seek an accommodation, even with a politically independent bourgeois regime such as the one Mossadegh could have established. Thus, the Iranian army, with the direct backing of the CIA, intervened and engineered the 1953 coup which resulted in the downfall of Mossadegh and the reinstatement of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

US imperialism, having emerged as the strongest capitalist power, now exerted its domination and began to execute programs directed towards accelerated capitalist growth in Iran. Beginning with the "White Revolution" in 1963, this period included a full scale attack aimed at the complete transformation of remaining pre-capitalist relations to those of capitalism, the conversion of stagnant wealth to mobile capital, the extension of markets and finally, the accelerated integration of Iranian capitalism into the world system. The original program of the "White Revolution"³ was initiated by imperialist planners, particularly from the United States, and sought to remove the then traditional barriers to the integration of capital, whether they were social, economic or political in nature.

Thanks to oil wealth and foreign aid, the state intervened to establish heavy and/or large scale industries. Private capital, often in joint venture with foreign capital, focused on the production of consumer goods (essentially of the import-substitution type). Due to low productivity and stiff

competition of cheap foreign grains, agricultural production decreased drastically. In this period Iran was a typical example of "dependent capitalism," where the growth of capitalism interacted and was actually subjugated to the world capitalist market, and accordingly to the international division of labor.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the increase in oil prices, the state's high revenues from oil began to play an ever increasing role in the shaping and the development of the Iranian capitalist system—a system which came to be characterized by a highly inflated service sector, a massive military and bureaucratic apparatus, and last but not least, the destruction of a self-sufficient agricultural sector at the cost of greater and greater reliance on foreign products. With this dependency, Iran began to undergo severe crises and fluctuations in response to the smallest motion or problem in the world capitalist system.

But another important aspect of this dependency was the *interdependent* character of *intra-class* struggles within the Iranian and the international bourgeoisie. The nearly absolute reliance on the oil income coupled with its almost monopolistic plunder by the US military-industrial complex left the non-military, consumer-oriented capitalists within the international bourgeoisie at a clear disadvantage. As dependency increased, Iranian society became more and more vulnerable and sensitive to the internal struggles between the different imperialist factions. Different factions within Iranian capitalism found themselves growing closer to or further from power as the balance of power shifted between the different imperialist factions.

On the basis of this understanding, one could rightfully argue that during the mid to late 1970s, it was unavoidable that political changes would occur in many societies under imperialist domination. A world capitalist crisis was intensifying. There was a relative shift of power in favor of the non-military faction within imperialism. And finally, the power of the Common Market and its claims to a greater share of the world economic pie were increasing. But these changes would only occur in places, like Iran, where objective social conditions were conducive, where social contradictions had reached a special intensity.

The Revolution

During the late seventies, different classes and strata in Iran were dissatisfied with the Pahlavi regime for different reasons. Despite a relative rise in incomes, workers directly felt the intensification of exploitation and despite the backwardness of many with rural origins, worker protests were growing. At this time, landless or small peasants comprised one of the most important strata in society. Even those peasants who were better-off than the rest but were caught in the grasp of big capitalists, the banks and government agencies, were ready to join the opposition. The traditional petty-bourgeoisie who saw its social and economic position threatened by change had its own complaints against the regime.

In addition, in the last few years before the revolution, an important part of the well-to-do petty-bourgeoisie and even parts of the small and medium capitalists began to openly criticize the regime. These were those who had mistakenly dreamed of a rosy world of free enterprise and quick wealth

but soon awoke to find their fortunes and futures threatened by a growing people's movement as well as the activities of huge monopolies. In the period before the uprising, they comprised one of the most important segments of the regime's opposition. They had at their disposal important material resources as well as other means of struggle.

Finally, it is important to note that included in the Shah's opposition were big capitalists not directly tied to the Royal Court nor the groups making up the Pahlavi gang, the "non-military bureaucratic faction" of Iranian capitalism. These people in particular had huge financial resources as well as access to the international press to draw upon. With their joining the opposition, they totally isolated the Pahlavi regime. No one was left inside the country to support the regime other than the members and dependents of the military-bureaucratic faction headed by the Shah himself. The "island of peace and stability" quickly capsized.

Let us now turn to the position of the clergy within the forces of opposition. As mentioned before, with the disintegration of the pre-capitalist mode of production, and the ever increasing conflict among the traditional wing of the bourgeoisie which in turn became more and more dependent on the world capitalist market, new splits appeared in the clergy (ulama) hierarchy. Today there appear two distinct factions in the clergy. One is mainly allied to the petty-bourgeoisie (its traditional wing and merchants), and the other is inspired by the bourgeoisie proper.⁴

Because the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie are profoundly linked to one another in that capital is the origin and aim of both, the battles between them must be seen as only battles within capital's front. In addition, one must recognize that besides sharing a common interest in the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, they also share the benefits that a respect for religion and its hierarchy offers.⁵ Once again, it must be emphasized that one should not fall behind history by perceiving the clergy hierarchy in Iran as a homogeneous block.

Thus, the class base and outlook of the participants in the two-year struggle that led to the overthrow of the Shah were very different. As for the capitalists from the non-military bureaucratic faction and their representatives from the compromising Bakhtiar to the "revolutionary" Bazargan and Bani-Sadr, the issue was one of getting rid of the Shah and his gang but preserving everything else. The petty-bourgeoisie, however, sought in addition to curtail the power of the big monopolists from the non-military bureaucratic faction as well. But workers and peasants involved in the movement as a whole did not express any demands other than those of the petty-bourgeoisie. Their activity was simply part of the general movement. Neither did they act as a class with a specific outlook nor did they pose any specific anti-capitalist demands.

Under these circumstances, and considering the situation of the left in Iran at this time, one could not hope for anything more than a political revolution. During the pre-revolution period, the left found itself wrought with sectarianism, estranged from the working class and analytically deficient. During the quarter century struggle against the Shah's regime, the left did not put together any coherent social program, neither was it able to obtain any significant popular support. The main feature of the leftist underground organizations (e.g. the Fedayeen) and radical

Muslim organizations (e.g. the Mujahedin) was their militance and uncompromising approach to the regime. In any case, nothing but a political revolution did come to pass. The capitalist system was neither under attack nor in any immediate danger. If any danger existed for capitalist interests, it was not within the bounds of the political revolution itself, but rather in its later acceleration when it ran out of control during the February uprising.

The February Uprising

The February uprising was both the climax and the finale of the Iranian political revolution of 1979. Until February, the situation was ideal for the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie in Iran. The uprising, however, disorganized many of the organs that the upper classes sought to preserve, for example, the Army and the intelligence network of SAVAK. Moreover, as a symbol of the radicalism of the masses, its victory further intensified mass militancy. New demands, such as the creation of a people's army, were generated in its wake. Finally, although it was ultimately defeated, it provided valuable revolutionary experience. For the left, the February uprising will always evoke many good memories.

After February, however, the conquered forts of the enemy were step by step, but quite rapidly thanks to the popularity of Khomeini, forfeited to the reaction. The army was reconstructed; the Shah's "anti-terrorist committee" rejuvenated, and under the guise of "every government needs an intelligence service," attempts were begun to rebuild SAVAK. Added to the previous regime's repressive organs, there now appeared the Imam's Committees, the Jihad Sazandegi (The Reconstruction Front), the Pasdaran (the "Revolutionary Guards"), the Islamic Supreme Council—to name just a few. Yet, the new regime seems more and more helpless than ever, struggling to stay alive amidst different social, political and economic crises.

The Islamic Republic

Today, we know that at the peak of the revolutionary ferment, the leaders of the new regime were involved in direct negotiations with the US aimed at curtailing the people's movement and its rapid radicalization. After the Guadalupe summit conference, a lengthy process of negotiation and collaboration between the United States, the Iranian army, the court and the opposition was begun. General Huyser was then dispatched to Iran to temper the Iranian army and to speed the Shah's departure. Both the fundamentalist and the moderate wings of the opposition were participating in these negotiations; some of the most prominent Iranian personalities involved were Beheshti, Rafsanjani and Bazargan. Mehdi Bazargan, chosen by Khomeini to be Iran's first "revolutionary" prime minister, had been able to gain the trust of the clergy and the bazaar merchants, the remaining factions of the Iranian bourgeoisie, the military, and the bureaucratic administration. Moreover, as a capitalist, he had the "merit" of being a staunch anti-communist, and the West saw him as a moderate post-revolutionary leader.

From the moment that the Shah's departure was certain, every effort was made to isolate and push the left forces out of the arena. Khomeini's famous "the Shah must go" speech not only sounded the success of Bazargan's meetings with the US but also relayed the message that: "Even for getting rid of the Shah, we must not cooperate with the communists."

What was intended to happen in Iran was that the Shah would leave and the new bosses would get control of the organs of the state *peacefully*, leaving the Army and the bureaucracy intact. In February, with a people's uprising and its momentary leadership by the left forces, the desired calm was shattered. One thing had been proven: the left and radical forces in Iran had grown too big and become too active (as well as now *armed*) to be ignored and left on their own any longer. From February, a clear polarization began to take shape amongst the "shah's opponents."

With imperialist consent and aided by the remnants of the Shah's regime, the bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie in Iran seized all the state organs and put the left forces on a clear defensive. The "provisional government" of Bazargan openly declared a war on the left and pulled the people (unaware of events and drunk with the elation of seeing the Shah leave) behind it. After the revolution, instead of a coalition of all the forces that had struggled against the regime, the "provisional government" emerged as a coalition of the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie against the rest of the Shah's opposition.

Within the new coalition, the bourgeoisie had control over the political apparatus of the state. The petty-bourgeoisie, although left out of the formal state administrative structures, commanded tremendous political power through newly established parallel structures, such as community-based revolutionary committees, various types of Islamic councils, revolutionary courts; and to these one should add, the dense network of mosques and religious institutions which had managed to remain active during the Shah's time, and exerted significant religious and political influence on the impoverished masses.

In a situation where the left forces lacked mass organization and the bourgeoisie was the target of an unorganized yet deeply rooted people's anger, the petty-bourgeoisie quickly emerged as the only alternative capable of seizing power. Under these circumstances, that is the weakness of the left and the disrepute and incapability of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie found an historical opportunity to acquire more power than it had ever dreamed. And so, the petty-bourgeoisie, with its own organization and ideology, was able to establish its political domination. This is clearly reflected in the reverence paid to Khomeini, which was of a magnitude perhaps surpassing that paid to the Shah. Some imperialist factions and forces understood the situation in Iran quite well from the very beginning; consequently, they knew that even if they had underestimated the extent and explosive character of the people's opposition to the Shah, all was far from being lost.

For many communists and certainly a good part of the bourgeoisie, however, it was clear that in terms of the relations of production, the petty-bourgeoisie could seek nothing other than capitalist relations, and that regardless of the sloganeering, it not only wanted the cooperation of the bourgeoisie in the economic realm, but needed it to keep the economy going. Thus, the petty-bourgeoisie remained

limited to the arena of politics and that of economics naturally fell into the hands of the bourgeoisie. While containing the seed of conflict, the alliance between the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie was one of necessity.

This induced coalition could only continue as long as the bourgeoisie in Iran had not regained its strength and the petty-bourgeoisie maintained its credibility. The elements of discord were present from the very beginning. That is why the Revolutionary Council and the Cabinet emerged as arenas for struggle and combat. The bourgeoisie, relying on the backwardness of the petty-bourgeoisie, the growth of people's dissatisfaction and the economic disorder tried again and again to force the petty-bourgeoisie into political retreat, hoping to establish its own rule without hindrance.

These attempts failed each and every time. The petty-bourgeoisie leaning on its popular support, was able to counter attack and maintain itself. The taking of the "spyden" (US Embassy) and the verbal attacks on America were some of the most important initiatives that the petty-bourgeoisie undertook in this on-going battle. In fact, the moderate and compliant attitude of the Bazargan government and of the bourgeoisie in general towards the US provided the petty-bourgeoisie with an invaluable opportunity to direct the mass anti-American sentiments against the bourgeoisie, through the American Embassy takeover. However, one should not be misled by appearances. The petty-bourgeoisie did not and could not transcend from the mere expression of anti-American sentiments to a genuine anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist consciousness. It is not surprising that the same mass mobilization of sentiments was used to suppress progressive struggles for autonomy in Kurdistan and Turkoman Sahra; to crush workers' strikes and protests by the unemployed; to trample womens' rights; and particularly, to crush the leftist organizations and the radical, democratic Islamic organization of the Mujahedin.

It was thus that a massive social upheaval which involved nearly all classes and strata in Iran (each motivated for different reasons and from different perspectives) resulted in the downfall of the Shah's regime, the divestiture of political power from the military-bureaucratic faction of Iranian capitalism, and finally the passing of political power to the petty-bourgeoisie. Economic relations did not change fundamentally and the same capitalist relations, under the guise of Islam, however much disrupted by the social upheaval, continued to survive. A revolution which, under different conditions, could have been a step towards a great social revolution, remained limited to a political change of regime. And even this political revolution, by maintaining many of the organs of the previous regime, did not fully develop its own potentials. The February uprising, out of the control and against the wishes of the post-revolution leadership, aimed at taking the people's movement to overthrow the Shah beyond the limitations of a political revolution. But this uprising with all its glory, radicalism and genuine revolutionary solidarity had neither the organization behind it nor the consciousness within it to realize such a transformation.

The Future and the Left

Under the present circumstances, and in the near future, that which will be most striking in the political scene of Iran

is the continuation of the struggles of different bourgeois and petty-bourgeois factions over political hegemony. As the present situation demonstrates, these battles can become extremely violent and acute. Although in the long run, *without a doubt*, the bourgeoisie will be the final victor, political power may change hands several times, with this or that faction gaining hegemony at any one time. Already, signs of the transmutation of the petty-bourgeois nature of the present regime into a more bourgeois character are appearing. The tendency against the nationalization of foreign trade and radical land appropriation seems to be gaining more support in the clergy-dominated governing institutions.

This is the struggle that is in the fore-ground. But a greater and more serious one is that which takes place elsewhere: one which is presently like a sleepy bear slowly opening its eyes. The working people of Iran, despite the regime's deceptions and in spite of the misleading direction of their "leaders," will reach the conclusion that the new regime bears no gifts for them. The spectre of exploitation has not grown any lighter by hiding behind the cloak of religion and invitations to the heaven of tomorrow do not make today's hell any more bearable.

People have seen that with the overthrow of the Shah's regime, their problems have not grown any less, and that Islam, religion and the clergy have not lessened any of their burdens. They must still go to sleep hungry, their children must perish from a lack of medicine, and they must still constantly witness social injustice; they must still face firing squads. Yesterday, it was in the name of the "Great Civilization" of the Pahlavis, today it is in the name of Islam.

The facts of life will move working people away from the Islamic Republic. Opposing the regime, in the long run, there stand two possibilities; the left and the right alternatives. Working people may be attracted to either. A dissatisfied person may fall victim to the rightists: the bourgeoisie—the Bakhtiars, the Bazargans and the Bani-Sadrs. Or he/she may see the way of escape through the petty-bourgeoisie. On the other hand, he/she may choose the left alternative. The assertion that the proletariat desires socialism is correct historically speaking, but not in every definite moment. The deviation of the proletariat has certainly not been an unusual phenomenon. Today, in front of those who turn their backs to the regime, stands both the left and the right. Both want to attract followers and both know what to do so, they must expose propagate and organize.

Unfortunately, today the Iranian left despite being the target of an annihilation campaign on the part of the reactionary forces still does not represent a viable social or political alternative. The masses of Iranian people do not know the left. They are neither familiar with its ideology nor its history. They may respect the left for its endurance but they look everywhere but to the left for a way out of their problems. It is here that the Iranian progressive and revolutionary organizations, particularly the communists, must meet the challenge. To do so, they must tackle difficult problems, many of which have been with them throughout the past several decades.

At the risk of over-simplification, two major problems may be cited which have kept the Iranian left organizations in isolation; their inability to unite and coordinate their forces and their incorrect approach to democratic rights and

struggles. Debilitating sectarianism and a readiness to "unite" with (or better follow) every force other than their real allies (i.e., other left organizations) has led to the hegemony of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois programs within both the opposition to the Shah and now to the Islamic Republic. The latest example of this attitude is the support given to the Bani-Sadr-Mujahedin coalition.

The confusion of the left about democratic rights and struggles is grounded in two major false assumptions: (1) that a sharp delineation exists between "democratic" and "class" issues, with "liberals" championing the first and "communists" only the second, and relatedly (2) that "democratic" issues such as women's rights, will automatically be resolved after a socialist revolution. This has led many not only to distrust and resent the very forces who should, in theory, be the most democratic of all alternatives, but also to the left itself being suspicious of democratic movements and thus estranged from one of the most important arenas of class struggle.

No doubt, these are problems not limited to the Iranian left and as elsewhere they find the roots and nourishment for their existence in a poverty of theory and knowledge. But in addition to not understanding or *mis*understanding general principles of class struggle, the Iranian left has had particular difficulty understanding Iranian society and the class forces that move it. Whether a result of dogmatically transferring the experiences of other societies—China, the Soviet Union for example, or simply an unfamiliarity with the tools of Marxist analysis, Iranian communist organizations belatedly "learn" the class nature of ruling regimes in Iran through "experience." Thus, lacking theoretical understanding, they have been unable to recognize let alone anticipate alliances between reactionary forces.

Unfortunately, political events do not wait to be understood this way. Most of the left, today, finally accepts that both wings of the Islamic republic were reactionary. They were ready to do so however only after nearly three years of this regime's "exposure" of itself: in Kurdistan, Khuzistan, and Turkoman Sahra, in relation to the democratic rights of women, workers and students, in its version of "anti-imperialist" struggle and in its attempts to annihilate the opposition. One of the most important issues now for the Iranian left is whether it will once again fall behind history and be dragged along by events or whether it can get a grasp on reality and begin to consciously affect the outcomes of class struggles.

Before it can become an alternative in Iran, the left must learn that the only possible social revolution in a capitalist society like Iran is a socialist revolution; that the only relations of production more progressive than those of capitalism are those of socialism. It must accept that any strata or class, including the petty bourgeoisie can only be progressive when its actions are in the interests of or towards the *goals* of the proletariat as a *class*. Today, within the Iranian movement, confusion and indecision concerning the nature of the bourgeoisie or the petty bourgeoisie, can no longer be simply considered as "theoretical" problems. Neglecting to clear up such confusion will contribute either to the survival of the petty-bourgeoisie or the strengthening of the bourgeoisie, as viable rightist alternatives.

In the future, power may change hands many times between the different factions of the petty-bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie in Iran. Big and little political revolutions will come and go. Large and small uprisings, with or without political revolutions are all possible and probable. Neither their appearance nor their specific character are predictable very far in advance. What is important during this time, during the preparatory phase of the socialist revolution in Iran, is the possibility of these political revolutions leading to a social revolution so that when their appearance is in fact perceivable, specific tactics and programs can be undertaken according to the shape of the existing forces and the main current of the pending revolution's content.

Discussion and argument about how the future political revolution will take shape is unending, to a great extent an intellectual parlance, and considering the other problems facing the left at this time, a waste of time. For the left to represent a left alternative, for it to be able to have a program for political revolutions and for every social movement it must base its strategy on preparing for the social revolution. It must thus define its goal and then establish the way out of the different twists and turns of the road ahead. Without considering the necessity and unavoidability of the socialist revolution in Iran, *today* not tomorrow, the Iranian left will once again lose its way at the crossroads as it did after the 1979 revolution.

NOTES

¹ Iran never became a formal colony of either colonialist power, but both Britain and Russia exerted enough influence and control over the polity and the economy of the country to largely render its independence meaningless. Aside from the profits which could be derived from the Iranian economy itself, Iran was of great strategic importance to the British empire in the latter's efforts to establish a secure commercial route to India. The Russians were interested in intercepting the British and also in gaining access to the commercially important waterways of the Persian Gulf.

² The British were quite serious in their intent, because the October Revolution in Russia, a devastating famine in 1918-1919, and public reaction against the British-Iranian Treaty of 1919 (which allowed for virtual British control over economic and military affairs in the country), had given rise to a series of sporadic popular revolts in Iran. These revolts, notably the Jangali movement in Gilan, and the Freedom movement in Azarbaijan were anti-imperialist in character and contained leftist elements within them, but were too disunited and weak to challenge the government effectively. They were subsequently defeated by Reza Khan and British intervention.

³ The most significant points of the White Revolution were (1) land reform, and (2) the sale of government owned factories to the private sector. The practical effects of these reforms were—the movement of remaining landowner capital into industry, which compensated dispossessed landowners, and the further extension of capitalist relations into the countryside.

⁴ For example, manifestation of this split can be observed today by the fact that Ayatollah Shari'at-Madari, a moderate bourgeois figure is under house arrest. The fact that serious disagreements are occurring and contradictory approaches are adopted in the current discussions in the Islamic parliament on the direction which land reform should take, further illustrate the nature of the conflict.

⁵ Both factions of the clergy lost much of these benefits under the rule of both Reza Khan and the late Shah.