

# International Internal Discussion Bulletin

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# Once More on the Vanguard in Europe

By Edgardo (Italian section of the Fourth International)

There is a rather well known anecdote which has made the rounds of the Fourth International: in 1969, Comrade Mandel made a report at the University of Aarhus on the working class struggles in Europe. In the debate that followed a student intervened saying, "It isn't true that a revolutionary upsurge took place in France in May 1968, and I can prove what I say." When asked to give his proof, he went on: "During a revolutionary upsurge the revolutionary party is strengthened. But I can assure you that my party, the French Bordighist organization, wasn't strengthened at all."

This episode comes to mind when we observe one of the characteristics of Comrade Mary-Alice's document on Europe: it is well known that the Italian section is not very strong, that its growth cannot be compared to that of the Ligue Communiste or even the IMG; and therefore why should we concern ourselves with Italy? This seems to be implied in the document: in over 35,000 words it finds occasion to mention Italy only a couple of times, and then only in passing. When speaking of the student mobilizations, Italy is not mentioned. Nor is it referred to, despite the "creeping May," when dealing with the major working class mobilizations. There is not a word about the attempt to develop a fascist movement with a mass base in Italy. On the subtle repression based on the theory of the "opposite extremes," and on the practice of the State Massacre,<sup>1</sup> there is only silence. It seems that not even the Italian Communist Party, the strongest Stalinist party in Western Europe, is an important element to Comrade Mary-Alice when she sits down to write about this continent!

I have no intention of assuming a nationalist attitude. I think, however, that very little can be understood about Western Europe if one does not take into account how the radicalization has developed in Italy and what this radicalization has meant and means for the relationship of forces between the classes.

For this reason I will not intervene on other important points in the international debate (Latin America, Vietnam, etc., about which however I wish to confirm my complete agreement with the international majority), because I wish to contribute to the understanding of the characteristics of the period in which we carry on our political activity, using as a starting point for the contribution the Italian experience, which I think merits serious attention. I have divided my document into four parts. In the first part I will try to present the essential elements of the Italian experience. In the second I will indicate the common characteristics of the class struggle in the various European countries that allow us to talk in terms of Europe. In the third part I will take up the question of the new vanguard with mass influence. In the fourth and last part I will bring up several factors to illustrate my belief that their failure to grasp certain basic truths inevitably leads the comrades of the SWP leadership to serious shortcomings and errors when it comes to building the revolutionary party in the United States.

## 1. Italy during the upsurge of the working class struggles in Europe

From the end of 1966 onwards a series of struggles of university students developed in Italy, struggles still under the control of the "little parliaments" which existed in the universities. (These were sham organizations, fig leaves for the youth federations of the various political parties.) They were purely defensive struggles which nevertheless progressively tended to escape the control of the traditional student organizations. From the late spring of 1967 onwards, with the occupation of the School of Architecture of Venice, the students increasingly took part in direct actions, in mass mobilizations. The content nevertheless remained for many months at the level of defensive demands.

At the same time there was a considerable increase in anti-imperialist demonstrations. It was largely members of the youth federations of the Italian Communist Party, the PSIUP (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity) and the Italian Socialist Party who took part in these mobilizations, and they developed a critical attitude toward the bureaucratic leaderships, above all for their attitude toward Cuba and Che Guevara, for their incapacity to build effective mobilizations in support of Vietnam, for their tail-ending the Soviet Union—albeit with various nuances—in the dispute with China. There was no mass movement: for quite a long time the youth would come to the traditional parties' demonstrations and then separate from the marches, giving rise to more combative and well-defined, even if narrower, mobilizations.

We had, in summary, on the one hand a mass movement in the universities around somewhat backward issues, and on the other hand there was the crystallization of political militants, with an experience in the youth organizations of the bureaucratized parties, capable of intervening in the mobilizations, of carrying out agitational work, of speaking in public—in a word, leaders.

It was the fusion of the mass university movement and these political cadres along with the definitive decline of the "little parliaments" which determined the first turn toward a mass political movement of the students, a movement which took up the basic theme of the crisis of the relationship between university and society and which was characterized by an anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic attitude. Two events of exceptional international importance speeded up this process: the Chinese cultural revolution, the mystique of which seemed a suitable reply to the by now completely discredited Moscow bureaucracy, and the French May events which reaffirmed in Europe the decisive central role of the working class.

The abandonment of the universities was very rapid: the movement's political militants saw the necessity of sending the students in front of the factories as soon as they felt a head-on clash developing between the classes, which could not be resolved in peripheral sectors but only on the decisive ground of the place of production. Parallel to this the mass political movement of the students was confronted with basic political choices and split, with the most dynamic and politicized elements regrouping around various tendencies and hypotheses of intervention: the "groups" were born. Their role in the upsurge of the working class struggles was not a secondary one.

It was these groups which generalized the most significant experiences, popularized the slogans which emerged in this phase and promoted them on a national scale. It was around the groups that the first combative workers gathered who understood the necessity for working class action independent of the government and the ruling parties (including the PSI—Italian Socialist Party), even if they responded to this necessity incorrectly, concluding that it was impossible to work in or with the unions, "the bosses' tool."

But the most important characteristic of the working class struggles, prior to the contract renewals of 1969 and the numerous struggles of that autumn, was the liberation of important sectors of the working class from the bureaucracy's control. From this follow other characteristics: the union followed a strategy of "improving" the workers' conditions and hesitated when faced with the dilemma of rationalizing/reducing the employed work force; the workers began to contest the boss' right to organize production to suit himself. The union put forward its demands in a fragmented, poorly articulated fashion, using the generalization of the struggles only on particular occasions in order to show off their own strength and obtain something more at the negotiating table; the workers rediscovered, or discovered for the first time, forms of struggle which, because of their militancy, were able to involve in action the great majority of employees in each factory, stimulating mobilizations in solidarity, and promoting similar behavior in nearby factories.

The central demand put forward by the militant workers in this phase, imposed first on the union federations and then on the bosses, was for equal pay raises for all, thereby putting the brakes on the progressive fragmentation of the working class. "Equal pay raises for all" was a slogan which proved capable of tightly uniting the fighting front and of winning the enthusiasm of the workers. Other demands around which struggles developed were: reduction of the work week to 40 hours with no loss of pay; abolition of the lowest job classifications; and equality of benefits at the level of white collar workers.

The contract was signed without realizing the gains that were possible because of a clever maneuver by the unions, which, after their initial bewilderment, were able to "ride the tiger." That is, by allowing the workers' combativity and ambition to dissipate factory by factory, the unions regained control of the overall direction of the movement, preventing any real generalization, splitting the vanguard sectors from the less combative elements, and isolating the struggles category by category, sector by sector, region by region. Despite all this it was the most advantageous contract signed by the metal workers since the end of World War II, and many other contracts were modelled after it.

But the struggle did not wear itself out on the contract demands. The workers participated on a vast scale: (a) against the unbearable speed-ups, (b) against unhealthy working conditions, (c) against the linking of wages to production, i.e. against piece-work and all other forms of "incentive work." The struggles against speed-up led the workers in several factories (particularly at the Pirelli factory in Milan) to develop forms of dual power: it was the workers who decided how much was to be produced daily; it was the workers who checked that no work team made more than the established number of items. The struggles against unhealthy work conditions led to important victories at the chemical factories in Portomarghera, where they won a shortened work day, rest periods, and the partial transformation of several shops. The slogan that came out of these struggles: "a factory made to mea-

sure for man, not for profits," was certainly utopian in a capitalist society, but it corresponded to the workers' conscious refusal to passively accept the alienating and inhuman organization of work, and it pointed the way toward a struggle to control the selection of machinery, the mechanism of production and the personnel needed for each particular job phase. Equally utopian were the slogans against incentives, if they are understood as attempts to abolish all material incentives; but in practice the struggle against piecework and for equal bonuses for all, to be incorporated in the basic wage, constituted a moment of unity for the working class that overcame the sectional divisions fostered by piecework. It also meant that for the first time thousands of workers learned a few laws of economics; they learned to "look in the boss' wallet," and to counterpose to the boss' individualistic ideology a united front of struggle.

We need to take a look at the forms through which this struggle developed: rotating strikes,<sup>2</sup> thanks to which the workers lost only one hour's work while disrupting production for an entire day. (After a while, following Fiat's example, the factory management adopted the tactic of locking out the shops preceeding and following the one in which the strike started; however this led the workers to (a) a series of solidarity strikes, and (b) to a more careful study of the overall conditions of the assembly lines and the shops, in order to hit the boss equally hard in spite of his attempts at intimidation: to hit a key shop and thereby bring the whole productive process to a halt, or at the right moment hit where stock had built up, thereby flooding the line, or a thousand other ways of interfering, discovered by studying the factory; impeding an effective counterattack by the bosses and making the lockouts appear to be unjustified from a technical point of view and therefore seem an intimidation and nothing more, provoking new and tougher responses. This experience allowed the workers to considerably increase their technical and administrative knowledge, it made them feel that they more than ever were the real producers, the natural holders of power; through it they proved the uselessness of the bosses and their factory guards.) Another advanced form of struggle was the demonstration inside the factory itself which spread the strike from one shop to another. Often these marches had to confront the factory guards, or they ended up laying siege to the management office. It sometimes happened that the managers were held inside the factory and could only leave to go home after the workers arrested by the police had been released. . . .

The factory assembly, the shop assembly, the picket assembly, became the headquarters from which the struggle was led. It was here that the vanguard tendencies put up their proposals against those of the union bureaucrats. It was a great lesson in workers' democracy.

Numerous groups were formed that brought together the most determined and conscious workers; these were the "rank and file committees." The only thing that prevented a further development of these groups and their centralization on a national level was the sectarianism of certain groups, such as Avanguardia Operaia (Workers Vanguard), which maintained that the committees should become their recruiting grounds, and the adventurism of others, such as Potere Operaio (Workers Power) and later Lotta Continua (The Struggle Continues), which did not understand that these workers had to stay closely linked to their natural base.

But in spite of this, the class tension that developed in 1968-69 was to bear fruit concretely on the organizational level as well. In the thick of the struggle the shop

delegates were born, meeting together in factory councils and coming to represent the struggling workers' most important direct instrument as well as constituting a permanent battle ground between the revolutionary vanguard and the union bureaucrats.

I will not dwell on the political events which took place in the meantime in Italy: the international bourgeois press reported them on more than one occasion. I would like it to be remembered however, that in these political events the working class mobilizations on each occasion played a leading role. One characteristic of the Italian "creeping May" in fact was that there were no great ups and downs: except for a very brief period (summer/autumn of 1970), the working class struggle practically never stopped. In the same period the extreme left played an exceedingly important role: during the worst provocations by the fascists, government, Italian and international secret services, aimed at unleashing a "strategy of tension" against the working class and its organizations, it was the extreme left which took the initiative, bringing tens and tens of thousands of people into the streets, carrying out extremely effective mass counter-information campaigns, definitely contributing to maintaining the level reached by the movement, in order to prevent the relationship of forces being overturned.

Exactly insofar as there did not exist in Italy—and I will discuss this point shortly—a revolutionary Marxist pole (i.e. a section of the Fourth International) sufficiently visible and credible, it was possible for huge Maoist, spontaneist and centrist organizations to develop and to flourish longer than in France, for example. But the fact is that these groups, notwithstanding their aberrant positions, played at crucial moments a positive role of great value, and this (anticipating what I will develop more fully in part 3 of this document) makes me reject one of Mary-Alice's definitions: we cannot under any circumstances define the extreme left groups as our "political opponents."

And here we come to the Italian section. I have no intention of recounting the story of our crisis. I think that has been done with sufficient clarity in the self-criticism that the section made to the International, in Comrade Livio's essay published in the volume *The Leninist Party*, and that its various aspects have been seriously taken up as well in the present pre-congress debate in the Italian section, and that it has been accurately summarized in Comrade Jebrac's document on the axes of the international debate. I refer readers to these texts for the origin of the crisis. As for the section, or what remained of it in 1968-69, we found in the Workers Initiative an instrument through which we could involve in joint activity those radicalizing elements which accepted our method of intervening in the factories while not having, in overall terms, Trotskyist positions. This not only allowed us to survive in spite of a vast wave of anti-Leninism and anti-Trotskyism, but also allowed a part of these comrades to mature, enabling us to win them to our general positions and to form, along with them, an initial nucleus which could take on the difficult task of reconstructing the section at a time when in the heat of the struggle it was the other groups, given the absolutely unequal relationship of forces, which attracted the greatest number of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and anti-bureaucratic workers and students. It is true that this initial nucleus was not yet enough to turn around the relationship of forces and that we have only been able to further develop our work, to begin to enter the student sectors, to develop our first campaigns on a national level, at

the price of great efforts, often committing errors due to the fact that in the crisis we lost the majority of our leadership and therefore found ourselves with an executive which could only develop in the course of this very experience, with all the limitations of empiricism and the waverings which it naturally had to go through. However, we have made considerable progress. The pre-congress debate going on in the section is highlighting the errors and the delays that we had even in the phase of reconstruction, but today we can say with certainty that we have an undeniable potential for intervening, that on the whole the militants have developed well politically, that we can look at the very serious tasks of the period ahead of us if not with optimism at least with the certainty that we have good cards in our hand. The central point of our congress—which I believe should be followed carefully by the other sections of the International, especially those who do not seem to have recognized the importance of the class struggle in Italy—is exactly how to realize this potential, how to prepare our qualitative leap from "propaganda group to organization in the process of implantation in the working class."

But it is just here that the question underlying the criticisms of the international minority comrades arises: isn't it a false objective, isn't it the purest utopianism, to maintain that we can implant ourselves in the European working class in this phase? And isn't it mistaken to look at the working class as a "European" phenomenon when so many differences and peculiarities exist from country to country?

## 2. A conflict on a continental scale

If we look at the strikes in Europe during the late 60s and the early 70s, it may seem that they present too many differences to be considered under a unified scheme: the duration of the mobilizations, the actual repercussions on production, the level of insubordination to the rules in the factory, to the government, to the unions . . . a wide range of nuances. If, however, we carry out a closer analysis we see an initial unifying element: the strikes in Europe are all characterized by a rejection of the working conditions imposed by capitalist technological development and at the same time respond to the attempts at subordinating the workers to the necessity of exactly foreseeing the cost of the labor force (incomes policy).

A common characteristic, which created a particular "atmosphere" during 1968-70, is the ability of the most advanced phases of struggle to stimulate other struggles: the workers in a series of factories tended to emulate the struggles in the leading factories (this phenomenon was even more striking in the Scandinavian countries, where the struggles in Sweden had an immediate effect in Denmark); and, once the result was achieved the workers did not feel at all satisfied, setting off again at ever shorter intervals, proposing objectives which corresponded to the needs of the working masses.

Normally these objectives were extremely concrete (except in isolated cases where the demagogy of the spontaneists involved sectors of the workers in abstract and utopian demands): wage raises in round figures and not in percentages (exception: the Limburg strikes. It must be said however, that for months and months the unions had fought around the demand for a 15 percent increase, and that it too at that point seemed a very concrete objective); extremely precise demands tending to discourage piecework or to abolish it; detailed demands around speed-ups, around working conditions, around health factors.

Generally speaking the workers did not maintain that their objectives could in any way constitute the "basis for negotiations": they were felt to be non-negotiable objectives that were to be attained in full, at the cost of sharpening and making more resolute the forms of struggle.

Almost everywhere the strikes either were directly set off by the workers going beyond or against the wishes of the union bureaucracy, or they were managed by the workers committees which bypassed the traditional union structures, or dualism arose between the workers committees and the structures in the hands of the bureaucrats, a dualism which then had to be resolved, with varying outcomes, in the rank and file assemblies. The committees were limited by their localism: in the majority of cases when struggles on a national scale came up, the union apparatus got the upper hand thanks to its centralization.

As Livio correctly indicated at the European Workers Convention in Turin, the workers committees were not in themselves an embryo of revolutionary tendencies in the unions, nor of soviets, nor of the party. Rather, given the dramatic lack of a revolutionary leadership, and consequently unable to confront the ruling class on a variety of fronts, the committees had to carry out (partially and discontinuously) all three of these functions: sometimes as substitutes for union structures (where the old structures no longer functioned or where they did not fulfill the needs of the struggling ranks), other times as a place where the various revolutionary tendencies confronted each other (and usually the debate was not over small details but about fundamental questions, on the perspectives for struggle, on strategy), and finally as a meeting place for worker cadres looking for comprehensive solutions to their anti-capitalist needs, who therefore tended to declare themselves "political groups," that is, "rank and file cells" of a hypothetical party being formed from the ranks. This last tendency was encouraged by the spontaneist groups who denied the value of an "external" vanguard and of scientific Marxism.

Where they came into being the committees were in great part formed of not yet unionized workers, or of workers who had left the unions because of their bureaucratism. Once the peak of the struggle had passed, numerous workers joined the unions for the first time or rejoined them. It was in this way that they expressed their need for organization, and in joining or rejoining the bureaucratic organizations with a militant attitude they brought into them a part of that conflict which had developed previously between the committees and the union apparatus. Thus a new dialectic opened up which provided fertile ground for the work of revolutionaries trying to crystallize a left tendency in the unions.

But let us take a look at a specific sector of this mass of radicalized workers: the delegates. In northern Europe these are instruments won by the working class in the course of previous historical waves of struggle (the English shop stewards, for example, came out of the 1914-15 strikes). As time went on their function became merely routine, and they were absorbed by the union apparatus to the point where they became instruments of control over the working class (e.g. the tillismaend in Denmark). The Italian delegates, on the other hand, came out of this present phase of struggle and therefore have quite a different kind of combativity. There are also great differences as regards the method of representation: in some countries delegates are representatives of a craft (carpenters, electricians, fitters and turners, etc.), in others they

represent a shop, in others a "homogeneous work group." Everywhere, however, the delegate represents a relatively small number of workers, and the worker-delegate ratio is much lower than between the total number of workers and the members of the old shop stewards commission. It is because of this that the delegate is much more sensitive to the moods of the working class, to the requests of the workers *who know him personally and work alongside him*. And this is why the delegate, even where his role had declined or become that of a watchdog, tended to regain a place at the heart of every important wave of working class struggle: the English shop stewards, the Danish tillismaend, the German vertrauensleute are all different but very indicative examples of this tendency toward rehabilitation of the delegates as instruments of workers democracy.

At the convention for a Red Europe in Brussels, I proposed the above analysis of the phenomenon of the delegates and the following demands to be generalized in our intervention, in my report to the workers' commission:

"The worker delegate is never completely in the hands of the bureaucracy; certainly there are no antidotes to the bureaucracy's attempts to control him, but we should regard the delegate *as an area of conflict* between the reformist moderation of the unions and the revolutionary impetus unleashed by a wave of class struggle, between the bureaucracy on the one hand and the revolutionary vanguard on the other.

"Revolutionary militants should demand a delegate selected according to *homogeneous work units*, not elected from a slate, not nominated from above, not selected on the basis of his affiliation with any specific union, and revocable without any special formality at any moment; they should oppose any attempts to impose as delegates the union bureaucrats' right-hand men. But at the same time the revolutionaries should realize that the presence of a nucleus of revolutionary workers in the delegates' council (factory council) is absolutely indispensable if this structure is to become a decisive one during the struggle, and is not to be won over by the bureaucracy when the struggle slackens. The delegates' council has the potential of becoming a soviet-type structure at the height of the confrontation and an instrument of power in the transition period, but this cannot happen either if the lack of a revolutionary nucleus lets it become an appendix of the bureaucratized union structure, or if it refuses to carry out even elementary union functions where the traditional union structures are not adequate, so as to gain the confidence of the workers who recognize its leading role. The council must base itself on the shop assemblies, not so much, or not only, to hear the workers' opinions and to carry them out (which in slack periods in the movement would necessarily lead to a moderate, if not opportunist council), but to encourage debate, generalize the awareness of the problems of the entire factory and of other factories, in order to generate a discussion of the condition of the working class *inside and outside* the factory; the councils should be structured on a national scale, they should establish international connections, and they should set up executive bodies (these too, of course, to be revocable without any particular formality).

"Struggling for this type of delegate and of delegates' council, not in the abstract but through demonstrating its concrete usefulness in the living struggle against the bosses and the government, the revolutionary militants will be able to implant themselves in strong positions in

the working class, to develop close relationships with the "natural leaders" of the class in the shops and on the assembly lines, to play a decisive role as a revolutionary nucleus which, thanks to its determination and spirit of sacrifice, is able to lead and unify the class around a revolutionary program."

And here already we are beginning to shed light on the question of what is meant in Western Europe by "workers vanguard." But I will have more to say on this further on. I would like to emphasize that the European strikes showed an increasing homogeneity in the forms of struggle, and above all I would like to point out that their ability to stimulate further struggles, the concreteness of the objectives, the determination to win them, the rise of strike committees and rank and file committees, the revitalization of the old delegates or the explosive function of new layers of "natural leaders" of the struggles — these tough and incisive forms of struggle *are not elements characteristic only of the 1968-70 period but arise continually in the new upsurges and therefore appear as specific characteristics of the working class struggle in our epoch.* I would also like to add two further observations: (a) very frequently during the demonstrations the workers break the "rules" of the factory, which often coincide with the laws of bourgeois society, giving rise to episodes of "mass violence" which the masses recognize as absolutely legitimate; these create an atmosphere which allows episodes of "vanguard violence" to be rapidly assimilated as well, when their objective is to stimulate the workers' reaction against particularly hated phenomena such as the use of strikebreaking gangs by the bosses, the use of fascists against immigrants, etc.; (b) although the characteristics indicated above are seen even in the struggles declared by the unions, the periods of greatest working class upsurge are distinguished by the multiplication of spontaneous strikes or by the spontaneous lengthening or toughening of the official strikes, which means that the radicalization is a molecular and uncontrollable phenomenon which explodes suddenly, set off by various specific detonators, and that it is not possible to 100 percent "invent" a class upsurge. The fundamental things for revolutionaries are to be implanted solidly in the working class, to understand in time when the radicalization is about to reach its saturation point, to be able to act as effective elements in the generalization of the pilot experiences, and to know the right moment in which to put forward slogans that advance the movement and give it an overall anticapitalist character.

For differing reasons there can be impetuous new upsurges of the working class within a fairly short period in at least France, Italy, Great Britain, and Spain; and the recent struggles in the Federal Republic of Germany can be placed in the context of intensifying struggle on a continental scale. Comrade Mary-Alice asserts that the most that can occur anywhere are mobilizations of the size and depth of May '68 in France. And does she think that would be a small thing? Either she has not understood the exceptional, decisive, meaning of the French May not only for Western Europe but for the working class on an international level, or else the misunderstanding is even deeper. And I suspect the latter, although I do not exclude the former possibility: Mary-Alice is too insistent in her harping on the "decisive" conflicts foreseen in the IEC majority text within the next 4-5 years!

Let us try to be clear: we maintain that within this "phase" the proletariat will have to succeed in winning significant revolutionary victories in Western Europe or it will experience defeats of historic scope. Comrade Mary-

Alice seems to identify the expression "phase" with the 4-5 year time limit. I interpret the IEC majority document in quite a different way. I think that for a definition of the present phase we have to turn to Comrade Ernest Mandel's analysis that international capital has entered a period of general recession, and that within this period (20-25 years) there will certainly be those cyclical fluctuations which we know well, but that a generalized expansion of international capital will no longer be possible, competition will be intensified, the contradictions will become ever more explosive. This is the "phase" which the IEC majority document is talking about. Within this "phase" a revolutionary leap will be necessary, otherwise international capital will resort to the most savage crushing of the workers movement in order to build up its margins of profit again. But within this "phase" there will be shorter time limits. The class conflict will intensify and there will be general confrontations *decisive in terms of determining the relationship of forces.* These conflicts will be decisive also in terms of the implantation of revolutionaries in the working class, in terms of their capacity to lead increasingly important struggles, in terms of building the revolutionary party *in the thick of battle.* "New Mays" would be decisive in this context, in that they would deal tremendous blows to the already ramshackle state machinery of the European bourgeoisie, they would lead to a further qualitative leap in class consciousness, and they would advance to an unprecedented extent the hold of revolutionary Marxism on the working class vanguard.

### 3. The new vanguard

Here, of course, the problem is posed of the relationship between the vanguard and the present revolutionary nuclei, in terms of building the party. From reading Mary-Alice's document, but even more from reading the contributions of supporters of the SWP majority in their recent preconvention discussion, one gets the distinct feeling that the Americans comrades believe it possible to build the revolutionary party "in a laboratory." Their argument is based on the promotion of mass actions (the characteristic of this period, however, is continual *spontaneous* upsurges of the masses, particularly the working masses!) and on recruitment and education. But who are you going to recruit, in Europe, from a movement involving tens of thousands of workers and students, if you don't know how to be tightly linked to that movement, if you don't put forward slogans which indicate the logical outcome of the struggle's anticapitalist dynamic, if you cannot win hegemony within the very wide layer which in fact leads the mobilizations? And who will you educate, and where will you educate them, outside of that movement? In cadre schools? In order to have so many fine "cadres" to hang on the wall or to exhibit, to show how beautiful and saturated with Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism they are? Or are political cadres educated by that increase in consciousness which leads the "natural leaders" of the struggle to an understanding of the context of those struggles, the perspectives deriving from the various formulations of the conflict, and therefore the necessity of assimilating the lessons of the history of the working class movement and carrying them further — and, I repeat, this is an unavoidable *necessity* to the degree that you lead a struggle? This can *also* be done in cadre schools, but it is done *above all* by making the *need* for theory arise from the problems that these militants have to resolve in the living struggle.

The persistence and the scope of the working class upsurge in Western Europe is such that marginal or peri-

pheral sectors in motion refer to it and derive encouragement and ideas from it. The task of revolutionaries who work in these sectors cannot be one of inventing "transitional programs" for each sector. The basic characteristic of a transitional demand is not just that it teaches the necessity of a decisive battle with the capitalist state, through a process of development which may start from the lowest levels of consciousness; a fundamental characteristic is also that, in order to carry out this objective, specific instruments of dual power have to be created. And here I would like to quote what Comrade Francois Vercaemmen related in an interview in *Bandiera Rossa* on the student movement: "In some universities a completely favorable relationship of forces was achieved in certain periods, such as in Berlin, and in some universities in Japan a real "student power" was created; but in contrast to what happened in the factories, this did not bring about a comprehensive challenge to the capitalist system. Student "power" must of necessity be linked to workers' power, and it is for this reason that we refer to the student sector as a *second front* not a strategic vanguard.

Therefore "truly transitional slogans" exist only for the industrial workers! The other sectors of society are incapable of creating a decisive counterweight to the central power of the bourgeoisie! The process, however, should be analyzed thoroughly: insofar as the process of industrialization involves ever broader layers of society, insofar as students are ever more massively channelled into production, and the same thing is happening to national minorities and to women, it is to this extent that we need to know how to use this general phenomenon as a lever, understanding that students, national minorities and women are increasingly sensitive to the central conflict between the classes and that their mobilizations can be built not around "transitional demands" but around demands which *coincide with workers' demands*, and within the framework of a transitional program which is centered on the working class struggles. A rather different analysis, it seems to me, from the "combined revolution" so dear to the comrades of the SWP majority, which seems a variation on the Maoist theory of the "country encircling the city." But it is the city—that is, the working class—which is the real heart of the revolutionary process.

And this is the reason why, in a period of profound instability and acute class conflict, the center of revolutionary activity must not be propaganda around the transitional program but agitation around mobilizations, slogans and objectives which give the movement a comprehensive anticapitalist character. It is surprising, and a big laughable, when Comrade Mary-Alice comes and tells us that we ought to use a whole series of transitional slogans in our political action, such as opening the books, the two sliding scales, etc. But what does she think we have been doing all this time? What has been the axis of intervention for the European sections in recent years if not just that? In Italy we have even managed to get our proposals on the sliding wage scale accepted by a majority of advanced workers in several factory councils! That is still not much; obviously we have not yet been able to mobilize the majority of the working class or its more important parts around this goal; but to "advise us" to agitate around this theme means not to have ever read either our newspaper or our documents and not to have the slightest knowledge of our section's activity. The same thing can be said for the Belgian, Swiss, French sections, etc., and for the En Marcha faction of the Spanish Liga.

There are two specific points in Comrade Mary-Alice's

proposals with which one cannot agree: on the transitional value of the theme of civil liberties and on the need to indicate how capitalism (or the bourgeois state) should carry out investments. As far as civil liberties are concerned, we believe that the battle to maintain them and extend them is important, above all where there exists already or where there is an attempt to bring about a form of "strong state"; but we are dealing with battles which simply protect the ability of the working class and its vanguard to function politically, they are not transitional demands and they can easily be put forward by radicalized sectors of the petty bourgeoisie or by the reformists, who in fact make a good deal of noise about them. The same petty bourgeois and reformist elements are also involved in pointing out the "social" investments that capitalism should carry out. We do not think we should intervene here, we maintain that it would be absolutely miseducating, a never-ending source of reformist illusions, to tell the working class that it should play a positive role in management decisions of capitalist society. Workers control and co-management are, for us, mutually exclusive terms.

Now that we have seen what we mean by priority of intervention in the working class, and around which themes this intervention should take place, and how the mobilizations of the marginal and peripheral sectors should refer to it, let us try to define what is meant by "vanguard." Perhaps Comrade Mary-Alice is right in saying that this term has been used with a variety of meanings; if it were only a question of vocabulary, it would be easy to get rid of the misunderstanding and reach agreement. I do not, however, believe that this is the case. The difference in my opinion is a basic one. But let us proceed in an orderly fashion and define the vanguard.

In the periods of greatest mobilization, the workers' participation in the struggle is practically total in the factories, and in the universities and schools the majority of the students are involved, although never totally. Between one wave and another, however, partial mobilizations take place, around particular demands, around general political questions, around anti-imperialist and anti-repression issues, etc. We see that on these occasions the whole of the student and working mass is not mobilized but rather politicized layers of tens of thousands of individuals: this is what is called at times, in a broad sense, the "vanguard," which it would probably be more correct to call "radicalized milieu with a solid grasp of the characteristics of class conflict in the present period."

Within this broad milieu there exists a particular layer which plays a very important role in the forms and rhythms of the mobilizations. Or rather, several layers exist. Comrade Mandel has described the molecular and variegated process of growth of class consciousness very well, and I refer here to his analysis. Let us take that layer which Ernest has defined as the layer of "natural leaders" of the class. We find a similar layer among the students and in the other radicalized sectors: we are dealing with militants (here as well there are thousands and thousands) who take the initiative in organizing the struggles, who put forward the slogans, who invent or re-discover forms of struggle. They are the pole of attraction for the wider radicalized milieu and, in periods of general mobilization, for the whole movement: this, strictly speaking, is the "vanguard." This is the necessary link by which the revolutionary program of the revolutionary party transforms an upsurge of struggles into a revolutionary upsurge. Winning the hegemony in *this* sector is crucial for us.

Now we have to see *how* we can win this hegemony. I believe the political line of the document of the IEC majority clearly shows us how we should function. I would like to emphasize here the type of dialectic we can and must establish with our intervention: the vanguard element (that is, the organic leader of the class or of the marginal/peripheral sector, the "natural leader") is tightly linked to his own surroundings and to the specific problems he is faced with, often in a sectoral or localistic way. In order to attract him we have to demonstrate *in practice* the effectiveness of our program, *including* its effectiveness in solving his particular problems. Comrade Frank has already explained that the needs of the vanguard today are the needs of the class. This is true, and one can continue along the line of this observation: we have to "respond" to the needs of the vanguard, not "submit" to them; that is, we must show the vanguard that these needs can only be fulfilled through mobilizations which have a general anticapitalist content, even if they begin around minimal demands. That is, in order to win the vanguard, we have to know how to direct ourselves toward the masses, or at least to their broad radicalized layer; we have to know how to lead the struggles or at least how to point out the objectives which should be at the center of the struggles in that particular moment and given that particular relationship of forces. This is the only way the vanguard will come to see us as a credible point of reference, and only in this way will it be possible to "respond" to the needs of the vanguard and advance them to a qualitatively new stage by placing these needs within a more complete and organic framework; thus we can force the vanguard to recognize, as I mentioned before, the "need" for a deeper knowledge of theory and for mastering the scientific instruments of revolutionary Marxism.

A big obstacle to our progress in this direction comes from the type of conditioning which the working class and all the social layers (more or less radicalized), and even the vanguard undergo: a conditioning induced by the characteristic bourgeois institutions (school, family, mass media, etc.), a conditioning induced by the social-democratic and/or stalinist leaderships, a conditioning induced by the various tendencies of today's extreme left.

We should never underestimate the persistence of bourgeois ideology or the devastation wrought by Social-Democracy and Stalinism; these phenomena continue to have a certain weight (and we will see shortly that they have a particularly strong impact on the student radicalization, although they are not without influence on the working class itself); however we have said that an important characteristic of the period is a tendency to build the struggles as general anticapitalist actions, which is a tendency to break with the Social-Democratic and Stalinist leaderships. Let us therefore concentrate our attention on the third phenomenon: the conditioning induced by the various tendencies of the extreme left.

I have already rejected the idea of defining these elements as our "political opponents." Let us see why.

In the first place, we cannot equate the radicalization with the extreme left or the vanguard with the extreme left.

The extreme left is made up of vanguard cadres (but only a small part of the vanguard is in it) and of radicalized militants (but the radicalization is a much more vast phenomenon); the extreme left is made up of vanguard cadres who have posed the problem of building the revolutionary party and of radicalized militants who have posed the problem of militancy in a revolutionary party. Here the two other factors mentioned come into

play: Social-Democratic and/or Stalinist betrayal has prevented these layers from undergoing the process of radicalization in contact with revolutionary Marxism; this has left them defenseless against the penetration of bourgeois ideology. For these reasons we have seen the extreme left rediscover in a confused way, one after another, the various tendencies which have characterized the history of the working class movement (from anarchism to Stalinism itself, in "left" garb), and seen it respond to typically petty bourgeois impulses which give it the characteristics of idealism, individualism, inconsistency, impatience, and lack of discipline.

Lacking the leadership of a revolutionary pole, the extreme left will continually be tempted by spontaneism. At the same time the hegemony of the bureaucracy over the working class, even if undermined and weakened, will push the extreme left toward positions of accommodation to the bureaucracy (for example, the extreme left's infatuation with the so-called "left-wings" of the union bureaucracies). The Sino-Soviet split and the way the Soviet Union has been discredited among broad layers promote a greater sympathy for China and an adaptation to the foreign and domestic policies which China has developed, flavored with the rationalizations which were typical of the pro-Soviet Communist parties. These are contradictory influences which compete with each other or mesh together, appearing in different combinations from place to place, from period to period.

We have to conduct a tough battle against the "theoretical" products of this confusion. But can we consider the extreme left as a whole the inconsolable orphan of anarchism, Bordighism, revisionism, Stalinism? Can we regard the militants and the cadres of the extreme left as opponents to be fought against?

Certainly not. We have to regard them as an important mass of militants to be won over. They represent an enormous wasted potential which we have to restore to Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism. They are an obstacle to building the revolutionary party, which we have to transform into a powerful lever contributing to its construction.

How? With an implacable theoretical battle, certainly, but that is not enough.

The militant vanguard in the various groups of the extreme left, and also the radicalized militants who make up the rank and file, learn above all from experience and from facts. Here too, it is crucial for us to demonstrate concretely that we have a program and that we *know how to carry it out in the course of struggle*. To the extent that we are able to implant ourselves in the movement and win its natural leaders we increase our chances of winning the battle within the extreme left, and to the extent that we make headway in this battle we win decisive new militants and are able to play a stronger role in the movement. Of course, because of the centrality of the working class in the current conflict, our hold on the extreme left will be all the stronger if our strength lies more in the working class than in the marginal/peripheral sectors.

This is the tactic that Comrade Mary-Alice seems not to have understood.

#### 4. For a Leninist International

At this point I think it necessary to summarize the elements of incomprehension which emerge from Comrade Mary-Alice's text and from the preconvention discussion in the SWP:

a) they do not entirely grasp the nature of this period as a period of progressive difficulties for international



capitalism, of impetuous working class upsurges, of a dramatic sharpening of class conflict;

b) they do not confront directly, in all its implications, the phenomenon of the permanent radicalization of considerable layers of the working class and the appearance of a broad vanguard playing a decisive role in this radicalization; they don't draw out the necessary connections between the growth in working class consciousness and the radicalization and appearance of vanguards in marginal or peripheral sectors; they do not understand that only the systematic and not simply propagandistic presence of revolutionary Marxists (i.e. the sections of the Fourth International) within the movement can transform the needs of the vanguard into a new growth in class consciousness;

c) they conceive of party building as promoting sectoral campaigns, recruiting and "educating," in such a way as to be completely outside the dynamic outlined in the preceding point;

d) a schematic interpretation of the transitional program breaks up the SWP's intervention into general propaganda on the one hand and advancing minimal and even reformist slogans (such as slogans about choosing investments) on the other hand. At the same time they reveal an inability to understand the present possibility of putting into practice a transitional approach which revolves around workers' struggles and is capable of giving rise to instruments of workers' control and elements of dual power;

e) they refuse to derive the program of intervention from a combination of analysis of the period with short-to-medium-term projections; this leads inevitably to a tail-ending position in regard to the mass movements. This position is all the worse when the correct relationship between the working class and marginal or peripheral sectors is not understood, and when a theory of "combined revolution" is developed without a precise center of polarization in the working class.

If the European sections accepted Comrade Mary-Alice's suggestings and indications, we would be reduced to Bourdighist sects or, at best, Healyite sects. But we should ask ourselves: in today's situation, are these fundamental lines proposed by the Socialist Workers Party justified at least in the United States? It is legitimate to harbor some doubts in this respect.

In the United States for some time now signs of mobilization and radicalization have been appearing which have some elements in common with the upsurge of struggles in Europe: there have been strikes against speed-ups and against the "rationalization" of employees (at General Motors in Lordstown, for example), struggles around working conditions (oil workers), against the wage freeze (longshoremen), decisive responses to anti-strike legislation (march of 30,000 construction workers in Philadelphia, general strike in Pennsylvania), strikes for "30 hours work with 40 hours pay" which could be very fertile ground for the issue of the sliding scale of hours, wildcat strikes which indicate an impatience with the union bureaucracy. They are only symptoms, and they could remain only that. However we have to see what possibilities for the development of movements of this kind arise out of the more general socioeconomic context of the United States.

The American situation is characterized by an unprecedented increase in prices (which exposes the government slogan of "wage and price control" as in actuality simply a wage freeze) and by an increase in unemployment. The third spectrum facing the American ruling class is the scarcity of fuel for industrial and domestic use and for

automobiles; although Nixon's September 8 proposal to relax the standards forbidding the use of certain poisonous and polluting fuels created an "ecological" uproar, although the administration's request to set aside the Watergate scandal in order to allow the government to concentrate on economic problems received short shrift (the *New York Times* warned: "we won't exchange justice for a barrel of gas"), nevertheless it seems clear that neither the use of polluting fuels, nor the government's greater concentration on economic themes, nor civilian use of the Elk Hills refinery, up to now military property, will be able to prevent a massive importation of crude oil, which will mean a further jump in all industrial prices and an acceleration of inflation.

The economic chaos leads furthermore to an increasing dissatisfaction on the part of the union ranks and the appearance of more radical local committees, made up of middle cadres who are opposed to the collaborationist policies of the AFL-CIO big-shots. The radicalization around the working class and its problems is bound to grow among the racial minorities, while the student and women's movement seem to be marking time and showing symptoms of crisis.

If we take a look at the SWP's convention (I refer to Andy Rose's article in the *Militant* of August 31), we see that it projected a call for the unions to mobilize their bargaining power in order to win a sliding wage scale (but it says "contract by contract," whereas it is necessary to wage a general and interindustry fight for this objective, with equal wage increases for all, workers' control of the establishment of prices in the factories, control of retail prices by workers' and consumers' committees, etc.), an end to the wage freeze, shortening the work week with no loss in pay, a struggle against unemployment and military spending. Generally they are good slogans. But is it possible to conceive of them exclusively as an appeal to and within the unions?

Of course one should be a bit cautious in foreseeing events: it is not certain that we will see a general upsurge in working class struggles in the United States in the near future; however it must be added that this upsurge is more likely now than in past years and that the warning symptoms continue to multiply. We should ask ourselves therefore what forms this radicalization might take. Given the repressive role played by the American unions, and given the fact that it is rather improbable that they can be revitalized without a fight or in the near future, we should anticipate that an upsurge of working class struggles in the United States as well will at a certain point break from the control of the bureaucrats, that is, there will be a largely spontaneous phase. Even if we were already a full-blown revolutionary party solidly implanted in the working class, we would have to reckon with the negative by-products of working class spontaneity (anti-unionism, spontaneist theories, forms of anarcho-syndicalism); and these tendencies will make their presence felt even more negatively if we haven't yet been able to establish a sufficient presence in the factories, if we do not have an impact on the process right from its first developments, in order to give it, within the limits of possibility, less the character of simple rebelliousness and more political maturity. We also have to reckon with the fact that a spontaneous wave will give new life and influence to all those spontaneist and extremist tendencies that continue to represent a significant sector of the American extreme left, however much they are in difficulties at the present moment. Furthermore the Communist Party is sufficiently flexible and unprincipled (as it has shown on many occasions, not the last of which is its policy in regard to the

Black Panther Party) to profit from the movement and appear as an important point of reference, given also its ties with the international center of the Stalinist current which unfortunately still controls the majority of the workers' movement.

Comrades who go to cadre school and learn a great deal about the Teamsters' strike at the end of the thirties but who understand very little about the working class upsurge in Europe in the seventies, comrades who have a propagandistic view of the transitional program and a minimalist practice in mobilizations, risk finding themselves in great difficulties.

In the issue of the *Militant* quoted above, there is an article illustrating the "SWP's plans for expansion." There we find the launching of a big campaign for donations, subscriptions and circulation of the press, a renewed involvement in the election campaigns, and the decision to fully exploit the Watergate case for the struggle in defense of political rights and civil liberties. In the SWP's "plans" there is no practical utilization of transitional issues (apart from propagandizing them in the unions) for the purpose of implanting the party in the working class!

This is extremely dangerous. We in Italy know very well how hard it is to pick oneself up after missing an appointment with a great proletarian upsurge. The building of the International in Europe was greatly handicapped by the collapse of the Italian section in 1968. Do we realize what a collapse of the SWP, faced with an impetuous upsurge of the class struggle in the heart of international capitalism, would mean for the entire International?

For this reason, it is the duty of the world congress and of the bodies of the International to express their opinions on the policies of the SWP. Comrade Joe Hansen in his contribution on the differences in method seems to underestimate the necessity for the International to be above all an *effective instrument* in the class struggle against the world capitalist and imperialist system. What does it mean to assert that what counts is not the resort to democratic centralism but political agreement, loyalty to principles, fraternal collaboration, good will? An organization which has these qualities is probably an ideal organization but it has never existed and never will exist. The broadest and most thorough discussion before decisions and the most rigorous and militant enactment of these decisions once they are made—that is, Leninist democratic centralism—is the only guarantee of effectiveness for a revolutionary organization.

It is not at all a matter of the center's "special punitive powers" with regard to the sections; it is a matter of guaranteeing ourselves an adequate and timely impact on the class struggle, which no "federation" of groups can ever guarantee, even if they refer to the same fundamental texts and to the same principles. And only in this way, with the central bodies of the International having a real leadership responsibility, will we get what Comrade Joe is asking for, that is, help "in developing the national leaderships." In fact, around what can they develop, if not through the elaboration and application of the general line of our organization?

It is true that centralization is most effective when our interventions into various situations have at least a few fundamental characteristics in common, making it possible for us to work together on initiatives on an international scale. The specific needs of situations which vary greatly among themselves of course give preponderant weight to the comrades right on the front lines and inevitably produce concessions to tendencies that arise from specific situations. A systematic widening and deepening of the discussion, an appeal to the characteristic and decisive

elements on an international level, can lessen these tendencies but can never eliminate them completely. We therefore have to realize that not even democratic centralism gives us the mathematical certainty that we are fighting the right battle everywhere and at all times. But the federalist alternative is much more backward, it goes against the very concept of permanent revolution, it avoids a confrontation with the dynamic of combined development; in fact it is somewhat analogous to the concept of "combined revolution," which portrays the parallel and independent upsurge of different sectors without seeing the correlations and interactions. Reinforcing the center and its functions is no panacea, but at least it allows us to intervene in a way that minimizes the disadvantages of the uneven development of the class struggle among the three sectors of the world revolution and within each of the sectors.

Obviously the place where we can today make substantial progress toward an effective centralized leadership, with minimal margins of error, is in Western Europe itself.

This was discussed a great deal at the summer cadre school of the Italian section. Comrade Ernest, participating in the discussion, emphasized that the problem of a central leadership on the European level required the direct involvement of the national leaders, who would therefore have to be taken away from their work in their own sections, and that this was an initial fundamental obstacle which could only be resolved insofar as a broad leadership group of the International was consolidated in Europe. At the same time he indicated concrete tasks on which systematic work could begin: the creation of a permanent continent-wide commission working toward centralizing our intervention at least in the industries of automobile, steel, chemicals, glass, construction and transport, and above all on standardizing our slogans around international trusts; the establishment, on the basis of an overall strengthening of the center of the International, of a permanent conference body of the Political Committees of the European sections, which has already practically become an institution; the transformation of *Quatrieme Internationale* into a real journal of the International and not just of the French section, the issuing of a monthly or fortnightly bulletin with all the most important documents and articles of the European sections.

This is a good deal, and it could lead to substantial progress in our task of simultaneously building the European sections. And it is above all from this point of view that we must reject the minority's criticism of a program "valid for a whole continent": if we understand that the decisive element, today, is the working class radicalization, if we see the common characteristics emerging from a vast range of different struggles, if we can recognize the consistent tendency toward a similarity in the radicalizations, even if the timing varies from one place to another, then we can intervene in a centralized and at the same time flexible way, so that we become, directly, a channel for combining uneven development, a point of reference for the marginal or peripheral radicalized sectors, a "response" to the needs of the vanguard.

September 15, 1973

1. This is the name given to the procedure of the courts, the police, and the government that, in order to put the blame for the December 12, 1969, massacre of the anarchist Valpreda concealed the evidence pointing to the fascists who instigated and perpetrated the crime.

2. For example, the strike starts in the body works, moves to the motor works and then to the foundry, and so on.

# Nationalism and Revolution in Iran

By Ahmad Heydari and Cyrus Paydar

## Introductory Note

Iranian Trotskyists have held extensive discussion on the national question. In view of the aggressive posture that the shah of Iran is assuming against the Arab revolution the present discussion has added importance for us. This document reflects the views of the majority of Iranian Trotskyists. Its first part is a brief analysis of the revolutionary history of Iran. The Marxist analysis of the revolutionary history of Iran is the unique contribution of the Iranian Trotskyist movement. There has been no such attempt by any other tendency in the Iranian workers movement. The contribution on the national question by Comrade Azar Najmi offers a different view, which is held by a very small minority of Iranian Trotskyists.

## Part I. The Lessons of the Revolutionary History of Iran

Iran is a multinational country composed mainly of Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Baluchis, Kurds, and Persians. The largest nationality is Persian, then, in the order of size, come the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds. Although the Persians represent only about 40 percent of the total population in Iran, they dominate the other nationalities. Persian is the official language of the country, and the shah's regime does not permit the other nationalities to teach their languages in their schools. These oppressed nationalities are denied self-determination and their cultural and economic development is stifled.

The people of Iran are oppressed by the imperialist powers. In fact, the shah was brought back to power as an absolute dictator through a CIA-engineered coup in 1953. His client state has been used for the imperialist domination of the country.

At the same time the shah is an agent for the imperialist domination of the oil-rich Arab Gulf region. He has already occupied three Arab islands in the Arab Gulf and is building up a strong military force to counter not only the Iranian revolution, but to move further against the Arab revolution. It is well known that he has troops in Oman fighting against the Dhofar revolutionists. The shah is also in collusion with the bourgeois leaders of Pakistan in their efforts to suppress the Baluchis, a nationality which lives in both Iran and Pakistan. In fact, all of Iran's oppressed nationalities have links with their people who live beyond the boundaries of the country.

The national question is undoubtedly of crucial importance to the Iranian proletariat in this struggle for the socialist revolution. This proletariat suffers from varying forms—and in different degrees—of national oppression. Its most exploited layers are also the most nationally oppressed. Building a Leninist combat party that can lead the proletariat to power in Iran requires a clear understanding of the role of nationalism in class struggle.

In the first part of this contribution we present the origins of the nationalisms in Iran and the role that they played in the two revolutions the country witnessed in the twentieth century. The first revolution came after the 1905 workers revolution in Russia. The second took place as an outgrowth of the crisis imposed by the Second

World War. Although assuming different forms during each revolution, the nationalism of the oppressed helped promote revolutionary developments, reflected the class demands of the workers, and illustrated the theory of permanent revolution for Iran.

In the second part of the contribution we take up a few of the points raised in the present discussion in the International.

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Iranian nationalism arose in the late nineteenth century as a direct response to the plunder of the country by foreign capitalist powers, particularly Britain and Russia. These European countries were able to obtain economic concessions from the shah, and, in return, gave him nominal sums, which mainly went to keep up the luxurious Persian court.

Lord Curzon, before he became the Viceroy of India, said of one of these concessions that: "When published to the world, it was found to contain the most complete and extraordinary surrender of the entire industrial resources of a kingdom into foreign hands that has probably ever been dreamed of, much less accomplished, in history." In fact, this particular concession was cancelled under pressure from both inside and outside the country.

In 1890, when the shah granted the concession and exclusive right to buy and sell tobacco to a British capitalist, a mass movement arose, demanding cancellation of the concession. This single-issue movement was led by the Islamic *ulema* (clergy) and the merchants. Mass demonstrations and confrontations with the army culminated in a complete boycott of tobacco—even in the shah's harem nobody touched tobacco! The cities were in turmoil for more than two years. Finally the shah and the British retreated and cancelled the concession. This was the first nationalist movement in the history of Iran.

### *The First Revolution*

The victory of the tobacco movement was the first of its kind, and opened the era of national liberation struggles in Iran. But it did not change the class character of the shah's state. The despotism of the regime and the plunder by the foreign capitalists continued. The court borrowed more money to keep up its luxurious existence, and more concessions were granted. In 1901 an Australian, D'Arcy, was granted an oil concession, which the British Admiralty later purchased. The fight against this concession culminated fifty years later in the movement for the nationalization of oil.

Foreign banks established branches in the country. In 1903 it was revealed that the Department of Customs, headed by a Belgian named Neus, had made a secret agreement with the Russians, favoring their manufacturers and merchants. In the uproar about it the British were also able to obtain favorable treatment. Only the Iranians lost out.

National oppression bore down most severely on the poor peasants and workers. For example, in 1904 the peasants of Gouchan in the northeast who could not afford

to pay their taxes to the shah's appointees were forced to collect the money by selling their daughters to the nearby tribes. Agricultural production declined, tens of thousands left home for neighboring countries in search of work. The number of workers from Iran who went to the Baku oil fields reached ten thousand.

Opposition newspapers began to appear in Calcutta, Cairo, Istanbul, Baku, and London presenting political ideas and solutions to the country's problems. Even revolutionary social democracy found some adherents. At the same time, the arbitrary arrests of the oppositionists and their executions by the shah's regime was also in full force.

Another source of discontent was the hoarding of grain by the landowners, who were courtiers, *ulema* and merchants. The country's industrial development was blocked by the powerful foreign capitalists. And so Iran's possessing classes purchased land. Whole villages were owned by absentee landowners—who would hoard the grain so that they could sell it later for a higher price. This caused the price of bread to go up, making life more miserable for the poor. In 1898 a *mullah* (low clergy), a newcomer to Tabriz, started preaching against these grain hoarders in the mosques. This led to an uprising of the poor, who stormed the houses of the rich and looted them. But the hoarding of the grain continued. This situation was one of the causes of the revolution.

The defeat suffered by the Czar in the war with Japan and the 1905 revolution in Russia helped to regenerate the revolutionary movement in Iran. The price of sugar had escalated. According to the merchants this was the result of the 1905 revolution in Russia, from which the sugar was imported. The shah's autocracy, fearful of a mass rebellion, tried to solve the problem by forcing the merchants to lower their prices. In Tehran, the city's governor, as a matter of course, had some of the merchants whipped. This began a protest movement led by the merchants and the *uleman*. The demand for justice and the creation of a House of Justice evolved into the demand for a constitution and a *Majles* (parliament).

The working class at that time was extremely small, and therefore had very little weight in determining the course of struggle. The leadership remained in the hands of the *ulema* and the bourgeoisie (mainly merchants). Nevertheless, the plebian masses came out in spontaneous mass demonstrations. These demonstrations differed from the method the *ulema* and the bourgeoisie used. The latter appealed to the monarchy to reform the state. Whenever pressure increased or the shah disappointed them, the *ulema* chose to take sanctuary in mosques and in holy shrines outside the city. The bourgeoisie locked up the bazaar and looked to the imperialist powers, at that point to the British, for salvation.

In July 1906, the *ulema* leadership, in protest against autocracy, went to the holy shrine of Gom, outside the city, to take sanctuary. The merchants went to the British Embassy. At first fifty merchants took sanctuary in the embassy, but rapidly different strata of small shopkeepers were attracted to the sanctuary and within three days there were 13,000 men camping out in the embassy grounds. Meanwhile, in adjoining streets demonstrations took place. Women also participated in these demonstrations. In some cases the shah's soldiers also joined demonstrations. The demand was for a constitution. The shah, under the pressure of the British, issued a decree proclaiming the country a constitutional monarchy and calling for elections to the first *Majles*. The *Majles* was to draft a constitution. But in his proclamation the shah had not mentioned the word "nation" and instead had

singled out the possessing classes, granting them the right to vote. The peasants and plebian masses of the cities were excluded from the electoral process. When the shah's decree appeared in the wall posters, the people of Teheran tore them down. They demanded that the word nation be specifically used in the decree and that the nation be given the right to vote. Through these demonstrations they won their demand.

People all over the country viewed the change to a constitutional form of government as a major victory. In this struggle (1906-1909) class conflicts reflected themselves. The bourgeoisie moved quickly to the camp of the counter-revolutionary aristocracy. The masses were the most consistent defenders of democracy and a non-secular constitution.

An alternate leadership, in opposition to the bourgeois Teheran leadership, developed in Tabriz, center of the Turkish-speaking province of Azerbaijan. This leadership was forged through the efforts of a small nucleus of an Iranian social democratic organization—later to be known as *Markaze Gheibi* (Underground Center).

Azerbaijanis and Fars (Persians) were the most developed of the nationalities in Iran. Azerbaijan, with its proximity to Turkey and the Caucuses, and with its proletarian center in Baku—also Turkish speaking—was politically more advanced. Many Azerbaijanis went to work in Baku oil fields and there they were introduced to the revolutionary ideas of social democracy. Despite the absence of a sizable working class on a national scale, the proletariat intervened in the revolution via the nucleus of *Markaze Gheibi* (M. Gh.)

In Tabriz, an *Anjoman* (a council) composed of *ulema*, merchants, and the elected representatives of petty owners and craftsmen appeared for the first time. The *Anjoman* started with supervising the elections of the delegates to *Majles* in Teheran and published the first constitutionalist paper in the country. M. Gh. intervened in this development, and through the *Anjoman* organized a militia, called *Mujahedeen* or *Fedayeen*. At the outset the crown prince Mohammad Ali—who resided in Tabriz—ordered the *Anjoman* to be dismantled. The leaders of the *Anjoman*, who belonged to the possessing classes, accepted the order and disbanded. But the *Mujahedeen* resisted, and held an armed demonstration. They won, and the *Anjoman* was saved.

The further evolution of the *Anjomans* and *Mujahedeen* signaled the development of dual power in Tabriz. *Anjomans* began to supervise the distribution of bread in the city, to administer justice, and later on took over the military defense of the city. Armed *Mujahedeen* attracted the plebians in increasing numbers, and formed the most militant and advanced section of the revolution. This brought them into conflict with the bourgeois, and land-owning, elements of the *Anjoman*. Early in 1907 the *Mujahedeen* expelled Haji Hassan Mujtahed, a landowner and one of the leading *ulema*, because he was implicated in an attack that the government made upon the peasants of a near-by village.

This kind of decisive action on the side of the toiling masses brought in more radical elements to the leadership of the *Anjoman*.

But the virtual absence of a working class on a national scale prevented its assumption of leadership of this nationalist movement; bourgeois influence remained strong on the leadership. As the elements of this leadership retreated under the pressure of the monarchy, or turned against the *Anjoman* as the revolution unfolded, the *Mujahedeen* became the best fighters in defense of the *Anjoman*. The small nucleus of social democratic M. Gh.

intervened in this way not only in Tabriz, but through Tabriz established the framework for an alternate leadership on a national scale for the revolution.

Following the formation of the *Anjoman* and *Majahedeen* in Tabriz, these organs appeared in other cities and towns. The Teheran leadership resisted giving them recognition—they said they did not want "violence"—but eventually under the pressure of mass demonstrations the *Majles* accepted the formation of local *Anjomans* as an integral part of the constitutional regime. These *Anjomans* came to represent the organs of self-rule for the nationalities. In Azerbaijan they united to form the *Majles Melli* (national parliament). The Teheran bourgeois leadership did not welcome this development. Its insistence on including the Islamic *Shiah* sect as the official religion of the country did not help to win over the Kurds and Baluchis, who adhered to the *Sunni* sect of Islam, to revolution. They also discouraged the women, who had on numerous occasions participated in the struggle.

The year 1907 was marked by numerous political confrontations between the monarchy and the revolution. The first part of the year was a period of retreat for the monarchy. Mass mobilizations in Tabriz, followed by demonstrations in other towns, forced the hesitating *Majles* to ratify a bourgeois democratic constitution, over the objections of the monarchy and some sections of the *ulema*. They also forced the government to dismiss such foreign agents as Neus from the directorship of the country's customs office. The monarchy's practice of handing over land and taxation privileges to its appointees in the provinces was outlawed. Functions of the central state were being taken over by the *Anjomans*. The Tabriz *Anjoman* extracted from the reluctant *Majles* the right to arm and defend the city in the face of the central government's inability to fend off the raid that one of the tribes had earlier made. This legalization of the armed struggle enabled the M. Gh. to turn the whole city into a military training ground. Every day after political agitation by *Mashroote* (constitutionalist) speakers and songs by schoolchildren—on themes of freedom, independence, unity of Iran—the *Mujahedeen* marched off for military training. Other towns, especially the ones in the north, followed the example of Tabriz. And Tabriz followed the example of the soviets of workers in Russia.

On the anniversary of the shah's constitutional decree a victory celebration in Teheran attracted half a million people. But this was to be a turning point. The mounting mass movement accelerated the backward retreat of the Teheran leadership. The frightened bourgeoisie tried to contain the masses, and the counterrevolution went on the offensive. It mobilized the courtiers, their servants and thousands of other parasites around the court. The shah had stopped paying the salaries of those serving in the *Majles*, claiming that they had reduced the court budget. With the help of the *ulema* who had defected to the monarchy the counterrevolution counterposed the Islamic religion to *Mashroote* and nationalism.

The 1907 treaty between Britain and Russia, dividing the country and making it virtually a colony of the two powers, was announced on August 3. This announcement boosted the morale of the counterrevolutionary forces. In December a mass counterrevolutionary camp-in was organized in the central square of Teheran around the slogan of "Islam, not *Mashroote*." It threatened the existence of the *Majles*.

Tabriz took the lead in mobilizing the whole country in defense of the revolution. The Tabriz *Mujahedeen* de-

clared, "if *Mashroote* is endangered we will separate Azarbaijan from Iran." Armed detachments began to move on Teheran. The shah retreated and asked his followers to end their camp-in. But in the following six months the shah continued with his counterrevolutionary thrusts, each time retreating under the pressure of mass mobilizations. Azerbaijani soldiers in Teheran were ordered by the Tabriz *Anjoman* not to obey orders that were against *Mashroote* and *Majles*. But the Teheran leadership did not take advantage of these mobilizations: it discouraged the *Mujahedeen* in Teheran from mobilizing to defend the *Majles* and it relied on the shah's promises. The shah used the time to his advantage.

The Iranian army had become unreliable. Under the advice of the imperialist powers the shah consented to use the Czar's infamous cossaks' brigade, which had been stationed in Teheran for some years at the service of the court. In 3 Teer of 1908 they struck. The *Majles* was bombarded, revolutionary *Mashroote* leaders were arrested and executed, the constitution was annulled. The revolution was suppressed everywhere except in a section of Tabriz.

In Tabriz, under the leadership of Sattar-khan, a plebian *Mujahed*, resistance developed. The shah organized all the armies he could and sent them against Tabriz. They cut the food supplies to the city, and tried to starve the population. Tabriz was surrounded for eleven months, but the resistance was not broken! Revolutionary working-class fighters, veterans of the 1905 revolution came from as far as the Caucuses to join the revolution. They brought their political and military ammunition with them. They set up workshops to build hand grenades, a weapon which was unfamiliar to the shah's soldiers.

As the shah's invading armies were defeated in Tabriz, the resistance grew and spread to other parts of the country. The *Mujahedeen* appeared again in other cities, especially in the north. Those counterrevolutionary elements which had aligned themselves with the shah abandoned him, and some even voiced their support for *Mashroote*. Armed detachments began to organize, and to move onto Teheran.

Fearing a victorious revolution on their southern borders, the Czarist army entered Azerbaijan in April 1909 and started to dismantle the organs of revolution, massacring the militants in Azerbaijan. The *Mujahedeen* either perished in unequal fights with the Russians or were forced to flee from the city. The Russian army hanged the leaders of the revolution in the public square.

The armed detachments composed of *Mujahedeen* from the north and tribal elements from the south were on the move to Teheran before the Russians entered Azerbaijan. They continued on, but with diminished momentum, and with the aristocratic and tribal heads gaining control of the leadership. When they entered Teheran the shah fled to the Russian Embassy, and was automatically dethroned.

Teheran was not occupied by the Russians. But under the tutelage of the Russian and British representatives, and independently of the *Anjomans* or *Mujahedeen*, the bourgeoisie joined with the aristocracy, courtiers, landowners and some tribal heads to form a coalition government. It installed the son of the deposed king as the new monarch, and declared itself a constitutional government based on a written constitution. With the Russian army's intervention, and suffocation of Azerbaijan, the national bourgeoisie were able to betray the revolution with impunity.

The new government turned around and suppressed

the *Anjomans* and *Mujahedeen*. In one of the armed conflicts between the *Mujahedeen* and the forces of the new regime Sattar-khan was fatally wounded. The liberal bourgeoisie thus differentiated itself from the plebian masses whose fighting spirit Sattar-khan—an illiterate Azerbaijani who could not speak Persian—represented. The man in charge of this military counterrevolution was Gavam, a cousin of Mossadegh. Over the years both men have played important roles in Iranian bourgeois politics.

Soon after the central government was appointing the very same men who had served the old shah as the governors and heads of departments in Azerbaijan. These were the very same individuals who had attempted to crush the Tabriz resistance but returned to Teheran humiliated in their defeat. Now, using the Russian boot as well as the method of coopting the revolution, they found success at last.

The national bourgeoisie who began its political career with begging for a constitution at the British Embassy, took fright at the mass nationalist movement, drew back, and ended up suppressing the revolutionary organs of the revolution in alliance with the old possessing classes. It succeeded because this time the Russian troops fully crushed the revolutionary nucleus of social democratic leadership in Azerbaijan.

The formation of the coalition government in Teheran assured ascendancy of the Persian bourgeoisie above the bourgeoisie of the other nationalities. In the defeat of the revolution on the one hand, and the weakening of the monarchy on the other, the Persian bourgeoisie found a privileged position for itself. As the Persian bourgeoisie bowed meekly to the imperialist bourgeoisie, and sought to form an economic base for itself, the bourgeoisie of Azerbaijan bowed meekly to the Persian bourgeoisie. During the rise of the first revolution both bourgeoisies had united to oppose the revolutionary movement, both feared the rise of the downtrodden, and both opposed the guns in the hands of the *Mujahedeen*, who increasingly came from the ranks of the toilers. Both bourgeoisies had interest in the land, and were consequently opposed to the emancipation of the peasantry. As far back as 1906, when the social democratic Underground Center M. Gh. proposed a land reform program in the Tabriz *Anjoman*, these same bourgeois elements vetoed the essential measure. Although the Tabriz resistance did receive help from the peasantry during the 1908 resistance, the absence of a working class on a national scale prevented the development of a strong force that would fight for the implementation of a land distribution program, and would win the peasantry to the revolution on a massive scale.

The first Iranian revolution took on the form of a nationalist movement, and developed to an extent that it posed the question of state power in the interests of the nascent proletariat and its allies among the rural poor and urban plebian masses. The frightened possessing classes in the country, as well as the imperialist powers, intervened to crush the revolution. Yet the revolution made impressive gains, such as the introduction of a bourgeois democratic constitution, and it went as far as smashing the shah militarily. Its defeat meant the defeat of the toilers and the oppressed masses, whose development for liberation expressed itself in the nationalist movement. The revolution's political base was Tabriz, in the Azerbaijani region, its most militant leaders were members of Iran's oppressed nationalities, and it projected itself as a force for dramatically changing the lot of all oppressed peoples. But these forms of nationalism were to unfold differently in the 1940s.

The Bolshevik Revolution had a significant impact on Iran. Trotsky, then Commissar of Foreign Affairs, declared in 1918 that the Bolshevik government unilaterally annulled all the treaties that Czarist Russia had imposed on Iran, and ordered the evacuation of the country by the Russian troops. This act of revolutionary honesty eliminated the yoke of Russian imperialism with one swoop from Iran, and gained the sympathy of the people.

British imperialism moved in to fill the vacuum. They negotiated a secret treaty in 1919 with the central government, which in effect made the country a colony. Only a mass nationalist movement forced the government to annul the 1919 treaty.

Local uprisings against the central government took place in Azerbaijan and Khorasan. A republic was even established in Gilan. The creation of this republic was fostered by the presence of the Red Army, which entered Gilan temporarily while chasing British and white Russian troops. The Gilan Republic was called a soviet republic (in imitation of the republics of the Soviet Union) but there were antagonistic class forces in its leadership. The newly formed Communist Party of Iran tried to share power with a petty-bourgeois leadership; it proved to be catastrophic.

All of these uprisings proved short lived. They also lacked the mass character of the *Mashroote* revolution. The central government was able—often using the traditional despotic methods—to assassinate the leaders. The defeat of Iran's first revolution also led to the destruction of the *Anjomans* and *Mujahedeen*. The M. Gh. was wiped out, and the young Communist Party was unable to develop a transitional program. These uprisings had a spontaneous character; they had no time to develop a mass base or their own armies, such as the *Mujahedeen* had done. Furthermore, having gone through a revolution, a counterrevolution and a world war, the people were exhausted and confused. During these events foreign troops occupied the country at will, parts of the country became battlegrounds of the Turkish, Russian and British armies, and tribal wars and plunderings continued. But civil war in Russia prevented the workers there from giving significant aid. And the revolution needed time.

British imperialism, in order to prevent the extension of the October Revolution throughout Iran, the Arab world, and the Indian subcontinent began to reverse its policy of favoring a weak Iranian government to one of promoting a strong, centralized state. The British sought to use their foothold in Iran to build a base against the Soviet Union, and to do this it needed a more efficient method of exploiting the resources of the country (e. g., oil). Ever since the national bourgeoisie appealed to them from the yard of their Teheran Embassy in 1906, the British had favored a parliamentary system in Iran. From the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the British began to oppose the parliament. They also came to oppose the tendency to decentralized rule of local tribal chieftans whom they had earlier patronized as a part of their divide-and-rule policy. A faithful servant of the shahs and imperialism, General Hassan Arfa wrote in his autobiography, *Under Five Shahs*:

"Then occurred the unforeseen events of 1920—the reappearance of Russia under the guise of the Soviet Union as a great power on Iran's northern frontiers and the quasi-general opposition of the Iranian Nation to the [1919] treaty; the last fact precluding any possibility of having it ratified by any Majles. On the other hand it

was obvious that if Iran was abandoned to its own devices, without money or military force and with a weak Central Government, it would become the prey of anarchic forces represented by well-armed predatory tribes and leftist revolutionary elements, and would drift towards Bolshevism and eventually become engulfed in the wave of the Communist advance towards India and the Arab Middle East.

"These considerations led Lord Curzon—whose hands the Prime Minister, Mr. Lloyd George, had left free in this matter—envisage the coming to power in Iran of a strong Government, friendly to Great Britain but not compromised by the 1919 treaty negotiations, which could be helped to apply piecemeal certain of the stipulations of the treaty after they had been watered down."

General Arfa then describes in detail how the British imperialists proceeded to implement Lord Curzon's plan.

As a part of the British plan for Iran's centralized state in 1920 they engineered a coup d'etat, replacing the old dynasty with the Reza shah, the current shah's father. The first task in the program of the Reza shah and his imperialist benefactors was the effective subjugation of all other nationalities to the Persians—something that the Persian national bourgeoisie had tried, but been incapable of carrying through. They accomplished this task through the organization of a modern army. Of course, the resistance was stiff and it was not accomplished all at once. The army resorted to massacres. Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs, Baluchis and many tribes of the country were thus subdued. The liberal bourgeoisie applauded all this, but as the victory was assured, the Reza shah turned on them and threw them out of the coalition government.

This ended the period of bourgeois democracy—which had co-existed with Asiatic despotism since the first revolution. Basic freedoms were denied, trade unions were outlawed, the Communist Party was declared illegal. This process facilitated the penetration of the imperialist goods and capital, as well as the plunder of oil resources.

During the twenty-year dictatorship of Reza shah the oppression of the nationalities took varying forms. On one hand the Azerbaijanis were to be assimilated into the Persians—they were told that their language was not really Turkish, but Persian. Possessing classes of Azerbaijan found no difficulty in yielding to such a policy, in fact they welcomed it. On the other hand the Arab population of the country, with their ties to the Arab world and its culture, could not possibly be hoped to be assimilated. The name of the oil-rich province where they resided was changed from Arabistan to Khusistan, an old Persian name. They were discriminated in their own province and the towns were Persianized. General Arfa considered this one of the accomplishments of the Reza shah period. After making a military tour of the province in 1942, he made the following observation about Ahavaz, an old Arab city: "This town had also improved very much since 1936, when I had last seen it. There were many wide asphalted avenues and squares planted with palm trees, and it had lost its Arab character, through the immigration of many Isfahanis." (Isfahan is a central Persian city.)

After the Second World War the nationalism of the oppressed became once more a revolutionary sword that threw the country into a pre-revolutionary situation. Unlike the first revolution—in which the Iranian nationalist movement was combined with the struggles of the nationalities for self-determination—this time the two became separate. First came the movement of the oppressed nationalities for self-determination, which culminated in the crea-

tion of workers and farmers governments in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in 1945-46. Then, four years later, came the Iranian nationalist movement for the nationalization of the oil industry.

National oppression served the imperialists' interests. It was a tool to open up the country to more thorough imperialist penetration. At the same time the economic development within these areas was retarded by comparison to that of the Persian areas. The illegality of the nationalities' written languages caused their cultural stagnation, and the resulting illiteracy hurt workers the most. They became the least skilled and lowest paid of the working class. The differentiation increased as the number of modern factories for consumer goods increased, and the oil industry in the south expanded.

The twenty-year rule of the Reza shah consolidated and legalized national oppression. At the same time the privileges that were granted to the Persian nation at the expense of the oppressed nationalities brought forth Persian chauvinism. The Persian bourgeoisie, which had earlier developed the ideology that the Persian culture and language was superior, now implemented their ideology. The culture of the Persian nationality was elevated and counterposed to the culture of the other nationalities, very much as Russian chauvinism had been used to suppress the variety of nationalities which made up the Czar's kingdom. The culture and the language of the non-Persians were henceforth seen as "alien" elements.

### *The Second Revolution*

Allied troops entered the country in 1941. Reza shah—who had been flirting with the Germans—went into exile and his son, the present shah, came to the throne. A period of bourgeois democracy opened, and political life was rejuvenated. Political prisoners were freed; the working class entered national politics as a militant force.

A heterogeneous group, consisting of ex-members of the then defunct Communist Party, social democrats and liberals, formed the pro-Soviet Tudeh [Mass] Party based on a minimum reformist program. Being the only party on the left, it attracted large numbers of intellectuals and workers, and became a mass party. The Tudeh Party was not the political and organizational continuity of the Iranian Communist Party, whose leaders, living in exile in the Soviet Union, had perished under Stalin in the thirties. Iran's Communist Party had been thus destroyed.

The reformist program of Tudeh Party failed to attract some of the old communists. In particular, Jafar Peshavari, who had been a leader of the Communist Party, and had been freed from the shah's prison in 1941, did not join Tudeh. He remained independent until 1944, when he organized the Ferge Democrat (Democratic League) in Azerbaijan. The program of the Ferge was an Azerbaijani nationalist program. It called for national autonomy within Iran, including the right to a separate armed force, the revival of Anjomans, and the legalization of the Turkish language in Azerbaijan. The Tudeh Party had refused to raise the latter demand. Ferge attracted Tudeh members in Azerbaijan until the latter dissolved its branches, and Ferge became the only political tendency with a base in the working class in Azerbaijan. This was a significant development, because ever since the fall of Reza shah, workers and peasants' struggles were on the rise in Iran, especially in Azerbaijan.

The Ferge program did not call for a socialist revolution. But workers and peasants, as well as the ruling class itself, viewed it as a bolshevik organization. Its

central leadership was working class, under the influence of Stalinism. Ferge declared itself a multi-class organization based on a minimum program. This was also true of the Tudeh Party. The fundamental difference between the two was that Ferge had a nationalist program.

In its struggle to fulfill its program Ferge came into conflict with the shah's state machinery. Ferge organized *Anjoman* and *Fedayeen*, in the tradition of the first revolution. These were primarily composed of workers and peasants. Three months after its founding Ferge started an insurrection which led to the collapse of the shah's army—without any major battles—in Azerbaijan on December 12, 1944. The *Fedayeen* took over Azerbaijan and a workers and farmers government was established under the leadership of Peeshavari.

Ferge's rapid success in gaining the leadership of the Azerbaijani revolutionary movement was due primarily to three factors: the emergence of the working class in Azerbaijan, the presence of the Soviet troops there because of the war, and the anti-nationalist character of the possessing class of Azerbaijan, i.e., their refusal to struggle against the Persian domination and the imperialists.

When Ferge took power it instituted labor laws beneficial to the workers. It distributed the lands of big absentee landlords, without compensation. It introduced universal suffrage for both men and women. It took steps to revive the culture and language of Azerbaijan, introducing textbooks in the native Turkish language. All these reforms were being carried out for the first time. Of course, the influence of the Soviet system and the links with Soviet Azerbaijan facilitated the process.

Two months after the victorious insurrection in Azerbaijan, the shah's garrison in Kurdistan was disarmed and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan declared a Kurdish republic under the leadership of Gazi Mohammad. Later Mustafa Barzani came with his tribe from Iraq and joined the republic. The first step in the aspiration of the Kurdish people for national independence became realized.

The example of the Azerbaijan and Kurdish uprisings began to spread. Peasants and workers movements engulfed the whole country, sparking movements among other nationalities, especially the Arabs. The workers movement witnessed sharp and militant struggles. The Tudeh Party became a major obstacle in those struggles. Its class-collaborationist program led to the defeat of strikes, and consequent demoralization.

In August 1946 the papers reported a spontaneous strike involving 100,000 workers in the oil-rich province of Khusistan. The workers demanded an end to the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company's continual interference in the internal affairs of the country, and also demanded the dismissal of the governor of the province. This strike, the largest in the history of the country, directly posed the question of who shall rule, and opposed the workers to both imperialism and their own bourgeoisie. The fight for national liberation went hand in hand with opposition to the shah. They were asserting their right to dismiss—and consequently to appoint—administrators. The workers were showing their deep opposition to home-grown oppression as well as foreign domination.

These developments were all the more significant because after the Azerbaijan and Kurdistan uprisings the shah's prime minister took office on the basis of a demagogic, but leftist-sounding program. His program included a platform of "friendship" with the Soviet Union. As a consequence, the Tudeh Party leadership, which was in the forefront of the Iranian workers movement, joined with the government in opposing the uprisings of the workers, un-

employed and peasants. The government sent the army to crush the striking oil workers—opening fire on the workers, killing 49 and wounding hundreds. But the strike continued until Tudeh leaders went from Teheran and used their authority to break the strike. After this exhibition of their counterrevolutionary capacity, the Tudeh Party was given three portfolios in Gavam's government. With their help the popular front government defused the class struggle in the rest of the country, isolating Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Meanwhile the shah made preparations to move against those revolutions. Earlier events had paved the way, and they had obtained Stalin's agreement before the Soviet troops left Iran.

During the Second World War Soviet troops had occupied the northern section of Iran. But Stalin did not see these troops as a mechanism to help the growth of the revolutionary forces within Iran. Instead he pursued a strategy of using their presence in order to pressure Iran to form a joint oil company to exploit the unexploited oil resources in the northern part of the country. The Tudeh Party used its influence within the mass movement to lobby for it both within and outside the *Majles*. In fact this was the object of the first public demonstration that the Tudeh Party organized.

People viewed the Soviet demand for the oil agreement as they had viewed the British oil concessions obtained early in the century. It went against their national aspirations. Mossadegh, then a deputy in the *Majles*, introduced a bill in 1949 prohibiting the government from negotiating any new oil concessions so long as foreign troops were still present in the country.

In 1946, in order to defeat the Azerbaijan and Kurdistan revolutions Gavam then dangled the oil concession in front of the shortsighted eyes of the Stalinist bureaucracy. The deal was made and publicly announced that after the departure of the Soviet troops the government would propose that the *Majles* ratify the oil agreement. Another clause in the agreement stated both governments agreed that the Azerbaijan "problem" would be solved peacefully, according to the "Iranian laws." This meant Stalin had assured the shah that not only would he refuse to defend the Azerbaijan and Kurdistan revolutions against attack, but he would also strongly counsel the Azerbaijan leadership to capitulate. Soviet troops departed in June 1946.

The shah and his ministers ruled out direct military intervention by the shah's troops because they were well aware of the ineffectiveness of their army in a revolutionary war. The history of the Tabriz resistance and the fate of a shah forty years earlier were well known. Furthermore, in the spring of 1946 the class struggle was on the rise throughout the country. Any military move by the government would certainly spark a civil war in the entire country. So they waited it out and worked to defuse the class struggle. And within this strategy Stalin and the Tudeh Party, which followed Stalin's political leadership, became accomplices.

By fall of 1946 the shah's government felt that the balance of the class forces had begun to shift in its favor. They began to move against the cadres of the Tudeh Party, intimidating and imprisoning the most militant elements. Still later they forced the three Tudeh ministers to resign from the government.

By November the military began to move against Azerbaijan. They used the pretext that to carry out the elections for the new *Majles*—which were to ratify the oil agreement with the Soviet Union—the army had to be present in all provinces of the country. The Ferge agreed. But when the army moved to the border town, Zanjan, the landlords and the bourgeois elements came along and



began victimizing the workers and peasants, and massacring the *Fedayeen*. The news caused a reaction throughout Azerbaijan, and a mass mobilization for defense began.

In Azerbaijan the mass movement in opposition to the shah's invasion included workers, peasants and women. They held rallies in towns and villages in the name of defense of their homeland, Azerbaijan. That nationalist slogan meant the defense of the social gains already achieved. They wanted to be armed and to join the militia. Women's declarations pointed to the oppression of women throughout Iran. The Azerbaijan women saw their fight as a fight for the liberation of all women in Iran. There was confidence that the defeat of the shah's military would bring the liberation of all Iran. Jafar Peeshavari, leader of the Azerbaijan Ferge, in speech after speech, reiterated the will of Azerbaijan to fight the shah's army and to defeat the shah as had the forces of the first revolution. These mass mobilizations continued through early December 1946 and the shah's army did not advance any further than Zanjan. On December 11, workers unions joined the Ferge in a call for a revolutionary war. On December 12 a sharp and sudden turn of policy came.

Ferge's newspaper appeared with the startling statement that the people should "welcome" the shah's army into Azerbaijan! Ferge commanders were ordered to surrender to the shah's officers and the mobilization for defense was halted. No formal body of Ferge ever made the decision to capitulate, and Peeshavari's name did not even appear in the December 12 statement. Orders for the capitulation had come from Stalin. Stalin, using the authority of the Bolshevik Revolution, and his agents, succeeded in disrupting the internal life of the Ferge and imposed his bureaucratic will on Azerbaijan. Ironically, December 12 was the first anniversary of the Ferge insurrection. On that day the planned celebrations turned into the massacre of the most militant workers and peasants.

Later, when they started to burn the Turkish language books and the executions became legal, imprisonment and exile of the militant Azerbaijanis became widespread. The re-imposition of bourgeois rule took the form of fierce national oppression. And so the shah, with the help of Stalin, succeeded in dismantling the revolutionary government in Azerbaijan.

The fate of Kurdistan was essentially no different. After the fall of Azerbaijan, the Kurdish republic was completely isolated. It quickly fell. There was, however, one exception. The Barzani tribe did not surrender, but retreated to Iraq. But the British puppet regime opposed their entry there. Then, under the leadership of Mullah Mustafa, they fought their way back through Iran, and through the regiments of the shah's army to the Soviet Union. This heroic fight kept Kurdish nationalism aflame among the Kurdish people of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq. More than a decade later, when the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown, the government invited them to come back to Iraq and live. The Kurdish people, living as an oppressed nationality in these several countries, are continuing their fight for full self-determination.

The defeat of the Azerbaijan and Kurdistan revolutions resulted in demoralization and confusion, enabling the central government to consolidate its rule. The number of working class strikes dropped to almost zero. The elections were rigged and the new *Majles* refused to ratify the oil agreement that Gavam had worked out with Stalin. By 1948 the Tudeh Party was declared illegal. Imperialist economic, military, and political penetration intensified. For the first time American advisors came to reorganize and re-equip the shah's army. The liberal

bourgeoisie, having served its usefulness, was again thrown out of the government.

The defeat of the oppressed nationalities strengthened Persian chauvinism, and the intimidation and discrimination against the other nationalities became widespread. All over the country schools were forced to use *only* Persian textbooks, and were instructed to speak Persian exclusively in the classrooms. The psychological oppression resulting from being forced to learn a foreign language without first mastering one's native language was a deliberate and calculated attempt to destroy the nationalist identity and to suffocate any nationalist cultural development. It was an attempt to prevent any challenge to the authority of the centralized bourgeois state. And it was most damaging to the working class of the oppressed nationalities. The implications of this policy, including the relative increase of illiteracy, pushed those workers to the lowest levels of economic life. To the Persian ruling class, the call for freedom of languages became identified with communism—with some justification. Such a call became a *form* of the class struggle.

#### *The Movement for the Nationalization of Oil*

The defeat that the revolutionary movement suffered in 1946 was overcome within four years. Once again the revolutionary movement appeared as a nationalist movement, this time as an all-Iranian nationalist movement, similar to the antitobacco movement which arose in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As before, the movement was in opposition to the much-hated British imperialism. Leadership of this movement fell into the hands of the liberal bourgeoisie, by default. Those sympathetic to Stalinism had discredited themselves by insisting that the northern oil concession be handed over to the Soviet Union. They had no program relating to the nationalist movement, except a tendency to downgrade it. The defeat in 1946 isolated them, demoralized the cadre, and enabled the regime to suppress the Tudeh Party. Incapable of evaluating their defeats, they were not even capable of organizing a movement to defend their own democratic rights.

Despite the victory that it had scored against the revolution, the regime was not able to consolidate itself. In opposition to the course that the regime was following, a movement began for political democracy—one of the unsatisfied demands of the first revolution. Each small gain in this sphere widened the movement, and soon other demands were posed, deepening the struggle.

This national liberation movement crystallized around the slogan of the nationalization of oil. Nationalization meant the expulsion of the British interests as well as breaking the chain of economic and political oppression which they imposed. As the movement progressed, the monarchy, as the native base of imperialism, became threatened. The country's class structure was threatened by the democratic demand of the masses.

All these struggles, starting with the one for political democracy and the struggle for the nationalization of oil, coincided with the immediate and historic struggles of the proletariat. While there was no objective basis for the national bourgeoisie to assume leadership of the movement, there were subjective factors: the lack of a bolshevik party and the previous Stalinist betrayal. On the other hand, Mohammad Mossadegh, a liberal bourgeois politician, had, over the years, gained a reputation as a nationalist leader who fought for democracy and defended the interests of the Iranian people. When the movement revived in the early 1950s Mossadegh and his co-thinkers

were looked to for leadership. The national bourgeoisie feared the independent mobilizations of the masses. But even the timid fight around democratic demands which the bourgeoisie was prepared to lead left over the narrow barriers of reformism.

Mossadegh's first major political move was to lead a procession of notables to the shah's palace to seek sanctuary there and to ask the government to pledge noninterference in the coming *Majles* elections. Mossadegh was thus following in the tradition of his bourgeois forerunners who went, in the early twentieth century, to the British Embassy to ask for their intercession on the question of an Iranian constitution. Mossadegh's procession to the shah's palace gave birth to the Jebhe Melli (National Front), a loose liberal bourgeois formation.

Under mass pressure the regime annulled the rigged election, and, in the new elections, Mossadegh and some others from Jebhe Melli were elected to the *Majles*. The masses viewed this as a victory, and it, in turn, helped the growth of the opposition movement.

Within two years the movement developed to such a scale that the massive demonstrations for the nationalization of oil forced the generally reactionary *Majles* to ratify Mossadegh's bill for nationalization. This was seen as a victory by the masses against national oppression—it inspired them. Almost immediately after this the oil workers went on strike over economic demands. The spectre of the combined national liberation struggle and the struggle of the proletariat so frightened the regime that they felt compelled to bring Mossadegh forward as the new prime minister. Mossadegh, whose Jebhe Melli group in the *Majles* was a tiny minority—and always at odds with the others—was elected to premiership with a unanimous vote. The shah promptly and formally endorsed the decision.

Mossadegh's rise to the head of the state was viewed by the masses as a victory. They saw this government as their own, and went to sacrifice their lives for it when it came under attack. When the imperialists imposed a blockade on the marketing and sale of the nationalized oil, the masses understood the source of the economic scarcity imposed by the blockade, and accepted it as a part of the national struggle. This blockade lasted for two years.

The major confrontation took place in July 1952, when the shah appointed Gavam once again as the new prime minister, in order to "solve" the oil "crisis." Mossadegh resigned and chose to react by merely staying at home. Jebhe Melli deputies likewise refrained from calling on the masses to defend their government. Instead they engaged in parliamentary maneuvers, with occasional visits to the shah, trying to persuade him to change his mind by warning him about the possibility of revolution.

But, on the other hand, people started going into the streets from the moment Mossadegh resigned, demanding his reinstatement. After four days of such political agitation all over the country, the major confrontation took place in Teheran on the 30th of Teer (July 1952). Unarmed masses confronted the army. Hundreds were killed, but the persistence of the people affected the army. Military discipline began to crack and even some of the officers joined the demonstrating population. The shah retreated, Gavam was dumped, and Mossadegh reinstated as prime minister. For a few days the police did not dare to show up in town, and such things as directing traffic were taken over by the youth. In embryonic form the *Anjomans* began to appear in some districts. With proper leadership a situation of dual power might have begun to develop. However, this development was frustrated by

the Jebhe Melli leadership. They told people to go to their homes and, later, used the police to forcibly disperse those who stayed. Thus Mossadegh the "democrat" revealed just how far his belief in democracy would stretch.

Mossadegh's overthrow took place in August 1953, thirteen months after the 30th of Teer uprising. The conduct of the national bourgeois leadership has proved to the masses that the bourgeois government was not their government. After having sacrificed so much for it, the masses were unwilling to give their lives in order that the same police, military, landowners and capitalists rule over them. When the CIA-engineered coup came in 1953 the masses did not pour into the streets to defend Mossadegh. And no other party existed to organize and lead the masses against the reaction, as the Bolsheviks had fought against Kornilov during the Kerensky government in Russia in 1917. On the day of the coup people looked to the Tudeh Party to call them into action and Tudeh militants waited for the orders from the central committee. But the orders never came.

#### *The Role of the Tudeh Party*

The Tudeh Party, while still an illegal organization, was able to operate more or less openly because of the generally democratic atmosphere that the movement had created. But from the inception of the struggle for the nationalization of oil, it had taken an ultraleft, sectarian attitude toward the movement. Its ultraleftism was partly due to the turn the Soviet bureaucracy had taken in reaction to the initiation of the cold war by American imperialism. It was also a cover for their opposition to the nationalist movement, and for their betrayal of the 1946 revolution. They called Mossadegh an agent of American imperialism, and concluded that a movement under such leadership could not be progressive. They identified the *leadership* with the *movement* and *abstained from the struggle* when the movement for the nationalization of the oil industry developed. The Tudeh Party taught its cadre that nationalism in the colonial world was a reactionary phenomenon. They called for "internationalism."

They continued to tie themselves to the narrow interests of the Stalinist bureaucracy. They did not call for the nationalization of *all* Iranian oil, but simply that under the domination of Britain, in the south. They were aware of Stalin's continuing interest in the northern oil, and wanted to reserve it for him. Their opposition to the nationalist movement was thus a recognition of the anti-bureaucratic edge of that movement.

The Tudeh Party's refusal to support the nationalist movement, which was making strikes against the imperialist interests in the country, precluded the possibility of their coming to the leadership. It also significantly undermined the development of the struggle, as the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to victoriously lead the national liberation struggle became increasingly clear, the other alternative—a working class leadership—became so much more obvious. Especially after the 30th of Teer, young students and workers began to look toward and join, the Tudeh Party under the mistaken assumption that it was a revolutionary working-class party. Under the pressure of the masses, the leadership changed its line and gave verbal support to the nationalization of oil throughout the *entire* country. Tudeh militants participated in specific actions. But the leadership developed no transitional program relating the ongoing struggle to the struggle for the socialist revolution.

The party was unable to see that the class struggle was presenting itself in the form of a nationalist struggle. Con-

sequently, when the struggle of workers as workers began to develop, the Tudeh Party had no perspective of how to link up these two aspects of the class struggle. They kept the struggle artificially separated, thus preventing the possibility of the proletariat from exposing and discrediting the bourgeois leadership in the nationalist movement and winning the leadership for the working class forces. The Tudeh Party did not fight for, or even propose, a program for the emancipation of the peasantry. Wherever the peasants started to radicalize, the leadership of the Tudeh Party opposed it. The same was true in the case of the oppressed nationalities.

The August 1953 defeat, just like the December 1946 defeat, was inflicted upon the revolution without a battle. The gains of the revolution were once again wiped out. The shah's military dictatorship consolidated itself and the revolutionists were imprisoned or executed by the thousands. The constitution was trampled upon, workers organizations were eliminated, and the oil was, in effect, denationalized and parceled out among the various imperialist powers, with the U.S. monopolies getting the lion's share.

\* \* \*

The revolutionary potential of the nationalism of the oppressed in Iran can be seen in the fact that now, after more than twenty years since the defeat of the Iranian nationalist movement, and more than a quarter of a century after the defeat of the oppressed nationalities, the shah continues to build huge military bases in the heartland of the oppressed nationalities. His current concern for Pakistan's "stability" is based on the understanding that any nationalist struggle there, particularly by the Baluchis, may unleash the revolutionary forces in Iran once again. Yet the defeats of the late 1940s and early 1950s were so severe, and the repression so deep, that those movements have still not revived on a mass scale. Revolutionaries must absorb some of the lessons of those defeats. Betrayed by both the national bourgeoisie and Stalinism, these revolutions have written in blood the incapacity of these forces to provide political leadership.

Neither the oppression of the nationalities nor the liberation of Iran has been resolved over the last twenty years of the shah's rule. The shah, brought back to power by the imperialists, is kept there to serve imperialism's interests. He has spent a pittance of what the imperialists pay for the oil in order to imitate the empire of Cyrus, and to make a "White Revolution," as if these meager attempts to play the great shah will stave off the revolutionary needs of the masses. In order to protect the imperialist oil interests against the revolution, especially the Arab revolution, the shah is carrying out a military build-up that is the biggest since the American build-up in Vietnam. Concentrating his forces on the Arab Gulf in order to dominate the region, the shah is extending his father's policy of uprooting the Arabs from their lands and Persianizing the region. He has already occupied three Arab islands in the Arab Gulf. In Baluchistan he is making deals with Bhutto to suppress the nationalist movement on both sides of the border. In Azerbaijan and Kurdistan the ever-present military sees to it that movements for liberation are nipped in the bud. Meanwhile they are introducing projects to change the language of Azerbaijan in the near future. Yet even in the censored press of the shah the voice of Azerbaijani nationalist writers can be heard demanding their language rights and their identity. The struggle of the oppressed nationalities in Iran is beginning once again.

## Part II. Nationalism in the Epoch of Imperialism

In Comrade Germain's document "In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International" he asserts that in the epoch of imperialism "nationalism as a rule becomes reactionary." The revolutionary history of Iran completely contradicts this statement. In Iran the nationalist consciousness of the oppressed masses did not appear and mature in any other epoch but the imperialist epoch. It arose during Iran's two revolutions of the twentieth century and helped propel these revolutions forward. How such a nationalist consciousness can be characterized as reactionary, as Comrade Germain's statement implies, is not at all clear.

Comrade Germain's blanket assertion equates the nationalism of the bourgeoisie with the nationalism of the masses. Comrade Trotsky teaches us otherwise: "*But the nationalism of the mass of the people is the elementary form taken by their just and progressive hatred for the most skillful, capable, and ruthless of their oppressors, that is the foreign imperialists.*" (Emphasis added. Letter to the Indochinese Oppositionists, Sept. 18, 1930, published in *International Socialist Review*, September 1973.)

The revolutionary experience in Iran clearly supports Comrade Trotsky.

Trotsky talks about the nationalism of the masses of oppressed people and immediately provides us with the material basis of that nationalism: oppression by the foreign imperialists. "The proletariat does not have the right to turn its back on *this kind* of nationalism" (*Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.) Trotsky continues: "On the contrary, it must demonstrate in practice that it is the most consistent and devoted fighter for the national liberation of Indochina."

Consider how national consciousness developed in Iran. The hatred against the foreign oppressors became the unifying element in the anti-tobacco movement of the 1890s, in the first revolution early in the century, in the mass movement against the 1919 treaty intended to make the country a colony of Britain, and in the movement for the nationalization of the oil industry in the 1950s. At present the nationalism of the Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs and Baluchis is rising, precisely because of their hatred against their foreign oppressors—an oppression which is imperialist in origin, but for which the Persians have become transmission belts.

Unfortunately, Comrade Germain's method is different. Unlike Trotsky, Comrade Germain is talking about nationalism in general. He defines nationalism as bourgeois ideology, and that settles the question for him from then on. Once nationalism is seen universally as bourgeois ideology, there is no longer any need to examine the material basis of nationalism in the imperialist epoch. It becomes an abstraction. And that abstraction of nationalism he declares to be reactionary in the imperialist epoch.

Should one ask, is there any difference between American, French, or English nationalism and that of Bolivian, Chilean, Iranian and Palestinian nationalism, what would Comrade Germain answer? Would he answer, no, they are both "ideology, the ideology of national solidarity, irrespective of regional, ethnic or social differences?"

In reality, ideas do not have the ahistorical character that Comrade Germain attributes to them. Nationalist ideas first originated in an earlier historical period, during the rise of capitalism, and out of a certain relationship of class forces. Nationalist ideas of the oppressed

today arise in a different historical period and out of a different relationship of class forces. Marxist analysis requires, first, an analysis of this material and objective base in order to understand the essence of nationalism.

In the first Iranian revolution as the bourgeoisie withdrew from the struggle the working-class elements leading the plebian masses in Tabriz organized the *Mujahedeen* and proved to be the "most consistent and devoted fighters for the national liberation." In 1946, the workers, peasants and women of Azerbaijan mobilized to defend their social gains, which had been won in the form of a nationalist revolution against the invading armies of the shah, which were returning with them the bourgeoisie and the landlords. Azerbaijan and Kurdistan were betrayed by Stalin and the shah's armies were allowed in without a battle. In the subsequent massacre the workers suffered the most for being the most devoted fighters for Azerbaijan national liberation. Both the regime and the workers saw the national liberation struggle as a form of class struggle.

Later on in 1952 when the shah attacked the national liberation movement of Iran and replaced the Mossadegh with the reactionary Gavam, he anticipated a quick defeat for the movement. The national bourgeois Mossadegh went home to bed, but the workers came out in the streets. In massive political confrontations with the army they proved the most consistent and devoted fighters for national liberation. They won, only to be betrayed by the national bourgeois and Stalinist leaderships one year later.

Trotsky's method is quite clear; he starts from the material reality (the imperialist epoch), and from this analyzes the phenomena (nationalism of the masses of oppressed people). Trotsky makes it quite clear that he is not talking about nationalism in general, but emphasizes that he is talking about "this kind" of nationalism, i.e., the nationalism of the oppressed nation.

Nationalism first came on the scene in the period of bourgeois revolutions and in the process of formation of capitalist nation-states. The rising bourgeoisie stood at the head of the national movements, which themselves involved divergent classes, mainly the bourgeoisie, proletariat, peasantry, and urban petty bourgeoisie. National movements were a historical necessity to open the road for the productive forces which had no room for development under the old feudal system. The oppressed classes, having become nationally conscious, were set in motion to fight against the old possessing classes and to fight for the formation of the national state. The bourgeoisie, a rising class, was able to identify completely with these national movements and impose its ideology on these national movements.

Nevertheless, the national movements were not homogeneous from the viewpoint of class composition and class interest. Each class attempted to put forward its own class interest in the national movement. The bourgeoisie was trying to capture the home market and was looking for privileges over other nations and other classes. The peasantry was trying to win possession of land. The proletariat was likewise trying to put forward its own class interests and better its conditions while fighting against all privileges. The interests of each of these classes were to some extent expressed, and in distorted form, through their nationalism. But the ideology of the national movement was the ideology of the dominant class in that movement. It is in this sense that nationalism arose as a bourgeois ideology—"the ideal expression of dominant material relationships." Despite the unity of classes within the national movement the divergence of

interests naturally provoked class antagonism. The bourgeoisie attempted to replace class struggle with national unity.

But among the oppressed nationalities today it is a totally different thing. Ernest Mandel has already explained so brilliantly in his *Marxist Economic Theory* the special objective conditions that prevented the Eastern countries from formation of national states. This in turn gave rise to the stagnation of productive forces in these countries. Imperialist penetration did not break through that stagnation but intensified it. Thus, the combined and uneven process of development of history postponed the national revolution to the twentieth century in the East. The old possessing classes were no match to the social revolution, but imperialism upheld them and molded them for its own interests. The driving force behind the national movement still is the same historical necessity, i.e., development of productive forces. To materialize this historical necessity, national movements are confronted with a combination of tasks: "The central task of the colonial and semi-colonial countries is the agrarian revolution, i.e., liquidation of feudal heritages, and national independence, i.e., the overthrow of the imperialist yoke. Both tasks are closely linked with each other." (Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program*) That is the essence of national revolutions in the epoch of permanent revolution.

Nationalism is still the same phenomenon, i.e., the expression of the objective need for development of independent nation states. But where the nationalist movement is waged against imperialism, it finds its strongest and most consistent expression in the form of nationalism of the oppressed, not of the bourgeoisie. Thus, nationalism of the oppressed today is not the same as the bourgeois ideology of yesterday. Today, within the national movement it is that form of consciousness which first raises the toiling masses of the oppressed nations to their feet to fight against their oppressors. It is a giant step forward and a revolutionary factor. While the bourgeoisie recoils from the implications of fighting for the nationalist objectives, the toiling masses do not. The national struggle is a "complicated form of class struggle."

Comrade Germain identifies nationalism with the bourgeoisie. There is as much truth in that notion as to identify democracy with the bourgeoisie. To be sure, there exists a bourgeois nationalism, just as there exists bourgeois democracy, but this does not mean that democracy and the interests of the bourgeoisie are one and the same thing, nor does it imply the universal identification of nationalism with the interests of the bourgeoisie.

If we were to follow the abstract method of Comrade Germain we might say: "The ideas of democracy form a bourgeois ideology. This ideology played a progressive role essentially in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, i.e., in the classical period of the bourgeois democratic revolution of the pre-industrial era, when the bourgeoisie was historically a revolutionary class. With the epoch of imperialism, democracy is outmoded, and therefore the ideas of democracy as a rule become reactionary, because they are nothing more and nothing less than bourgeois ideology."

Such a non-materialist method would lead us to disastrous consequences. We do not oppose democracy, on the contrary, we are the most consistent fighters for democracy. Likewise, we see the nationalism of the oppressed only in the light of class struggle.

Comrade Germain's reasoning for the reactionary character of nationalism is that "the universal idea of independent organization of the working class, of the autonomous class goals followed by the proletariat and the poor pea-

santry in the class struggle, of *international class solidarity of the workers of all countries* and all nationalities, is opposed to the idea of national solidarity or national community of interests." So we see that the reason Germain calls nationalism reactionary is because, for him, the *idea* of international class solidarity of the workers of all countries is opposed to the *idea* of national solidarity, the *idea* of internationalism is opposed to the *idea* of nationalism.

Comrade Germain apparently considers this counter-position self-evident. Yes, it is self-evident from a grammatical viewpoint. Comrade Germain's argument on this point is a grammatical argument, not a political argument. It does not take into account the dynamics of the revolutionary process. He essentially argues that since nationalism is the opposite of internationalism—opposite in the grammatical sense—it is consequently reactionary.

According to the method of Comrade Germain one may argue that since the *idea* of dictatorship is opposed to the *idea* of democracy, dictatorship is reactionary as a rule. Of course, we do not agree with this. Not every dictatorship is reactionary, we have to make it clear what *kind* of dictatorship we are talking about. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the most progressive government in this epoch.

Similarly, not every nationalism is reactionary. We have to make clear what *kind* of nationalism we are talking about. That is why it is essential to make a clear distinction between the nationalism of the oppressed and that of the oppressors. Comrade Germain fails to do this. All other arguments that he puts forward against nationalism—besides the grammatical one cited above—do not apply to the nationalism of the oppressed at all: How the triumphant bourgeoisie uses nationalism against its foreign competitors, or how it takes over other nations' lands. These and many other arguments that Comrade Germain could have used only show the reactionary nature of the oppressor nations' nationalism. But the abstraction that he has made of the *idea* of nationalism mechanically transfers the reactionary character of the nationalism of the oppressor nations to the nationalism of the oppressed.

By the same method Comrade Germain separates the struggle for self-determination, or national liberation, from nationalism. Again the ideas are separated from their material base. While he considers nationalism as a reactionary ideology which must be opposed, at the same time he tells us "the correct Marxist-Leninist position is to combine *full support for the national self-determination struggle of the masses* including all the concrete demands which express this right on the political, cultural, linguistic field, with the struggle against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalism." (Our emphasis.) This distinction which Comrade Germain may think is profound is meaningless. If, in fact, nationalism is reactionary because the *idea* of national solidarity or a national community of interests is opposed to the *idea* of international class solidarity with the workers of all countries, as Comrade Germain asserts, then would not the struggle for the realization of that idea be reactionary? After all, in the Marxist terminology national self-determination has a precise meaning which includes the creation of a state; a body of armed people who defend the class interests of a definite class.

Trotsky, on the other hand, does not make such a mechanical separation between the nationalism of the oppressed with their struggle for national liberation. Having first completely defined the basis for the kind of nation-

alism he is referring to, Trotsky says: "The proletariat does not have the right to turn its back on *this kind* of nationalism. On the contrary, it must demonstrate in practice that it is the most consistent and devoted fighter for the national liberation of Indochina." It could not be otherwise; that kind of nationalism is their consciousness of their oppression. Their struggle for liberation flows from that consciousness, and in turn enriches it.

When Comrade Germain tells us to give full support to the national self-determination struggle of the masses, without concretely specifying what kind of masses he is talking about—oppressed or oppressor—and without specifying against whom the struggle is directed, he is giving us a formula with grave political implications. Should we give support to the struggle of the Israeli masses for self-determination? Should we give them support in their struggle to be armed and have their own state in Palestine? Asking this question is answering it. No, of course. Yet in Comrade Germain's abstract formulations an affirmative answer to his basic question is implied. Of course, the comrade does not mean this, and cannot mean it. That position, certainly, would be a betrayal of our proletarian principles. We do not support the nationalism of oppressor nations. We do not support the struggle nor affirm any right of the Israelis to be armed and have their own state, i.e., their right to self-determination.

Still, the non-materialist method that Comrade Germain has employed leads to such implications despite his intent. On the other hand, his denial of the revolutionary character of the nationalism of the oppressed—calling it reactionary along with other kinds of nationalism—tends to belittle, at the very least, the struggle of the oppressed for liberation.

We will demonstrate to the Palestinians who have become conscious of their oppression as Palestinians, that only the socialist revolution can put an end to their national oppression, and that their struggle against national oppression is part of the socialist revolution. We are not going to tell them that their nationalism, their hatred of their oppressor is reactionary, because it is not true. We are not going to tell them that their struggle against national oppression is not anticapitalist, because it is not true. We will tell them that their bourgeoisie cannot end their national oppression, because we know well that in the epoch of permanent revolution, they will not gain their national independence, or as Trotsky puts it, "the overthrow of the imperialist yoke," other than through a socialist revolution. And likewise, the Palestinian worker cannot and will not attain class consciousness until he or she becomes conscious that he or she is being oppressed as a Palestinian.

The identification of nationalism in general with the bourgeoisie has led Comrade Germain to give credit to the bourgeoisie as a fighter for the goals of the national movements—he commits such a grave mistake as crediting the national bourgeoisie with the ability to end the national oppression. For instance, Comrade Germain writes: "Is it true that, because the national bourgeoisie is dependent upon imperialism, it is unable to break all ties with imperialism and therefore, cannot lead a victorious struggle against foreign oppression? This is completely wrong." One has the right to ask if the national bourgeoisie objectively has the ability to play such a progressive role in the national movements, then on what basis do we reject the Stalinist theory of the bloc of four classes. If Comrade Germain's notion was correct, then Stalinists do have every right to accuse us of being sectarians for our refusal to collaborate with the so-called

national bourgeoisie. After all, by uniting with the national bourgeoisie, which has such a supposed desire to fight for nationalist goals, and together with it mobilizing the maximum forces possible, couldn't we wage a victorious struggle against national oppression? If that were true, it would constitute a first stage of revolution. This first stage would be objectively possible. Then, in the second stage, after the national bourgeoisie has broken all ties with imperialism, we could wage a struggle against its indigenous "economic exploitation" of the workers.

The revolutionary experience in Iran as it has already been demonstrated, contradicts Comrade Germain. The national bourgeoisie is not able to "lead a victorious struggle against foreign oppression." The national bourgeoisie is hardly able to begin such a struggle, let alone lead it. The role of the national bourgeoisie in the national movement is nothing but a brake on the unfolding class struggle.

The source of Comrade Germain's mistake lies in his forgetting to take into account the uneven development of history in the last century. The national movements are qualitatively different from those of the last epoch. The national bourgeoisie is no longer capable of leading revolutionary national movements to realize their objectives. Trotsky points this out in the *History of the Russian Revolution*:

"Whereas in the nineteenth century the fundamental problem of wars and revolutions was still to guarantee a national market to the productive forces, the problem of our century is to free the productive forces from the national boundaries which have become iron fetters upon them. In the broad historic sense the national revolutions of the East are only stages of the world revolution of the proletariat, just as the national movements of Russia became stepping stones to the soviet dictatorship." (Vol. 3, p. 55). In the age of permanent revolution nationalist movements of the oppressed not only have a different origin (imperialist oppression) than the bourgeois democratic revolutions of the past, they also have a different objective. They are "only stages of the world revolution of the proletariat."

Unlike the movements of the last century in Western Europe and North America, the objective aim of the nationalist movement of the oppressed no longer coincides with the class aims of the bourgeoisie. Instead they merge with the historic class interests of the proletariat. The leadership of these movements, therefore, belongs to the proletariat and not to the bourgeoisie. The only factor that enables the bourgeois elements to come to the leadership of the nationalist movements of the oppressed is the historic crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.

Identifying the nationalism of the bourgeoisie with the nationalism of the oppressed is completely false. The national bourgeoisie, if it participates in the nationalist movement, does so in order to promote its class privileges. It hopes to get a few more crumbs from imperialism and to prevent the revolutionary nationalist movement

of the oppressed from growing over into a socialist revolution. The national bourgeoisie is incapable and unwilling to wage a victorious struggle for national independence. This requires overthrowing the yoke of imperialism. Formal independence does not mean national independence. For example, Iran has *always* been formally independent, but it is not nationally independent. Foreign domination continues. As its history in the last hundred years shows, foreign imperialist powers have continually intervened in the internal affairs of the country. These powers have staged coup d'etats, installed their own governments, and handpicked their shahs.

As long as national independence is not achieved, foreign national oppression continues. If we say that it is possible to eliminate foreign national oppression without overthrowing the imperialist yoke, then we would be separating national oppression from its economic base, imperialism. If we say, as Comrade Germain does, that the national bourgeoisie "can lead a victorious struggle against foreign national oppression" (p. 30) then we would be endowing the bourgeoisie with a revolutionary role, at the expense of the theory of permanent revolution.

Apparently Comrade Germain equates formal independence with the elimination of foreign national oppression. But Comrade Germain's confusion does not rest on this one critical point alone. Not only is it incorrect to classify the national bourgeoisie as a revolutionary force, it is necessary for revolutionaries to see this bourgeoisie as a *counterrevolutionary* force. In the case of Iran, we see that the country has been formally independent, but foreign national oppression has persisted. And this has provided the basis for the development of Iran's national liberation movements. But the national bourgeoisie has betrayed each one of these movements. This national bourgeoisie leads the movement to defeat precisely because it plays a counterrevolutionary role in the nationalist movement of the oppressed.

Of course, the nationalism of the oppressed does not automatically lead to a socialist revolution, neither does the working class consciousness. That is why a bolshevik party armed with a transitional program is a historic necessity. But to arrive at a transitional program it is not enough to be clear about our goal, which is the socialist revolution. We must be clear about where we are.

In a country like Iran, where the majority of the people are non-Persian, if we cannot be clear about the revolutionary potential of the nationalism of the oppressed, that means that we do not know where we are and we cannot possibly hope to derive a transitional program. If we accept that the nationalism of the oppressed is reactionary, we will not be able to arrive at a transitional program, and we will not be able to construct a revolutionary party, the Iranian section of the Fourth International, to lead the revolution to victory.

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# Nationalism and National Struggles in the Middle East

By Azar Najmi

The growth of capitalism, from the end of the nineteenth century, beyond the framework of national states, i.e. the breaking of national boundaries by capital and its penetration of Asia, marked the beginning of a contradictory process. On the one hand, imperialism broke the centuries-old stagnation of the productive forces in most of these countries, which had resulted from the peculiarities of the development of the so-called Asiatic mode of production. On the other hand, having broken this stagnation, it put itself in charge of molding, forming, and controlling the process of development in these countries in the service of the objective needs and dynamic of imperialist capital. This resulted in the intensification of the extreme unevenness of development, perpetuating the most backward economic and social formations side by side with the most advanced features of monopoly capitalism.

It was this process which was at the basis of acute and explosive national struggles which broke out in these countries specifically in the Arab East and Iran in the twentieth century.

The struggle for national liberation (e.g. the fight against Zionism, for the unity of Arab nation, and for the right of national minorities for self-determination) and the achievement of many other democratic tasks (e.g. the agrarian revolution), still remain on the agenda and provide some of the more explosive elements of social revolution.

It is precisely for this reason that it is so crucial for revolutionaries to have a correct understanding of the national struggle and its relation to the dynamics of socialist revolution in these countries. It is in this perspective of the Middle-East revolution that I intend to deal with this question. I will attempt to clarify some of the more general questions concerning nationalism and national struggle by focusing on particular developments in the Middle-East.

## The Eclectic Confusion on Nationalism and the National Struggles

To begin with I find it necessary, at the expense of being repetitious, to reiterate what Comrade Germain brings out so clearly in his document ("In Defence of Leninism: In Defence of the Fourth International," IIDB, Vol. X, No. 4), in criticizing the incorrect identification and interchangeable use of "national liberation," "national struggle," and "national tasks" with "nationalism." It is necessary because of the continued confusion on this question in the documents which have attempted to answer Germain's presentation of the national question. Dick Roberts starts his reply to Germain in "The Agrarian Revolution and Nationalism: Trotsky's view" (*SWP Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, No. 17) by repeating this error. He claims that Germain is attempting "to drive a sharp wedge between the national struggle and the class struggles of workers and peasants." He then proceeds to back up this claim by a string of quotations from Germain's above mentioned document on *nationalism*. In the same article in the section titled "China and the National Question," Comrade Roberts

brings a quotation from Germain's document followed by one from Trotsky's *Problems of the Chinese Revolution*. Both quotations try to explain how concretely the agrarian revolution, national unity and economic sovereignty, and the challenge of the proletariat to the private property of the national bourgeoisie are all interconnected. However, Roberts suddenly jumps to the conclusion that "where Germain blurs the relationship between the agrarian revolution and nationalism, Trotsky elevates it into prominence." (page 5). One wonders in vain about the logical steps between the quotations and this conclusion. Where is Trotsky talking about *nationalism*? Such a jump could only result from a confusion between nationalism and the national struggle.\*

In the Marxist tradition, "nationalism" has always been used to refer to an ideology and organized movements whose programs are determined by that ideology and in turn reproduce that ideology. Like all ideology, it can be progressive or reactionary depending on its relationship to the actual historical dynamics of the class struggle in specific historical periods. It can be progressive, as it was during the period of the struggle of the bourgeoisie in Europe against feudalism. It can be reactionary whenever it serves to foster illusions that work against the objective dynamics of the class struggle.

A good example of how a nationalist ideology can play a reactionary role even among an oppressed people, is the role of Zionism in Eastern Europe at the turn of the century and later on in the twentieth century. The Zionist movement was the product of the last phase of capitalism. It was essentially a reaction against the scapegoat situation created for Jewry by the decay of capitalism. The Zionist ideology was a reflection of the interests of a class, in this case the ideology of Jewish petty-bourgeoisie, suffocating between feudalism in ruins and capitalism in decay. The reactionary role of this ideology was not just due to the relationship of the Zionist movement to the Palestinian Arabs, namely the colonizing character of the Zionist movement. It was also because it posed a utopian, impossible solution for the Jewish question. It sought to solve the Jewish question *without* recognizing the cause of modern anti-semitism: capitalist decay. It diverted its adherents from the real class struggles of the Jewish workers, encouraging "national solidarity" between Jewish workers and capitalists.

In the context of national liberation struggles in the present epoch, nationalism means an ideology that perpetuates the idea that the achievement of national tasks and the success of national struggle has a *national solution*, namely a solution in which the oppressed nation as a nation, all classes allied together, is going to achieve these tasks. It continuously covers the social stratification of the nation into classes, thereby obscuring the objective reality that in the present epoch it is *only* through a proletarian revolution that these tasks are going to be *fully* accomplished. In this sense, nationalism is a bourgeois ideology.

**Let Us Get Any Semantic Confusion Out of the Way**

Much has been said about the distinction between nationalism of the oppressed and nationalism of the oppressor. Indeed they are different. We all agree that nationalism of an oppressor nation is a thoroughly reactionary ideology, whose function is the preservation and perpetuation of the privileges enjoyed by the dominant nation. The nationalism of the oppressed, on the other hand, is a reaction against these privileges of the dominant nation, it is a reaction to oppression and humiliation suffered by this nation. In this sense, nationalist consciousness on the part of oppressed people is a step forward from apathy and submission to privilege. But it is *still* a block, an obstacle. It is the task of communists to politically combat this obstacle. If by "nationalism of the oppressed is progressive" we mean that nationalist consciousness of an oppressed people is an expression of their revolt against oppression and therefore a step forward from apathy, then we all agree. But, unfortunately, this is *not all* that is meant by the advocates of "consistent nationalism." While it has not been fully documented, oral discussion has shown within the Fourth International a tendency among supporters of the Leninist-Trotskyist Tendency that holds:

1. That nationalism of the oppressed has its own *independent* objective dynamic, i.e., because the bourgeoisie can no longer lead a successful national struggle to the end, nationalist struggles *by their own logic* lead towards socialism. (This is putting the theory of permanent revolution on its head.);

2. That therefore we communists should become the best nationalists;

3. That we should give unconditional support to all and any manifestations of this nationalism.

To substantiate these last three points historically, Trotsky has often been said to have supported the nationalism of the oppressed. His views on Catalan nationalism have been referred to on several occasions: for instance, that "Catalan nationalism is a progressive revolutionary factor; Spanish nationalism is a reactionary imperialist factor." (*The Spanish Revolution* (1931-1939), Pathfinder Press, 1973, p. 110.) But in what context and in what sense did he write this? "I have already written," Trotsky states, "that Catalan petty-bourgeois nationalism at the present stage is progressive—but only on one condition: that it develops its activity outside the ranks of communism and that it is always under the blows of communist criticism. To permit petty-bourgeois nationalism to disguise itself under the banner of communism means, at the same time, to deliver a treacherous blow to the proletarian vanguard and to destroy the progressive significance of petty-bourgeois nationalism." (op. cit., p. 155.)

The first thing to notice here is that Trotsky feels no qualms about characterizing the class nature of Catalan nationalism: it is petty-bourgeois. Secondly, he says that Catalan nationalism is progressive *only on one condition*: that the communists are continuously criticizing it and not merely trying to outbid it. If they fail in this task, its progressive character will be destroyed. This is a far cry from the communists becoming the best, most consistent nationalists. Finally, Trotsky makes completely clear that he did not regard Catalan nationalism as possessing any kind of *independent* progressive or revolutionary dynamic; its progressive role is wholly *dependent* on the unrelenting communist criticism.

Does all this mean that we therefore do not support national struggles unless they have communist leadership? Certainly not. Communists are always in the forefront of any struggle against oppression and of

opposition to all privileges and inequalities. Do we call nationalists of the oppressed nationalities "reactionaries" and turn our backs to their struggles? Do we preach to them that they ought not to struggle against their oppression until they have become communists? Of course not. On the contrary, we recognize nationalist consciousness among the oppressed nationalities as a form of rebellion. The communists of the oppressor nation in particular must lean over backwards to be fully sensitive to the feelings of suspicion, mistrust and hostility on the part of the oppressed. But this is not the end of our tasks. The most important aspect consists of a study of the class nature of the nationalist movement in each particular case and the determination of how the movement can be led in the direction of combining with the working-class movement. In the case of most oppressed nationalities in underdeveloped countries—like Iran—the social base of nationalist movements will be primarily composed of the peasantry and urban petty-bourgeoisie. Our primary task will consist of developing a correct transitional program which will lead the peasantry against the landlords and the nationalist bourgeoisie, thereby combining the national struggle with working-class struggle and placing the proletariat at the head of the peasantry. We will actively participate in the national struggle with such a transitional program, pushing it forward in action, without making any ideological concessions to nationalism. All this is very different from claiming that consistent nationalism is communism. Or that the national struggle, *out of its own logic*, will move towards a social overturn.

## False Polemics Against Germain

Comrades D. Roberts and T. Thomas ("National Oppression, National Liberation and the Socialist Revolution: A Defense of Leninism and A Reply to Comrade Ernest Germain," *SWP Discussion Bulletin*, Vol. 31, No. 17) in their polemics against Germain bring up a number of false allegations.

They claim that Germain equates the granting of formal political independence with national liberation. But Germain in his rejection of the theory of stages says, "The tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution cannot be reduced to national independence or the suppression of foreign national oppression, any more than they can themselves be separated into successive stages." (p. 31) They charge that Germain separates the agrarian revolution from the national struggle. But Germain in numerous occasions explains concretely how these struggles are *not* separable. For example, "This whole analysis of concrete social forces and their mutual inter-relations hinges precisely upon the *refusal to separate* any stages of 'national liberation' from a subsequent 'stage' of agrarian revolution, and a still later stage of 'independent working class struggle.' The whole essence of the theory of permanent revolution derives from the understanding that all these tasks are *combined and intertwined* from the beginning of the revolutionary process, as the result of the class relations prevailing in these countries." (p. 34, emphasis in the original.) Exactly *because* the struggle for full achievement of all these tasks (political independence, agrarian revolution, industrialization, etc.) is impossible except through a proletarian revolution, it is so crucial to combat any ideology which fosters any illusions, such as nationalism. This does not negate the importance of national tasks or the explosive character of the national problem in certain cases or that of the agrarian problem, it combats the illusions that would



lead to the failure of the struggles to accomplish these tasks. One of the reasons that Trotsky was against the slogan of the democratic dictatorship of workers and peasants was exactly because this formulation left the class character of the dictatorship unclear, leaving the door open for the political hegemony of the national bourgeoisie over the masses and consequently for the collapse of the democratic revolution itself. To say the least, nationalism "blurs" the class dynamics of national liberation struggles, leaving the door open for the political hegemony of the bourgeoisie.

It is true, however, that Comrade Germain does make a distinction between national *political* oppression and foreign *economic* oppression (exploitation). In my opinion his formulation is somewhat misleading. It introduces unnecessary confusion and unclarity into the discussion. A more accurate distinction would have been political independence and an end to all forms of political oppression and economic exploitation by world imperialism. What is the meaning of such a distinction? Is it a mechanical separation?

The struggle for national liberation has different components to it. One of these components is self-determination in its Leninist definition, namely the political separation of a nation and setting up of its own nation-state. Other components, possessing a generally economic character, include agrarian revolution, industrialization, and the end of monopoly exploitation on the world market. Of course, these components are not mechanically separable, but in order to understand the whole of this process, the dynamics of this process, a distinction between the different components is necessary. It is necessary exactly because some of these tasks *are* achievable under capitalism (political independence, e.g. Bengal), while others can be *started* but not completed under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie or petty bourgeois formations, e.g., agrarian reform in Egypt under Nasser and industrialization in Argentina under Peron. In order to understand the driving forces behind the national struggles one has to recognize what the national bourgeoisie *can* achieve.

To be more concrete, I will take up here the historical revolution of the Arab-East in the twentieth century, and show what Arab nationalism means *historically*. It is only this way that we can better understand what role this ideology plays and is going to play in the unfolding of class struggle in the Arab-East.

## Class Struggle in the Arab East Before 1952

On the eve of World War I the Arab East, although formally a part of the Ottoman Empire, was in fact partially dominated by British and French imperialism. In Egypt, the British had been firmly entrenched for over 30 years, turning the country into a supplier of raw cotton for British mills and an importer of its textiles. In greater Syria, the economy was in its last stages of disintegration as a result of heavy Ottoman taxes combined with an energetic penetration of European goods which were generally cheaper. In Palestine, the European Zionist movement was just beginning to make important progress in its deals with the various imperialist powers.

It is out of this background that the Arab national liberation movement developed before and during World War I as a movement for political independence of the Arab-East from the foreign oppressive rule of Britain and France and the Ottoman Empire. The big landowners in Egypt and the merchants in Greater Syria and the tribal chiefs of Hejaz, the small artisans of the cities, the workers and

the landless peasants—all were united in the struggle for independence.

It is important to distinguish during this period between two main trends within the leadership of the movement: the first originated in the Greater Syria region, which suffered not only from Ottoman political and military rule, but also—as in Egypt—from economic domination, which was steadily bringing about the near destruction of the artisan classes in the region. This was accompanied by widespread famine and disease which reduced the population of Syria to a very low level. Therefore the Syrian-Egyptian city bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie, and to a limited extent the landowning classes (particularly in Egypt), had a very powerful economic motive (along with a mass base with which to support it) behind their opposition to imperialist control. And they could be expected to maintain their leadership of the struggle as long as it took imperialism to grant them their share of the profits that were being reaped from the Arab masses.

The second trend in the leadership was that of the tribal chiefs of the Hejaz, Hussein and his sons. During this period, the Arabian Peninsula still had a tribal structure. In the Hejaz, the traditional economic base of these tribes (commerce down the Red Sea coast and pilgrimage to Mecca) had been taken over by the Ottoman administration. This was the driving force behind Hussein's "Arab nationalism." Other tribes of the interior, such as the one led by Saud of Nejd, never opposed Ottoman rule, since they had an internally self-sufficient tribal economy which was more or less left intact by Ottoman rule. This leadership was highly opportunistic and susceptible to manipulation by the British. In fact, it was largely British gold and promises that had inspired Hussein. The potential danger of the movement in Syria to the Ottoman Empire was quickly recognized and it was very harshly repressed. Meanwhile, the uprising in Hejaz, being far away and seemingly tribal in nature, enjoyed relative freedom. As a result, the leadership of the Arab national movement as a whole fell into the hands of Sharif Hussein until the end of World War I. The Arab East thus became easy prey for European imperial domination. The Hejaz leadership was neutralized, having received rule over the Arabian Peninsula at the expense of the national goals of the masses.

The Sykes-Picot agreement formalized and hardened the division lines between British and French influence, the former getting the best of the deal. Then came the Balfour Declaration as a further embellishment that carved out Palestine for Zionist colonization.

The tribal leadership had at this point completely discredited itself and the path was paved for a resurgent Arab bourgeois leadership to take over the mass movement.

Along with the occupation of Greater Syria, Iraq and Palestine by French and British troops came a wave of mass uprisings throughout the whole Arab East. This time the movement for Arab unity and independence from foreign control was faced by Sharif Hussein and his sons with harsh repression as he sent his police to shoot down people demonstrating against the arrival of French and British troops in the cities.

The year 1919 in Egypt witnessed massive strikes and demonstrations against the British and their proteges in control of state power. In Palestine in 1920, the movement took on the form of armed revolts against the incoming European Jewish settlers and their protectors, the British army of occupation. In Syria and Iraq, the same year witnessed a series of organized attacks on the French and

British armies respectively. For a while the situation in Iraq, where the most serious uprisings against the British had taken place, threatened to get completely out of hand. The fear of such a development, in addition to the high costs entailed in maintaining direct colonial rule in the Arab East, led Britain and much later France to change from direct to indirect neocolonial control of Middle Eastern resources and markets. This took the form of granting token independence under the reliable all-Arab auspices of reactionaries like Faisal in Iraq and later Abdullah in Jordan.

This shift in imperialist policy vis-a-vis the Arab East proved to be insufficient in the long run in that it did not achieve its prime objectives, i.e., to subdue and divert the Arab anti-imperialist movement. The former tribal sheiks, now in control of state power, remained incapable of appeasing the basic economic and national demands of the Arab people. Still, there was no real independence from Britain and France, not even in official propaganda. In fact, European economic control of the rich oil fields of the region was solidifying, this time under the auspices of Arab rulers, not Turks. Another painful affront of Arab national consciousness was the rising domination of European culture and language, which brought with it continued humiliation of the Arab people. In terms of concrete economic achievements, there was nothing—no land reform, no industrialization, in general, no development and no improvement in the standard of living of the average peasant or city dweller.

The years up to the 1950s were a continuation of mass uprisings, repression and violence, followed by more uprisings, strikes and demonstrations. At the slightest pretext, the Arab people would take to the streets in Cairo, Damascus and Bagdad. Unorganized and lacking revolutionary leadership, they were beaten back time and again.

In particular in Palestine, during 1936, a strike in Syria against the French coupled with an increasing influx of Jewish settlers and a deteriorating economic base sparked off a strike by the Palestinian urban working class that lasted over six months. The strike was staunchly supported by the Palestinian peasantry and quickly spread to other parts of the Levant and Egypt. Eventually, it was defeated as a result of British pressure on its leadership and the growth of a Jewish working class. But the defeat served only to mark the beginning, as armed struggle broke out around Nablus and Khalil. For three years, the Palestinian people managed to sustain the battle against the British army of occupation and the Zionist colonizers. The effect of their defeat in 1939 was to immeasurably strengthen the political and economic strength of the Zionist settler movement, paving the way for the final catastrophe of 1948.

In order to understand the leadership of the anti-imperialist movement in this period, it is important to distinguish between the openly bourgeois opposition parties like the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and Wafd in Egypt on the one hand and the Communist parties on the other, which were especially strong in Iraq and Syria. The disillusionment with that section of the Arab bourgeoisie that had compromised with imperialism after World War I, coupled with the impact of the Soviet Union and its achievements, had turned the Communist parties into highly visible mass organizations capable of playing a role independent of the bourgeoisie. The fact that they did not systematically and consistently play that role, objectively turned them into hard working organizers of the Arab people in the service of the dissident nationalist bourgeois and petty-bourgeois oppositionist movements. The ultimate

expression of political betrayal on the part of the Arab Communist parties (except the Iraqi) came in 1948 with their recognition of the creation of the state of Israel. The objective effect of this position was to make it easier for the nationalist parties that opposed Zionism, like the emerging Baath and the SSNP, to wrest away from the Communist parties the leadership of the Arab anti-imperialist movement.

In summary, the most important characteristics of this period were:

1) The struggle against Zionism and western imperialism was objectively being fought out all over the Arab world at the same time, because the Arab masses completely identified the Hashemite monarchies and King Farouk with British and French imperialism. This "unity of struggle" is what brought about the demise of the traditional ruling classes of the Middle East in the 1950s;

2) Despite the rigid distinction between the ruling classes and the masses, the social structure of most Arab countries in this period was still, in bourgeois terms, not a very developed one, in the sense of lacking clearly differentiated class relationships. The working class was numerically small, politically incoherent and socially not well differentiated. There was a great deal of mobility, overlap and fluidity among the peasantry, urban dwellers, the unemployed, the workers and the petty-bourgeoisie of the cities and the countryside. Despite these general conditions, an important economic and political development was just beginning to take place—the growth of an urban middle class. This process was proceeding at different rates in different countries and was accompanied by a relative flourishing of specific nationalist political formations like the Arab National Movement and the Baath Party, which potentially expressed the interests and aspirations of these classes;

3) Alongside the reality of a "unity of struggle" there was an important unevenness in the economic and social development in the various regions of the Arab East and hence a variety of tasks had yet to be accomplished. This brought into the leadership of the movement in different parts of the Arab East a variety of conflicting interests. For example, while in Egypt the struggle was going on against a local Arab ruling class closely linked to imperialism and stretching back to the nineteenth century, in Syria an independent Arab state was not even set up until 1945. In Palestine, of course, direct colonial presence remained until 1948, only to be replaced by a different kind of colonizer with the establishment of the Zionist state. The consequences of these divisions established by imperialism, while not bearing directly on the struggle in this period (1920s-1950s), were to have very important results in the future.

The total defeat of the Arab armies in 1948 completed the isolation of the traditional Arab regimes. Disillusionment spread deep, even amongst sectors of the state apparatus. The big bourgeoisie—landlords, industrialists and bankers—had proved their utter bankruptcy in carrying on the struggle. The mass movement, although lacking revolutionary leadership, picked up new momentum, especially among the peasantry, striving for land in conflict with the big landowners.

Out of this balance of forces—a ruling class not unified and strong enough to crush the mass movement and a mass movement of urban petty bourgeois layers, workers and peasants who lacked revolutionary leadership—emerged in the 1950s a new social force in the leadership of the Arab nationalist movement: the army officers. In essence they adhered to the aspirations of the growing ur-

ban middle classes, which were to try to develop the economy on a capitalist foundation. At the same time, this drive for progress and development corresponded, at least in the beginning, to certain interests of the masses of the oppressed and economically deprived classes. The officers' critical position in the state apparatus gave them an enormous advantage over other sectors of the petty-bourgeoisie, and they succeeded in taking state power in Egypt (1952), Syria (1955), and Iraq (1958).

In order to understand the dynamics of the Arab revolutionary movement, the concrete inter-relation of national struggle and socialist revolution in the Arab East, it is absolutely crucial to study the economic, social and ideological evolution of Arab nationalist regimes over the past two decades. It is necessary to study what Arab nationalist regimes *have* achieved economically and socially in order to comprehend why Nasserism has had such a strong ideological hold on the Arab masses. On the other side of the same coin, such an understanding will facilitate an understanding of what national tasks have remained unfulfilled, and thus the concrete way to a break of Arab masses from this ideology.

## The Case of Egypt

In Egypt the new regime's first step, after repression of the left, was land reform, aimed at breaking the old political and economic base of the landed aristocracy and calming down the turbulent conditions in the countryside by limited land distribution. The land reform, though partial, did achieve these two political aims. However, the low short-run profitability and the high risks involved in long-term industrial investment meant that the economic aim of the regime, i.e., promoting re-investment in industrial development, was not achieved. Instead, former landowners found it more in their interests to reinvest in construction, import of luxury goods, land speculation, or to export their money capital abroad. It was therefore necessary to seek additional means of acquiring industrial capital. In the first few years after the coup, attempts were made to attract as much western and foreign capital as possible. But the decades of instability and upheavals worked against such attempts. To this one must add the political factor: Israel. The Egyptian regime needed to reconstruct its army both for military defense and to preserve its "national honour." The West (U. S. in particular), by refusing to sell arms to Egypt, forced the regime to look towards Eastern Europe and eventually the Soviet Union for an alternate source of military and economic aid. This was followed by the nationalization of the Suez Company which, apart from its political value, had an important economic motive, in that it provided Egypt with a new economic resource. It also began a new phase in Egypt's attempts to develop the economy. In 1957 the regime started to Egyptianize the economy: both in capital and in management of all banks, insurance companies and foreign commercial enterprises. Certain sectors of private enterprise were also brought under state control. The years 1959-1961 can be characterized as a period in which the state's share in the economic life of the country was continuously increasing.

It is important to keep in mind that the problem which the regime was continuously trying to solve in its attempts to develop the economy on capitalist foundations was the lack of necessary capital. Hence to summarize the first decade of the Nasserite regime: he saw attempts to persuade, channel, and finally force the Egyptian upper bourgeoisie to invest its capital in industrial development and attempts to attract foreign investment. But as in other

underdeveloped countries, the upper bourgeoisie proved to be uncooperative in those areas which did not provide sufficient short-run profitability. The state was thus *forced* into taking control and planning of the development process. It is important to emphasize that the state was not working toward the elimination of capitalist property relationships, but rather *for their very promotion*. It is in this context that the "nationalizations" of 1961-1963 and the denationalizations of 1970-71 should be seen. By 1961 the formidable problems of development still remained. The great industrial and financial bourgeoisie were keeping aloof. Capital was not being used extensively. Discontent among peasants, students, and workers was rising. All these factors forced the regime to embark on a new series of measures which included Egyptianization of all merchant and commercial enterprises, the nationalization of all banks, insurance companies, shipping firms, and other basic industrial firms, higher taxation on high income categories, and laws requiring companies to give 25 percent of profits to workers and employees.

The various conflicting and contradictory methods successively adopted by the Egyptian regime in its attempts to achieve economic development under capitalism reflect the impossible nature of such an endeavor in the present epoch. The fact is that the Egyptian economy is totally dependent on, and thus molded by, the world capitalist market. On the one hand, after two decades of attempted industrialization, raw cotton still remains the most important item in providing Egypt with foreign exchange. After the loss of the Sinai oil fields and the Suez Canal revenues in 1967, it has become even more dependent on cotton. This one crop, whose price and volume of sales every year is dependent on the world market, provides Egypt with the bulk of foreign exchange needed to purchase raw materials and components for its industry, manufactured goods, army materials, etc. An ever decreasing price of cotton (as the result of the development of synthetics) coupled with increasing prices of manu-imports has left Egypt with an ever increasing volume of foreign debt. In addition to cotton, another 16 percent of Egypt's foreign earnings comes from other agricultural products like rice and onions, while Egypt itself is heavily dependent on wheat imports from the U.S. every year.

On the other hand, being within the world capitalist market severely limits the industrial development of Egypt. There is almost no heavy industry; hence all the assembly-type industries (cars, motorcycles, batteries, radios, refrigerators, etc.) and the textile and food industries remain heavily dependent on foreign imported components and machinery. Apart from the political consequences of such dependence, the limited market open for products (primarily Egypt's home market) due to the low efficiency and productivity of Egyptian plants in competition with Western European and American ones, limits the growth and expansion of such industries. This in turn perpetuates the dominance of agriculture in the economy of Egypt, completing the vicious circle of underdevelopment.

Egyptian industry will remain primitive and weak, Egyptian economic development partial and limited, unless this circle is broken by a break from the capitalist world market.

All these limitations and partialities are even more pronounced in the case of Iraq.

## Iraq

Prior to 1950, there was no modern industry in Iraq and oil production was very low. State power was con-

trolled by the interests of tribal sheiks and a landowning class that controlled 80 percent of the fertile land and approximately 4.5 million landless peasants. The annual oil income during this period was about \$15 to \$18 million. In the early 1950s, because of international developments—above all, the end of World War II and Mosaddegh's oil nationalizations in Iran—oil production took a big jump forward and revenues reached \$200 million in 1955. There has been a constant rate of increase since then such that today the figures are well over \$800 million. The one consistent physical manifestation of these changes in the social-economic structure of Iraq has been the steady growth of a huge urban middle class, recruited from peasant immigrants to the cities.

The pre-1958 Iraqi state was unable to industrialize and develop the country as a result of the conflict between industrialization and the interests of a landed aristocracy. This meant that the money pouring into the country from oil was used for other purposes: expanding the cities and roads, combatting floods and building irrigation projects which served the interests of the landowning class. The army, police, and the state apparatus as a whole were naturally expanded to accommodate all this activity. The labor force for all this work was conveniently provided by the immigrant peasants who were leaving the countryside for the cities in the hope of improving their miserable existence. It didn't take more than a generation or two at the most for the sons of immigrant peasants to become officers, minor officials, and clerks, while their fathers remained soldiers, policemen, and laborers employed by the state as gardeners, cleaners, garbage collectors, etc. The aspirations and consciousness of each generation were changing very quickly, while their material position was not. The monarchic ruling class was such a tightly knit whole that it could not accept new members and the pressures of a dynamic middle class and rebellious working class and peasantry completed its isolation.

Developments in Egypt and Syria presented clear alternatives to the dissident bourgeois and petty-bourgeois sections of society while the colonization of Palestine and imperialism's attack on Egypt in 1956 radicalized larger proletarian sections of Iraqi society. This state of affairs ended in July 1958 when an officer-led coup d'etat began the first decisive break with the old ruling class. The years after 1958 are characterized by a huge growth in the state apparatus—from 80,000 state employees (excluding the army) in 1958 to 280,000 in 1965. The small shop keepers, merchants and artisans had grown to approximately 150,000 people by 1965, while the number of officers in the army was around 25,000. In short, we are talking about a total of some 450,000 people, each of whom has a family of four or five, or a sum total of 1.8 to 3 million people, who comprise ideologically and materially the urban middle class of Iraq. It is out of and to this mass of people that the Arab Nationalist Movement, the Nasserites, the Baathists, and, to some extent, the Communist Party, made their recruits and directed their appeals. The subsequent series of coups and countercoups that mark the political scene in Iraq reflect no basic ideological differences, but simply a shuffling around of different officers and petty-bourgeois leaders competing with each other over the spoils of office.

During this period, the mass movement under the leadership of the Iraqi Communist Party played no independent role. By the 1950s, the CP had become an utterly bankrupt, reformist party with a very large mass base among the working class and peasantry but without a proletarian program directed towards the conquest of power. Hence

it played directly into the hands of the section of the emerging Iraqi bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeoisie represented by Qassem. Its policy paved the way for its later decimation by the Baath—its only serious rival—in 1963.

Between 1958 and 1968, the new bourgeoisie, growing out of the sections of the urban middle class that had won governmental power, was in the process of consolidating itself as a class politically—through the coups and countercoups of its various cliques—ideologically and economically. When it first came to power in 1958, it did not have definite economic plans and programs. It did not have a clear picture of what it wanted to achieve precisely because it was a class in formation and consolidation. In order to weaken and break the monopoly of power of the old bourgeoisie, and under the pressure of the mass movement, it set out to carry out land reform, nationalize some factories, initiate certain projects in mechanized agriculture, and housing and other construction. This process at the same time laid down the material basis for ownership and control of the means of production by this new, emerging bourgeoisie. Especially under the Aref regime, this took on a very direct form, when nationalized factories, land, construction contracts and import licenses were openly handed over to high government officials and officers and government favorites.

Towards the end of the 1960s, under the Baath, the process became much more organized and systematic. Gradually, a relatively stable regime, with a clearer view of its class interests, emerged. In contrast to Egypt, where the middle class in power (in 1952) had a certain model of economic development in mind and a history of thirty years or so of class consolidation and differentiation behind it, in Iraq when Qassem took power in 1958, the social structure was much more primitive and a socially and economically consolidated middle class did not exist. The landowning class and corrupt monarchy had left the country under complete economic control of British imperialism.

Having come to power, this growing class had to construct itself politically and economically, and at the same time under the impact of Nasser's achievements on the whole Arab East, it had to try to imitate Nasser's path of economic progress. Also, because of the severe repression of the mass movement—the mass murder of Communists as well as of the liberal-nationalist opposition—the regime was very isolated and extremely unpopular. Only recently has this situation begun to change, after the agreement with the Kurds and the oil nationalization.

This isolation, coupled with the historical immaturity of this class in Iraq compared to the Egyptian state-bourgeoisie, has imposed even more severe limitations on what can be achieved in Iraq, economically and socially, under its domination. At the same time, though, the questions of Arab national unity, Palestinian liberation, and, now, of the Arab-Persian Gulf, have been used as tools in the hands of this class to preserve and solidify its ideological hegemony over the masses.

This contradiction between ideological development and political reality in the Arab East is even more pronounced in the case of Syria.

## **Syria and the Limits of Arab Nationalism**

In order to understand this phenomenon, one must first recall that the economic balkanization of the Arab East has evolved slowly over generations of foreign domination. The Greater Syrian region had been for centuries

under the economic hegemony of European merchants to whom the Ottoman Empire was forced to give political and trade concessions. The Sykes-Picot Agreement formalized this development and brought Syria under direct French rule. The Syrian ruling class of big manufacturers and landowners was interested above all in maximizing its profits by protecting themselves from competing commodities, be they of French or Lebanese origin. Thus they had no real interest in unity with Lebanon. Within a general Arab nationalist consciousness which was a reaction to centuries of oppression by the European and centralized Ottoman powers, the Syrian movement for independence was led by the landowning aristocracy and achieved formal independence in 1945.

Very soon this aristocracy was discredited in the eyes of the masses of workers, urban petty-bourgeoisie, and peasants. It took no interest in social reform or general Arab affairs, and it made only a token gesture in the in the 1948 struggle. In 1950 it severed its last tie with Lebanon—the common currency—in order to protect the home market, and continued to carry intensive oppression and exploitation of the broad masses. This policy opened the way to various movements of peasants, workers, intellectuals and the urban petty-bourgeoisie. In the midst of an intensive and prolonged class struggle, the Baath, the Syrian Socialist Party, and the Syrian Communist Party bounded ahead. All these organizations were struggling for economic and social reform, for some anti-imperialist measures, and for greater cooperation with the other Arab states. On the background of total abandonment by the communists of the international class struggle and its substitution of the collaboration of all "national forces" against imperialism, colonialism and its local allies, a consistent bourgeois nationalist ideology developed very rapidly. The Baath Party under the leadership of Michel Aflaq was forced to give some minor concessions to peasant struggles by its left wing but had developed an ideology of mystified Arab nation under the strong influence of German nationalist ideology. This nationalism, while reflecting a deep historic need and aspiration of the Arab masses; i.e., that of a real Arab unity against imperialism and Zionism, did not endanger the economic and political domination of the coalition of army officers, state bureaucracy and the middle classes that led the nationalist movement. The aspiration and struggles of the Syrian masses could not find any organized independent leadership because of the capitulation of the Communist Party to the bourgeois nationalist ideology. The CP had chosen the easy path to power—through cooperation with the existing state machine and the watering down of their demands and agitations. The hold of the Baath and the nationalist ideology was tremendously strengthened throughout the Arab East by the rise of Nasserism in Egypt.

## Nasserism

Carried to power on the wave of universal rejection of the old regime of the British puppet Farouk and its complete breakdown, Nasser represented the masses' total and deep-seated distrust of Western imperialism and its local collaborators. At that time under the Eisenhower-Dulles doctrine, any independent, non-aligned position by a third world country was taken as hostile to them. Thus Nasser's drive against the British and his assertion of Arab independence was incompatible with any Western support. In fact, the West used the Zionist army in February 1955 in an attempt to push Nasser into the

Bagdad Pact. This pact was an early recognizable attempt to put the Arab world under the Pax-Americana anti-Soviet umbrella. This forced Nasser in turn to turn to the Eastern bloc later in 1955 in order to get the military and technical aid needed for repelling Zionism and developing Egypt's economy. During those days of anti-imperialist fights, Nasser got extremely valuable, effective and continuous support from the Arab masses in the whole Arab world. Many times those mass actions were against or in spite of the local rulers. The Nasserite regime understood very well from then on that Egypt must develop and struggle as an Arab and not merely "Egyptian" state. That struggle reached its historic climax in 1956 with the tripartite attack on Egypt. Again the whole Arab world rose in solidarity. With the help of mass demonstrations and strikes, Nasser repelled that attack and turned a military disaster into a political victory. The Arab character of that victory becomes clear when one recalls that it coincided with the struggle for independence in Morocco, Tunis, the Sudan, and with an upturn in the Algerian Revolution; moreover it brought important political and social upheavals in Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. The masses had Nasser in their hearts; their local leaders and governments lost their authority. The struggle of the masses became for a while a powerful challenge to all the ruling classes that were openly collaborating with imperialism. That mass effort demonstrated that the Arab workers and peasants can form a very effective force: a unified Arab force against imperialism and its local agents and dependents.

Thus Arab nationalism became identical with Nasserism. Egypt then took steps to nationalize foreign finance companies and to create an Arab political-economic unity under the leadership of Nasser, the figurehead of the emerging Egyptian state bourgeoisie.

The anti-Nasserite regimes of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, etc., could all be characterized as completely dependent on world imperialism and thus be labeled "anti-nationalist." This enabled the nationalists to explain all the political developments in terms of Arab nationalism—uncomfortable facts about essential weaknesses of Egypt and the continuous miserable situation of the masses were brushed aside as irrelevant or secondary. "What does it matter if we are weak—we still successfully manipulate world powers."

Thus one can see that Arab nationalist ideology, both in its Nasserite form and its Baathist mythical renaissance form, were suited to the narrow and special interests of the developing Arab state bourgeoisie. A local (Syrian, Iraqi or Egyptian) nationalism could not become the dominant ideology, since it does not correspond in any way to the aspirations and understanding of the Arab masses, nor would it enable various Arab state bourgeoisies to attract Arab sympathy and to help each other by the use, for example, of a popular Arab bourgeois national leader like Nasser. The attempts to create purely local or Syrian nationalist sentiments failed completely; nowhere has such a movement taken deep roots or enjoyed wide support for a prolonged period.

Arab nationalism was first used to attack the monopolistic hold of the old bourgeoisie on state power, a class which was despised and hated for its collaboration with imperialism, but concurrently and for a longer period another and potentially more dangerous enemy of the regimes—the organized left—was attacked and smashed. One can take as a typical example of these considerations the Egyptian-Syrian unity of 1958-61. It is clear that the Syrian Baath, now in power, while hoping to get some economic impetus from that unity, had, above all,

the powerful Communist Party in mind. The Syrian bourgeoisie did not want to share the political leadership with the CP, a potentially dangerous enemy since it might be pushed by its mass base to present some far-reaching demands. The unity with the strong and popular state of Egypt was a very good opportunity to outmaneuver the left by moving in the direction of Arab unity. These moves made the regime visibly more consistently Arab nationalist than the left and the Communist Party in particular and made it easier politically to crush the Communists, labeling them divisive, etc. After all, were not the CPs against the creation of the great United Arab Republic? After finishing that job and monopolizing political power in Syria, the Baath realized that Egypt had no intention of allowing the participation of the Syrian bourgeoisie as equal partners in the profit extracted from the Syrian market—but rather aimed at establishing Egyptian economic hegemony in Syria.

Gathering all its forces, the Syrian ruling classes broke the unity and redistributed the nationalized capital. The left was presented again as splitter and saboteurs of the national struggle.

In the light of this history, the specific character of Nasser's and the Baath's Arab nationalism and Arab unity come out as the unity of all Arab classes under the state bourgeoisie and nationalist leadership against an overt imperialist domination and against any open or organized expression of the class contradictions and mass misery inherent in the bourgeois mode of production. Foreign banks as well as striking workers and rebelling peasants must be subdued if the Arab world wants to be reborn and develop in freedom and independence.

## The Role of Arab Nationalism in the Middle East Today

Why is this review of historical evolution of Arab East relevant to the present discussion? For a number of reasons. First, to see that the distinction between political independence and an end to economic exploitation (foreign) is not an arbitrary one, but a historical one. Is there *no* qualitative difference between Nasser's Egypt and Farouk's Egypt? The qualitative difference lies in the real, however partial and limited, actual economic, social, and political achievements of Arab nationalist regimes like Nasser's and the Baath of Syria and Iraq. It is not for no reason that the Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi masses identified their old rulers as one with imperialism and Zionist colonizers, while for a long time and to a large extent still now, they saw the new nationalist leaders as championing their cause and aspirations. The material base for the strong hegemony of Arab nationalist ideology of Nasserite or Baathist variety lies in these partially successful anti-imperialist struggles coupled with the partial economic developments and social reforms carried out under these regimes. As a matter of fact it was exactly because of these partial successes, together with its nationalist ideology and slogans that the Palestinian movement was left isolated as a national liberation movement. The non-Palestinian Arab masses no longer identified their own ruling classes with imperialism and Zionism, and thus their participation in the Palestinian movement and the struggle against Zionism was to a large extent reduced to mere expressions of sympathy.

We must make an attempt to recognize Arab nationalism for what it actually, historically, is, and not for what we define or wish it to be. Arab nationalism, no matter of the Nasserite or Syrian Baath, or Iraqi Baath variety, is the ideology of the ruling classes in the Arab East. Of course,

it corresponds to certain real aspirations of Arab masses, significantly those of Arab unity and struggle against Zionism. But the Arab-bourgeoisies are incapable of achieving these national tasks in their totality. The developments in the Arab East, while on the one hand demonstrating the interdependence of the different Arab countries, also shows the creation of different Arab bourgeois classes in the different Arab countries. Each regime, enclosed within its small home market, remains at the whims of internal capitalist contradictions as well as the shifting winds of the world market. Often their interests clash with each other, preventing unity even on a level of creating common markets, demonstrating the limitations and incapacities of Arab bourgeoisies in uniting the Arab world. Thus the burning national question of Arab unity and the anti-Zionist struggle *cannot* be solved in the present capitalist framework. It is exactly these reasons that make it so important to fight any ideology which sustains the hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the masses.

## The Question of the Gulf

Today we see Arab nationalist ideology concretely at work in another part of the Middle East: the Arab-Persian gulf. The Baathist regime of Iraq for the past three years has been popularizing the slogan of "Arabization of the Gulf" (*Ta'rib al-khalii*). What is the content of this slogan? Whose objective interests does it serve? The objective interests of the Arab workers and poor peasants? Or those of the Iraqi state bourgeoisie which is trying to open the Gulf markets for itself in competition with the Iranian bourgeoisie by manipulating the deep anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses? What is the meaning of such a slogan, for example, for Bahraini workers of Arab, Persian, Indian, and Pakistani extraction who face the national guards composed of Omani and Saudi—Arab—mercenaries? Doesn't such a slogan—thoroughly consistent with and an embodiment of Arab nationalism in the specific context of the Gulf—serve as a tool in the hands of the Baathist regime of Iraq and the rulers of the sheikdoms to confuse the masses and to politically disarm them? In most of these countries the most immediate enemy of Arab masses are their own Arab ruling classes. In the spring of 1972, the Bahraini working class—Arabs, Persians, and others—struck and demonstrated in the streets of Manama. One of their main demands was the basic democratic right of organizing trade unions. Such a demand in the context of Bahrain has a highly explosive character, because it would mean an erosion of the state's ability to control the labour force. Raising or supporting a slogan such as "Arabization of the Gulf" would have totally disoriented the Bahraini workers struggle against their own Arab ruling class.

When one says that designating the struggle in Palestine, the Arab East, Iran, and the Gulf as a "national liberation struggle" is ambiguous, it means *exactly* that such a designation does not bring out the *combined* character of these struggles. The Dhofari and Omani revolutionaries who are fighting the Omani army are not just fighting for "Dhofari self-determination" or for "the Arabization of the Gulf." They are fighting a class enemy (the landlords and the tribal sheikhs) as well as struggling for national liberation. After all they are fighting against the Omani army, which is being Arabized with the help of Qaddafi and Hussein by providing Libyan and Jordanian officers to replace British officers. The fact that the Iranian army is also involved shows more sharply that the ruling classes, Iranian and Arab, are united in their attempt to suppress

this struggle. Of course, the most important task of the *Iranian* revolutionaries is to fight their own ruling class, against the ever increasing militarization of Iran and the role it is playing in suppressing the Dhofari struggle, and against all forms of Iranian chauvanism vis-a-vis the Arab revolution. But this is only a negative task, namely the negation of any privileges for the Iranian bourgeoisie. In the same manner the Arab revolutionaries have to fight all forms of Arab chauvanism and make no concession to Arab nationalist ideology.

## The Question of Oppressed Nationalities in Iran

In Iran, we see a classical case of many oppressed nationalities ruled under a central government. The centralized government of Iran owes its existence to a period when British imperialism found it necessary to set up such centralized authorities in the Middle East for more efficient control and thus more profitable exploitation of the economic resources of the region. The Saudi family in the Arabian Peninsula and the Pahlevi family in Iran owe their rule to this phase of imperialist penetration in the Middle East.

In Iran, in order to set up a stable centralized government, it was necessary to bring all the local rulers, in some cases tribal rulers, under the authority of Reza Khan. With the support and help of Britain, Reza Khan between 1921 and 1925 suppressed one uprising after another in Khurasan, Mazandaran, Gilan, Azarbaijan, Lurestan, Kurdistan, and of Qashqais and the Arabs in southwestern Iran. This opened a period of Persianization throughout Iran, ranging from suppression of local cultures (changing town names to Persian ones, enforcing Persian as the only official language, banning the teaching of languages other than Persian in the schools, etc.) to continuous surveillance of all political activity in these areas and quick suppression of any uprisings against the central government.

The history of Iran over the past few decades indicates that for the most part not only have these nationalities not been assimilated, but also their will to fight against national oppression has not been broken. The uneven development of class struggle in Iran will undoubtedly open up new expression of rebellion and struggle against national oppression on the part of these nationalities.

These struggles are part and parcel of the developing class struggle in Iran. We support them, participate in them, and seek to provide leadership to them in any way possible. In general, we recognize the right of oppressed nationalities to self-determination. We do this not only in words, but in action. This means that the most crucial aspect of work of the revolutionaries of the oppressor nation, in this case Persians, is consistently to oppose all manifestations of Persian chauvanism and to fight against the continuation of the rule of their bourgeoisie over the oppressed nationalities. For example, they oppose all policies imposing the Persian language on these nationalities. They support the right of these nationalities to secede if they so choose. They advocate a policy of revolutionary defeatism inside the army whenever it is mobilized to crush national struggles of these peoples. They educate the workers and peasants to reject all forms of chauvinism. Any other policy on the part of Persian revolutionaries would in fact constitute tacit support to their own ruling class and would make a mockery out of proletarian internationalism.

The revolutionary socialists of the oppressed nationalities, however, are faced with a two-sided task. On the one hand, they must be in the forefront of the struggle

against national oppression, of mobilization of masses around national demands. On the other hand, they must relentlessly combat any ideology which would tend towards the defeat of the national movement itself. In practice this means combining the national demands with class demands of workers and peasants of these nationalities in order to provide the correct direction for the national movement.

In the case of Kurdistan, for example, the Kurdish revolutionaries cannot limit the demands around which they mobilize the Kurdish masses to national demands, e.g., the right of Kurds to self-determination, to political autonomy or to the right to use their own language. Revolutionaries must combine these demands for land reform, which would be primarily directed against the Kurdish Khans. Only such a combined mobilization can break the hold of Barzani and his ilk over the Kurdish national movement.

The history of the development of national liberation struggles in the Middle East has shown that even in the absence of a revolutionary leadership, these struggles tend spontaneously to take on a combined character. However, it has also shown that in the absence of such a leadership, the nationalist leaders, in the name of the national struggle and national solidarity, seek to divert the peasant movement in purely national channels and to contain the peasants' uprising, which in turn weakens the national struggle itself. We saw this combined character in the 1944-46 period in the Azarbaijani movement for national autonomy. Along with the strong nationalist upsurge in the towns, there were spontaneous acts of confiscation of land by the peasants. The Democratic Party of Azarbaijan at first had a program of land reform under which it distributed the state-owned lands and those belonging to the landlords who had fled Azarbaijan. The program was carried through with the help of the militias formed under the leadership of the Democratic Party. This reform, however, was very limited. In the interest of an alliance with the big landlords who had stayed in Azarbaijan, the party oppressed any further land distribution. This led to disillusionment among the poor peasants and cost the Democratic Party a part of its peasant support. One of the tasks of revolutionaries under such conditions is precisely to understand this combined character, to develop a correct transitional program which would lead the peasantry into conflict with the landlords and bourgeoisie of their own nation, intertwining the national struggle with class struggle and thus wresting away the leadership of the national struggle from the nationalists.

On the organizational side of this question, the communists of oppressed nations must defend and implement the full and unconditional unity of the workers and poor peasants of the oppressed nation and those of the oppressor nation. "Without this it is impossible to defend the independent policy of the proletariat and their class solidarity with the proletariat of other countries in face of all manner of intrigues, treachery and trickery on the part of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie of the oppressed nations persistently utilize the slogans of national liberation to deceive the workers. . . ." (Lenin, *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-determination*, section 4.) This in practice means that although we unconditionally defend the right of members of oppressed nationalities to form nationalist political organizations, *we do not in general advocate such formations*, exactly because we recognize that the solution to the national problems cannot be achieved by the unity of all classes of the oppressed nationalities. Should such organizations arise out of the uneven development of class struggle in Iran, namely the explosion of national struggle in parts

of Iran in the absence of similar rise in class struggle in other parts, we do not condemn nor ignore such formations. Under specific circumstances we might even enter such organizations. We will give support to every struggle waged by such an organization against national oppression. But we will do nothing to perpetuate the exclusive nationalist character of such organizations. On the contrary, we will work for the maximum unity of workers and peasants of *all* oppressed nationalities with workers and peasants of the oppressor nation. We must fight politically against any nationalist illusion that the national question can be solved fully short of a united struggle of all oppressed and exploited against the rule of capital. The national *movement*, to which we give full support, does *not* out of its *own independent logic* move towards a socialist revolution. This would be the theory of permanent revolution on its head, and in the final analysis *denying* the necessary role of a vanguard party. A crucial role to be played by revolutionaries in the struggle against national oppression is continuous patient propaganda against nationalism as well as integration of class demands into their day to day mobilizing work. Socialist consciousness is not an idealist extension of national consciousness, but its very dialectic negation.

### On Democratic Rights in General and Their Relation to the Socialist Revolution

Much confusion has been introduced into the discussion on nationalism and the right of nations to self-determination by *separating* this particular democratic right, and treating it as if it is qualitatively different from democratic rights in general.

Democratic rights are not god-given, ahistorical, "natural" rights. They are products of centuries of class struggle, limits to privileges determined historically. Under specific conjunctures the struggle for a particular democratic right *may* come into conflict with the general struggle for democracy. In such cases that particular struggle is subordinate to the general struggle. Lenin, in his article *The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up*, section 7, trying to show that because we oppose a particular democratic struggle, we do not throw out the general principle out of our program, says, "Let us assume that between two great monarchies there is a little monarchy whose kinglet is 'bound' by blood and other ties to the monarchs of both neighbouring countries. Let us further assume that the declaration of a republic in the little country and the expulsion of *its* monarch would in practice lead to a war between the two neighboring big countries for the restoration of that or another monarch in the little country. There is no doubt that all international Social-Democracy, as well as the really internationalist section of Social-Democracy in the little country, *would be against substituting a republic for the monarchy* in this case. The substitution of a republic for a monarchy is not an absolute, but one of the democratic demands, subordinate to the interests of democracy (and still more, of course, to those of the socialist proletariat) as a whole. A case like this would in all probability not give rise to the slightest disagreement among Social-Democrats in any country. But if any Social-Democrat were to propose on *these* grounds that the demand for a republic be deleted altogether from the programme of international Social-Democracy, he would certainly be regarded as quite mad. He would be told that after all one must not forget the elementary logical difference between the *general* and the *particular*." (All emphasis in the original.)

A very good living example of how a *particular* demo-

cratic right can come into conflict with the more general struggle against privilege is the case of Jewish immigration to Israel. In general, we support the democratic right of individuals to immigrate and settle in any country they choose to. But in this particular case of immigration of Soviet Jews (or Jews in general) to Israel we *oppose* this democratic right, because it comes into conflict with the more general democratic national rights of Palestinian Arabs and is thus subordinate to it.

Of course, now in the differences on the national question, the problem is not that we are throwing out the general because of the particular, but the opposite—equally wrong contention—that we elevate the general into the level of a dogma and not allow for the particular.

### Can the Arab Revolution Afford Another Garrison State in Kurdistan?

Recent developments in the Kurdish national movement in Iraq indicate that the leadership of the movement, under Barzani, is seeking political and military support from the U. S., even if channelled through Iran or Israel. In return, if the U. S. support is strong enough, he would give the Kirkuk oil fields to an American company to operate. Barzani went even so far as saying that he considered the nationalization of the *Western owned* Iraqi Petroleum Company's holding in Kirkuk an act against *the Kurds*.

So far, of course, not much in this line has materialized and it is the duty of Kurdish revolutionaries to do their best to prevent such a course by fighting in the national movement to win leadership. But let us look at the dynamics of a *possible* development. Suppose that with the rise of the Arab revolution, and in particular with the intensification of class struggle in Iraq, U. S. imperialism tries to manipulate the Kurdish national movement under the leadership of Barzani to use it as a bastion of reaction against Arab revolution. History has seen many such instances in the past and it is not at all unlikely. Would we support the setting up of such a state in Kurdistan in Iraq in the name of support to the right of nations to self-determination? After all it is a democratic right of the Kurds to set up *any* kind of state, including a puppet state of imperialism. Of course the recognition of the right of the Kurds to self-determination by the Arab revolutionaries would tremendously undermine such a possibility. But here is a concrete case of how a particular democratic right *may* come into conflict with the interests of proletarian revolution. As Lenin put it in the same article, no democratic demand can fail to give rise to abuses, *unless the specific is subordinated to the general*. We are *not* obliged to support *any* struggle for independence. Does this mean we do not recognize the national rights of Kurds in *general*? No. It means that if this particular democratic right takes a form which is in conflict with the general democratic rights and struggles against privilege and especially to the interests of the proletarian dictatorship in the Arab East, we are not obliged to, we cannot afford to, support this *particular movement*. We recognize no such *absolute* democratic rights.

August 31, 1973

\*In most of this article, Dick Roberts is in fact *reinforcing* Germain's arguments by his quotations from Trotsky rather than refuting them. After one manages to untie the hopeless confusion between nationalism and the national question, one is left perplexed with the question: who is Roberts really polemicizing against?