

SABER NICKBIN

IRAN

THE UNFOLDING REVOLUTION

FOREWORD BY TARIQ ALI



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EDITOR'S NOTE:

This pamphlet was written during the course of the explosive events in Iran during November and December 1978. Therefore it is possible that some of the material will be superceded by further developments by the time it reaches the reader. Nevertheless the detailed account of the Iranian economic, social and political order provides the first comprehensive explanation of why religious leaders have appeared at the head of the mass movement and the future dynamic of that movement.

Part One on the economy contains a number of scientific marxist terms. Readers requiring further explanation can refer to Ernest Mandel's Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory —MG December 1978.

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Foreword by Tariq Ali

Iran and world politics

THE STRUGGLE which broke out in Iran not much more than a year ago seemed little more than ripples on the surface of the calm ocean that Iran had come to represent in the turbulent waters of Middle East and Central Asian politics. An ocean of repression it may have been, but calm it was.

Now, little more than a year later, speculation is not about **if** the Shah will fall but **when**. Indeed by the time this pamphlet returns from the printers we firmly hope that the Iranian masses will have disposed of the Pahlavi monarchy once and for all. A slightly out of date text will be a small price to pay for such a momentous victory!

It is a victory which will have profound effects on world politics and the struggle for socialism. This is not simply because of the vital importance of Iran's oil for the Western powers, but also because of what the events in Iran tell us about the development of the world revolution. 'The chain breaks at its weakest link', remarked Lenin many decades ago in an attempted theorisation of a socialist revolution which had taken many marxists by surprise. Since then China, Cuba and Vietnam have trebly confirmed the validity of the old Leninist theses. Iran may prove yet further conformation.

What is vital is that revolutionary socialists understand the objective political and social basis for this assumption. The form of the mass struggle, even the demands of the masses in Iran, may bear a strong resemblance with similar upsurges in the West. But the basic character of the Iranian economy and political structure is fundamentally different from those of Western bourgeois democracies. Even if the economic crisis in Britain or Italy appears relatively more advanced, the political reserves available to the ruling classes to control any consequent revolt are enormous. The traditions of bourgeois democracy (free trade-unions, the right to form political parties, universal adult franchise), foster and reinforce the hegemony of reformism and centrism in the workers movement and act as a powerful roadblock to political breakthroughs.

However, in a country like Iran which has lived for a quarter of a century under the iron heel of dictatorship, the facade of stability contains within its structures a much more explosive dynamic. For in societies ruled through

coercion and fear, once the masses overcome **their** fear and apprehension, then everything becomes possible. Because the Iranian masses are now prepared to 'drown the Shah's bullets with our blood' it is only a matter of time before sections of the soldiers revolt. At that moment the Shah will have no other agency of coercion, yet alone consent, to rely on: a revolution will be possible. To guarantee its success a strong revolutionary party is vital, capable of utilising the energy and creativity of the mass movement and channelling it towards the conquest of power by the toiling masses. Today, in Iran, the conditions are also ripe for creating such a party.

Why is Iran so important to the imperialist powers? The decision of Carter and his poodles in the British Foreign Office to junk all the phraseology regarding human rights in the case of Iran and defend the Shah's regime reflects the importance of Iran in world politics. The principal reason for this is the oil of Iran and the neighbouring Gulf states. It was oil which led Britain and the CIA to overthrow the nationalist government in 1953 and put Pahlavi back on the throne. It was oil which drove the United States and Britain into making the Iranian army and airforce the best equipped military formations in Asia.

The Shah, despite his growing megalomania, never forgot which side he was on. He helped crush the Dhofari rebels in Oman. He continued to supply Israel and South Africa with oil and he developed a torture agency, SAVAK, which was the envy of every military dictator in the 'Third World'. In addition the United States government, hypnotised by the 'stability' of Iran, had greater hopes for the role it could play. Iran was chosen to be the main relay of imperialism in the Middle and Near East. Its border with the Soviet Union gave it an added advantage. The Shah basked in the glory of all these plans. He threatened interventions to restore 'stability' in Pakistan and declared Iran to be a fortress against communism.

The overthrow of the monarchy would upset all these carefully laid plans. Even a short bourgeois democratic interregnum could prove to be explosive for imperialist interests in Iran. The Muslim leader Khomeini has already indicated that one of the first acts of a democratic government would be to stop the flow of oil to Israel and South Africa!

In addition there is turmoil in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the former a leftist coup has put a pro-Soviet government in power. It is now clear that the dynamic of this development is controlled by Moscow. Whether it wants an Outer Mongolia on its South Asian borders still remains an open question. In Pakistan the military regime is heading towards a confrontation with the masses. The country's largest though least populous province is Baluchistan. The national question is of vital importance and a Baluchi guerrilla movement remains in existence. A new regime in Afghanistan has strengthened the resolve of the Baluchis. An overthrow of their old enemy the Shah would be bound to draw them closer to their Baluchi compatriots in Iran. The inter-relationship of the struggles in these three countries frightens all pro-imperialist forces in the region.

For socialists in Britain the tasks are clear. The Labour Government and the Tory opposition have backed the Shah without reservations. The flow of arms has not stopped. Iran must be made a national political issue in this

country. Every Labour Minister, senior or junior, must be forced to debate the Government's craven support for the Shah at any public event. We have to use the experience gained over the last decade in international campaigns on Vietnam, Chile and Portugal to build a strong and powerful solidarity movement with the Iranian masses. For the past few years the Campaign Against Repression in Iran has waged a long and fairly lonely fight in defence of political prisoners and for democratic rights. It has won wide respect and much support in the labour and student movements. Now is the time for all those who have lent their verbal support to CARI to come out on the streets to stop arms shipments to the Shah, force the Labour Government to break all links with his regime, and support the Iranian masses call for the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy.

For if internationalism is to be something more than words it must be concrete. Iran, in that sense, is also a test for us here in Britain and in all the imperialist countries. We should not fail it.

TARIQ ALI, 6 December 1978.



Introduction

The unfolding revolution

ON 8 SEPTEMBER 1978, martial law was imposed on 12 Iranian cities. Within 24 hours 4,000 people were dead.

'Black Friday' as it came to be known was an important turning point in the deepening crisis of the Iranian ruling class — a crisis marked by the development of the most significant mass movement for over a quarter of a century. In the course of just one year a spontaneous movement of protest against the repressive dictatorship of the Shah had developed into a powerful mobilisation of millions calling for the overthrow of the monarchy.

The rapid growth of this movement, its depth and breadth, surprised most observers. Only weeks before Black Friday the CIA informed President Carter that there was no great threat to the Shah. Happily for us, and much to the President's chagrin, the CIA was wrong. For the first time since the CIA-engineered coup of 1953, which placed the Shah back on the throne, a pre-revolutionary situation developed in Iran.

Far from abating, the 40-day cycles of protest continue. The mass movement has taken explosive and potentially uncontrollable dimensions, even beginning to demoralise sections of the army and thus threatening the ability of the regime to recoup the situation. One day before the imposition of martial law, in Tehran alone, nearly one million demonstrators were chanting 'Death to the Shah' and asking the soldiers to join them. Once more the Iranian regime resorted to the use of tanks, demonstrating that even the smallest concessions to basic democratic rights could quickly result in an explosive mass movement demanding the overthrow of the repressive regime itself.

Despite the fact that today over 50,000 well armed soldiers with about 3000 tanks are daily patrolling all major Iranian cities and that assemblies of more than three people are not allowed, the regime claims that it is continuing with its policy of 'liberalisation'. This policy has so far resulted in over 10,000 killed in one year. There are still more than 100,000 political prisoners and the total control of SAVAK over all the press and mass media remains.

Before this policy of 'liberalisation' at least people could meet in the mosques, today even this is impossible. If anything repression has sharply increased and every sign indicates that it will get worse.

The Iranian ruling class has not been short of apologists, both inside and outside Iran, to justify this savage repression. They claim that the Shah does indeed want to liberalise his regime and has already granted concessions. However, he miscalculated one factor: the new atmosphere of political freedom has allowed conservative religious leaders to become active and stir up the superstitious Iranian masses against the Shah. Thus it is not due to the barbaric backwardness of the Shah's regime but to the rapid pace of his reforms in the early 1960s that we are to attribute the present troubles!

So the Shah is the true progressive while the masses are in the grip of clerical reaction against the modernisation (westernisation) of Iran. Accordingly, in order that the Shah might liberalise further at a later date, he must now keep a tight control over the situation. In this way martial law, massacres and military rule are deemed to beget political freedom!

That this is total nonsense cooked up by the regime's propaganda machine and its imperialist allies is obvious. However religious and superstitious the Iranians may be they have nevertheless had the strongest tradition of struggle for freedom and liberty against all kinds of reaction in the whole of the Middle East.

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-9 which forced the Qajar dynasty to grant a constitution; the Jangali movement of the late 1910s which led to the establishment of a Soviet Republic in Gilan; the mass movement against autocracy during and after the Second World War which gave way to the struggle of the Azarbaydjanis and Kurdish national minorities against national oppression and led to the establishment of autonomous republics in



Workers appeal to the soldiers not to shoot on their demonstration

Western Iran; the mass movement against imperialism which resulted in the nationalisation of the British oil concerns in Iran and which was defeated after the 1953 coup — all are but chapters in the unfolding of the Iranian revolution. All of these struggles rapidly grew into powerful revolutionary mass movements which could have opened up the dynamics of permanent revolution in Iran.

The reasons for this should be obvious. Ever since the integration of Iran into the world imperialist system it has faced a permanent socio-economic crisis which could be contained only by an autocracy and reaction, backed by imperialism and armed to the teeth. The agrarian question, the national question, lack of industrialisation and domination by imperialism have together created the conditions which make any mass movement against autocracy a potentially explosive one. Whenever, due to a change in the relationship of class forces, the masses have had the opportunity they have revolted against the state, and each time the movement has developed into revolutionary struggles around all the basic historical tasks of the Iranian revolution.

In this sense the sudden growth of the mass movement in the course of the last 18 months is no exception. But there is one very important difference. In the past all the revolutionary upheavals in Iran were made possible by abrupt changes in the international situation which led to a sudden weakening of the forces of reaction in Iran. As soon as these 'external causes' were removed the relationship of forces was more or less restored to its original condition, allowing the reactionary forces to impose a lasting defeat on the mass movement.

For example the Constitutional Revolution took place immediately after the 1905 revolution in Russia, and it started in areas which were ruled by the Tsarist imperial forces. As soon as the Tsarist regime had consolidated itself in Russia it assisted Iranian reaction in defeating its own revolution. During the Second World War the invasion of Iran by allied forces, and especially the presence of the Red Army on Iranian soil, created a very favourable relationship of forces for the mass movement. But as soon as the Stalinist bureaucracy made a deal with the Iranian regime the forces of the central government managed to crush the movement of the oppressed nationalities.

This time the situation is different. The change in the relationship of social forces which has weakened the Shah's regime and allowed the mass movement to develop is largely due to internal developments. Over the last two decades a gradual shift has taken place and this has taken a sudden qualitative step with the emergence of the structural crisis of the Iranian economy. Internationally there has never been such a favourable context for this development. Imperialism has still not recovered from its defeat in Vietnam and has suffered fresh reverses in southern Africa. Yet there are no signs that the Iranian ruling class can itself resolve the crisis. There is therefore every possibility that, despite the martial law, the movement of the Iranian masses will continue to expand and deepen until it succeeds in its goal of the overthrow of the Shah's regime itself.

Part One

The crisis of the economy

All the main economic indicators show that after two decades of considerable growth, a deep crisis of the Iranian economy has been developing since the latter part of 1976. The agricultural sector is in a state of almost total collapse; the growth in the industrial sector has come to a halt; the number of urban poor has exploded into millions. Despite the enormous income from oil Iran now has a considerable balance of trade deficit, and to top it all inflation runs at a rate above 30 per cent. Annual gross fixed capital formation in industry decreased by about 45 per cent in March 1976 to March 1977 compared to the previous year. This decrease is sharpest in large investments of over 100 million rials* — more than 70 per cent over the same year. More than 80 per cent of all investments were in existing plants rather than in new projects. Flight of capital from Iran has increased to the astonishing figure of over 3500 million dollars (six times more than the total non-oil and gas exports). Unemployment and underemployment have sharply increased and for the first time in years the number of wage earners has started to decrease. (£1 sterling = c135 rials).

It is clear that for the first time in its history Iran is facing a capitalist crisis of overproduction. But it is not just any temporary overproduction crisis, it is a structural crisis which stems from the integration of the Iranian economy into the world market — and it is difficult to see how it can be resolved without a total break from the world market.

CHANGING ROLE OF THE IRANIAN ECONOMY IN THE WORLD MARKET

In order to understand the structural nature of this crisis and its effects on the class struggle we must look more closely at the changes which have taken place in Iran in the recent period (1960s onwards). These changes which have been

*All the statistics cited in this section are from 'Notes on the industrialisation of Iran', and 'The Agrarian Question in Iran', a series of articles in issues 4 to 8 of **Kandokav** (an Iranian Trotskyist journal).

associated with the Shah's 'White Revolution' and his desire for Iran's 'modernisation' stem directly from the new phase in the international centralisation and concentration of capital corresponding to the stage of late capitalism.

With the increasing importance of technological rents as the main source of surplus monopoly profit, certain changes in the fundamental role of the 'backward' countries within the world capitalist economy have become necessary. International monopolies are, at this stage, not so much interested in these countries as outlets for their overaccumulated capital but as major markets for the export of technological goods and services. This is reflected in the fact that today unequal exchange has replaced repatriation of capital and monopoly profits as the main mechanism of transfer of values from the backward countries to the advanced capitalist centres. Furthermore the exported capital itself is no longer simply invested in the production of raw materials for the international market, but in producing goods for the growing internal markets of the backward countries themselves.

This phase in the development of the world imperialist system, associated with the so-called policy of neo-colonialisation, has resulted in a number of important changes in the relationship between backward countries and the metropolitan centres. In this phase, contrary to the early phases of imperialism, advanced capitalist countries are no longer able, and neither do they desire, to control the internal capital market of the backward countries. International monopolies are now in fact very much interested in encouraging the formation of an indigenous 'national' bourgeoisie and facilitating internal capital accumulation in the productive sectors. In order to transform backward countries to outlets for over-produced technological goods there has to be present conditions which encourage productive investment by the 'national' bourgeoisie.

Therefore the dependent states in these countries, which had previously been the main instrument in forcing the internal bourgeoisie into unproductive and subsidiary sectors of the economy and always ensuring that the competition between the 'national' bourgeoisie and foreign bourgeoisie were resolved in the interest of the latter, were now transformed into their opposite. It was now up to these same states to create the conditions for the development of an indigenous class of capitalist entrepreneurs who, while technologically dependent on the advanced capitalist countries, would in joint partnership with foreign capital exploit and extend the internal market in backward countries.

Iran has been one of the few countries in which these changes were carried through rather successfully. The strong state, the significant internal market and the considerable foreign exchange resources due to the oil income created favourable conditions for this transformation to take place. This was done by means of removing a number of obstacles along the path of capitalist accumulation which had been created in the earlier phases of imperialist domination in Iran: with the direct intervention of the state all the structural problems of the Iranian economy, which prevented the transformation of accumulated savings and wealth into productive investments, were removed and all the basic institutions needed to provide the necessary financial, managerial and technical assistance to the new capitalist class were created.

Through the 'Second Economic Plan' (1955-1962) which was financed by the oil revenues, loans from IBRD, and aid from the US government, the infrastructural changes needed to facilitate the internal circulation of commodities were carried out. Over 75 per cent of the budget was spent on improving the transportation networks, communications, electricity production and on increasing the capacities of the major Iranian ports.

Foreign trade regulations were gradually changed in the period 1958-1961. The 'open-door policy' of earlier periods was replaced by a tight and selective control on imports of consumer goods while easy terms applied for imports of the means of production and parts needed for the domestic production of some consumer goods. Through this new policy many large Iranian merchants and foreign companies were forced to start domestic production of goods previously imported into Iran.

The land reforms forced the separation of a large section of the peasantry from the land and the transformation of the wealth tied up in land into capital invested in the newly created industries. Millions of peasants were forced to migrate to the towns to become the cheap 'free labourers' for new industries while the price of the land bought from the big landlords was paid in the form of shares in these industries.

In 1957 the state-owned Industrial Credit Bank was created to provide cheap long terms loans to assist in the construction of large factories. The bank itself participated in many joint ventures and 'pilot' projects to facilitate the growth of industries. Later on in 1959 another similar bank, the Industrial and Mining Development Bank of Iran, a joint private bank with the participation of the state and foreign banks, was created. Through this bank international monopolies could find Iranian customers either for joint ventures or simply for buying ready-made factories.

By means of these 'reforms' the Iranian economy has been transformed to correspond with the changes in the world imperialist system and the role it is called upon to play by the international monopolies. In so far as imperialism is concerned the results have been very successful. Iranian imports have risen from 49,000 million rials in 1959 to the astonishing figure of 795,000 million rials, 90 per cent of which has come from the few advanced capitalist countries — **and this does not include military imports**. Over 75 per cent of the imports in the last five years were goods used in productive consumption, consisting of 45 per cent capital goods and replacement parts and 30 per cent raw materials and intermediate goods used in the new industries.

In so far as Iran is concerned this transformation has meant an enormous growth of the indigenous capital formation and capitalist production. Gross fixed capital formation has increased twenty times from 53,000 million rials in 1959 to 1,048,000 in 1975 (over 40 per cent of the latter represents investments in machinery). Foreign capital shares in all annual investments has decreased from 39 per cent to just under seven per cent in the same period.

It is these developments which have been labelled by the Iranian regime and its ideologues as the 'modernisation' and 'industrialisation' of an 'independent Iran'. Whatever the merit of these claims one fact is clear: the role of Iran within the international division of labour created by imperialism remains unchanged. Whilst Iranian imports have risen nearly 40 times in two decades,

non-oil exports have only increased five times — to under 40,000 million rials. The increase in the export of manufactured goods is totally negligible. Over 90 per cent of Iranian non-oil exports still consist of raw materials and hand-made carpets. In fact dependence of the Iranian economy on the oil sector has increased. In 1957 under 68 per cent of all exports were from the oil sector; by 1974 this figure had reached 97 per cent.

It is, however, true that the industrial sector in the Iranian economy has grown considerably over this period. The share of value added in the industrial sector (including mining and construction) has increased from 16 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (at constant 1972 prices) in 1959 to over 25 per cent in 1975. In the same period the share of agriculture has dropped from 33 per cent to 14.5 per cent. In 1959 only 20.8 per cent of total employment was in industry whilst in 1975 this had increased to 32 per cent. But what these global figures do not show is the contradictory nature of industrial growth in Iran which stems from its peculiar and dependent form. To show this one must look more closely at the process of industrialisation and analyse its outcome.

THE NATURE OF IRANIAN INDUSTRY

The technologically dependent and externally induced industrial growth have given Iranian capitalism many peculiar features which mark its stagnant and crisis ridden character. The deepened contradictions of world capitalism in its period of decay are extremely marked within the Iranian economy. There is an ever increasing unevenness, in both the geographical and technological sense, within the industrial sector; the unevenness in incomes is constantly getting worse; there is an almost total concentration within the industrial sector on the production of consumer goods; the growth of the internal market is extremely limited; Iranian industries are unable to compete on the world market; there is a strong tendency towards permanent overaccumulation and inflation; the increase in the number of wage earners is very limited; pre-capitalist and semi-capitalist relations tend to solidify and even get strengthened.

The imported character of the industrial growth has basically meant a superficial grafting of large, usually capital intensive, modern factories onto the old traditional sector which generally consists of small backward handicraft workshops using little or no instruments other than the human hand. The gradual technological change within this sector has been prevented by the growth of the modern imported and almost ready-made factories. This has resulted in a combined coexistence of just over 2,000 modern factories employing over 250,000 people with hundreds of thousands of traditional small workshops employing two million people, with almost nothing in between. The enormous unevenness of the sizes of Iranian industrial units reflects this peculiar feature. 81.5 per cent of the labour force is employed in over 860,000 small units with an average of two employees per workshop whilst 18.5 per cent works in less than 8000 large units employing an average of 55 workers each.

In fact if we leave out the 7444 large units (employing 10 or more workers), productivity in the rest of the industrial sector is even less than in agriculture which is the most backward sector of the Iranian economy.

Size of units	No. of units	Average no. of employees	Total no. of employees	% of total employment in the industrial sector
Less than 10 employees	869,000	2	1,800	81.5
From 10 to 49	6,431	25	161	7.3
From 50 to 99	520	68	35	1.5
From 100 to 499	355	190	67	3.0
500 and over	138	1050	148	6.7
Total	876,444	2.5	2,211	100

The fact that these small backward workshops can still survive and even increase in numbers shows the acute sickness of Iranian capitalism. Modern units have been unable to effect a change within the backward sector. Because the industrial growth is based on an imported advanced technology used only in the production of consumer goods, it has not brought about any revolution in production. The reasons for this become clear if we examine the various branches of the modern sector.

The first branch consists of those factories producing luxury items or durable consumer goods for the small layer of high-income urban consumers. These factories rely almost completely on foreign imports for their means of production and raw materials. In many cases even the managers and the technicians are imported! The goods they produce were previously imported therefore they do not come into competition with the other producers. Because of the highly developed technology involved in the production of these goods very large units are called for. However, the number of Iranian consumers for these goods is not large enough to sustain such units and therefore most of the factories in this branch of industry are not even complete production units but rely on imported assembly lines and parts. Therefore no basic technological skills are developed even within this branch itself, let alone transmitting anything to the traditional sector.

There is no possibility of technological interaction between the modern factories either. Usually they are based on such diverse technologies imported from so many different countries that no such links can be developed among them. Therefore this branch can have no significant backward or forward linkage effect on the rest of the Iranian economy. The different factories within this branch have basically parcelled out the market between themselves and are supplying it without much thought about anything else.

The demand for these luxury and durable consumer goods does not grow all that much either, hence the expansion of this branch has rapidly come to a halt. Most customers prefer better quality foreign goods and if it was not for state protection (customs duties on similar imported goods) they could not survive for a day. Their effect on the growth of wage-earners is also very limited. The only way they can rationalise production is by monopolising the market with the help

of the state, and relying on more and more capital intensive techniques. This is already taking place and has contributed to a fall in the number of wage earners.

The second branch is made up of those factories producing previously imported consumer goods for the general consumers. Everything said about the first branch is also valid for these, with the addition of one point in the case of one sub-section of this branch where parts of the raw material needed is produced inside Iran. But even here the effects on the rest of the economy are not all to the good. The raw material used by these industries was previously exported and all that has happened now is that less is exported. In fact the internal demand and higher costs in addition to inflation have caused a sharp increase in the prices of these raw materials.

Foreign importers have turned to other countries where lower costs of production provide cheaper materials. Some of the Iranian capitalists themselves are now turning to foreign countries for imports of cheap raw material. The state which protects these new industries has relaxed custom regulations to allow cheap importation of raw material. This has resulted in the ruination of the internal producers, especially in the rural areas. Many of them have been forced out of business by government price controls imposed in order to save the new industries.

The third branch consists of industries producing goods which are also produced by the traditional sector. Here there is direct confrontation between the two. Many of the small producers were initially driven to abandon their workshops but, after a decade or so of growth in this branch, a more or less stable picture has gradually emerged. Generally speaking the traditional sector has managed to survive and even thrive.

The modern sector is not all that much more efficient than some of the better organised traditional enterprises. Secondhand and imported technology, in addition to the generally high infrastructural costs, makes them less competitive than at first it may appear. The small units can survive simply by working harder, relying usually on the unpaid labour of the members of the family. In any case they have no choice, lack of significant employment opportunities forces them to keep their only source of livelihood at any costs. By providing goods directly to customers and for small local markets they can even make some profits.

One fact is very clear. There is neither any incentive nor the possibility for these traditional units to expand or to use better technology. The type of instrument that could be useful to them is not produced inside Iran and the advanced foreign technology is simply beyond their reach. The modern sector has blocked the development of these traditional workshops and their survival prevents the modern industries completely dominating the internal market. In fact within this branch there is the worst kind of overproduction crisis.

The geographical unevenness of the industrial growth shows up this problem even more acutely. Over 65 per cent of the new industries are concentrated in and around Tehran. The reason for this is obvious. The decisive factor in deciding where to build a modern factory is its closeness to the consumers. They do not have to be near any source of raw materials as that is mostly imported, or close to other related industries, as they are unrelated to the rest of the economy! Furthermore economies of scale require that they are larger than a certain



Shahyad Monument—symbol of failed 'White Revolution'

minimum size. Therefore they had to be concentrated in the most populated urban areas with the highest number of better-off consumers.

But the small workshops can produce for smaller local markets which exist almost everywhere in Iran. Unlike the modern sector a degree of geographical specialisation related to the closeness of the sources of raw materials and other dependent industries has developed within the traditional sector. This has put them in a better position to compete with the modern industries.

Statistics of family consumption expenditure show that in fact this geographical unevenness is constantly reproducing itself in a more extreme way. The concentration of industrial growth in the urban areas has widened the gap between the urban and rural private consumption expenditure. Whilst in 1959 they were equal, in 1975 Tehran alone consumed twice as much as all the rural areas put together. The unevenness in income groups has also increased. In Tehran over half the families spend more than 10,000 rials per month, whilst in the rural areas only seven per cent of the families reach this figure. The consumer orientated industries are therefore forced to concentrate even more in the rich urban areas.

The inability of the modern sector to remove these obstacles results in a very contradictory and limited growth of the internal market. Furthermore the structure of the Iranian industries does not generate the internal dynamism which induces an expansion of the divisions of labour and the internal market.

The exchange between Department 1 (producing the means of production) and Department 2 (producing the means of subsistence) which in the capitalist mode of production provides one of the most important mechanisms for the extension of the internal market is almost non-existent in Iran. Excluding the raw material sector there is basically no Department 1 in the Iranian economy. Hence, even if the modern sector was able to totally conquer the internal market it would soon face a deep crisis of permanent over-production and over-accumulation.

The Iranian bourgeoisie has, however, put a lot of hope in winning foreign markets. The sudden apparent interest of the Iranian regime in the middle eastern countries and the talks about an Asian common market all stem from this dream. That it is a dream should be clear by citing just one fact. The cost of production in Iran is on average over 33 per cent more than the costs of production of similar goods in the EEC. Why should any of these countries import from Iran and not from the EEC?

As long as Iran has to rely on the technological crumbs of the advanced capitalist countries there is no chance that it can have any share of the international markets. Cheap labour or cheap oil is no substitute for cheap and more productive technology, especially in the age of capital intensive modern industries.

THE STAGNATION OF THE AGRICULTURE

The main objective behind the land reforms of the early 1960s was explained previously. According to the regime's ideologues, however, the land reform was supposed to have made possible the modernisation of Iranian agriculture, the creation of a well-to-do peasantry and many other things besides. It has certainly failed to achieve any of the objectives set for it. In 1975 Iranian agriculture, employing 36 per cent of the working population, produced only 9.3 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product.

We have already indicated how well-off the peasantry has become! The population in all the rural areas combined consumes less than half that spent by the population of Tehran. Not only has Iran been unable, after decades of industrialisation, to export any significant amount of manufactured goods but it is now even importing foodstuffs to the tune of two to three billion dollars a year.

The propagandists of the ruling class blame this on the 'rapid industrialisation'. Apparently, because the government was so 'deeply involved in industrialising Iran' they forgot to pay 'enough attention' to the problems of agriculture. In addition to which they say that the rise in the standard of living has meant a rise in demand for foodstuffs and that due to the migration of peasants to the urban areas the countryside is suffering from a shortage of labour. We have already seen what 'rapid industrialisation' has really meant. As for the second point, the same situation in the early period of industrialisation in Western Europe led to exactly the **opposite** results, i.e. to a rapid **increase** of productivity in agriculture. The third point is simply absurd. It is true that the share of rural areas in the total population has decreased from 68.5 per cent in 1959 to 53.2 per cent in 1976, but in absolute terms the rural population has increased from 13 million to 17.9 million over the same period.

It is nevertheless true that the process of industrialisation has had something to do with the crisis of Iranian agriculture. But what? Basically the most important single factor is that it has increased the pressure on the land forcing more and more peasants into subsistence agriculture. The urban industries are unable to absorb the peasants whom the land reform has tried to turn into free labourers, let alone the increased population.

Iranian capitalism is unable to absorb those who it has to separate from their independent means of production if it is to develop. Even before the land reform there was already an acute degree of pressure on the land. The cultivated land has not increased but there are now about five million more people in the rural areas. If anything, the total land available has decreased due to the growth of urbanisation and the inability of the regime to keep up even some of the artificial irrigation networks which existed before the land reform, let alone increasing it.

Parts of the best land have also been transformed into modern capitalist farms producing for export, further reducing the amount of land available to the mass of the peasants.

In order to survive the peasant families have had to rely on hard work simply to produce for their own subsistence. Their increasing need for human labour has resulted in an increase in the average size of rural families from 4.8 to 5.2 persons per family over the last two decades. This in turn has produced more population pressures and hence more subsistence economy. During the same period the number of family workers has almost doubled whilst there are now less wage-earners in the rural areas than there were before the land reform. In fact in the Iranian economy as a whole the total increase in the number of wage-earners in the private sector (which is now beginning to fall) is equally matched by an increase in the number of unpaid family workers and the so-called 'independent producers'.

The existence of huge unemployment in the rural areas in addition to the sharp increase in rents, which itself is due to the increased pressure on land, has blocked any incentive on the part of the capitalists to use modern machinery. This would lead to even further increases in land rents and in any case there is a huge reservoir of cheap labour available. But the shortages in foodstuffs have to be offset immediately through imports. There the inefficient Iranian farms are brought into competition with cheap U.S. wheat, Australian meat, Israeli oranges and so on. This has forced many capitalist farms and the would-be kulaks (larger farmers) out of the market. In addition to this Iranian agriculture has become completely open to price changes on the world market. The drop in the price of cotton in 1975 forced a 26 per cent reduction in production in one year.

The effects of this type of 'population pressure' caused by the integration of Iran within the world capitalist system and the 'industrialisation' resulting from it are of course devastating for the urban industries too. The forced retreat of huge sections of the population into pre-capitalist modes of existence would further limit the extension of the internal market. Besides, rural unemployment keeps urban wages down which in turn compounds the inequalities in the incomes of urban families, resulting in further restrictions on the growth of the new industries producing the main consumer goods.

All this has created the peculiar situation in which instead of the surplus product from agriculture providing the funds to develop industries, agriculture has to be subsidised by the other sectors. At present the oil income can still provide these subsidies but what about the future?

THE OIL SECTOR

The oil industry is of course the darling of the Iranian ruling class. Employing less than half a per cent of the working population it nevertheless provided 37.3 per cent of the Gross National Product in 1975. Truly modern and productive. But its effects on the rest of the economy are not what one might expect from such a productive sector. It has no linkages with the rest of the economy. It employs a tiny labour force, requires its technology from abroad, and even most of the articles of consumption for its well-paid employees comes from outside. Most of its product is crude oil which is exported. It only provides a cheap source of energy which saves the foreign exchange that would have had to be used if Iran didn't have oil. Its only significant effect on the rest of the economy is that it provides the state with an income (rent) which can be deployed in its projects.

This role has of course been of vital importance. It has financed industrialisation, subsidised failing agriculture, bought off the middle classes, fed and clothed the 'armed bodies of men' which keep the ruling classes in power, and many more things besides. This role has become even more dominant after the huge increases in the price of oil. Without it the stagnant Iranian economy could not survive for one day. It has certainly managed to put off the emergence of an overproduction crisis for the last few years.

The results of this state assistance have not been all that rosy. Furthermore, real income has begun to fall both due to world inflation and a reduction in the demand for Iranian oil. The crisis of the Iranian economy cannot be resolved simply by injecting hard cash into it. It managed to postpone the overproduction crisis but not indefinitely — and now that it has come it is combined with rampant inflation.

The income from oil allowed very high rates of profit for the new capitalist class. The state provided for the major part of the infrastructural costs which would have otherwise been paid by the capitalists themselves. Capitalist profit has been almost totally exempt from government taxation. Large amounts of easy long-term credit has been made available to the new industries. Many public institutions started relaxing the regulations on long-term credits and were in this period even giving loans for the running costs of industries. Many financial institutions were created which finance hire purchase agreements. But none of these measures succeeded in preventing the crisis in the Iranian economy.

Furthermore, the injection of the oil money into the economy has led to an explosion of unproductive activities. The consumption expenditure of the state has increased at an average rate of 90 per cent annually since the rise in oil revenues. The service sector now accounts for more than 33 per cent of GNP and 31 per cent of the working population. The effects of this oil boom on income distribution has been devastating. Estimated figures show that in 1976 less than 10 per cent of the population accounted for half the total consumption. Whilst the vast majority of the rural population is struggling to retain its starvation income, less than half a million Iranians last year spent their holidays in Europe and North America spending over two billion dollars. The rate of inflation has become so embarrassing that the government had at one stage banned the release of figures by the Central Bank.

In any case, the Iranian economy has not been able to use the income from oil to modernise itself and resolve any of its most basic problems. When the oil runs out there is no other source of income to replace it. The revenues are already falling. In real terms it has dropped by about 30 per cent since the last big rise in prices. It can be estimated that by the early 1980s, even if Iran stops all its arms expenditure (which it cannot since the generals might not like it), the drop in revenues would force the Iranian economy into a severe recession.

Gas and petrochemical exports, contrary to the claims of the government, can in no way offset this fall. There is no reason why the European countries will import gas from Iran and not from Holland or Algeria, especially when one considers the fact that transportation of gas is a very costly business. In any case, Iran has already pre-sold all the gas that it can hope to export in the next five years through a series of barter agreements. As for petrochemicals, one need say only one point, there is already overproduction in the international market. The best that the Iranian petrochemical industries can hope for is to supply the internal market and save the foreign exchange that, otherwise, would have to be spent for its import.

THE POLITICAL CRISIS OF THE IRANIAN RULING CLASS

The analysis of the structural crisis of the Iranian economy demonstrates that despite all the favourable factors and all the Shah's 'reforms' the problems which result from its backwardness and integration into the world imperialist system have not been resolved. Now that an emerging overproduction crisis is showing up all the failures, the Iranian regime faces an acute crisis which has led to a growing political opposition and a turn in the relationship of social forces against the monarchy.

Initially the big bourgeoisie itself started to moan. Up to then, the Shah's regime had served their interests well. After all, they had all been its creation. But now that the crisis was beginning to appear round the corner they began to bite the hand that fed them. Firstly, they complained about the increasing wastage of resources by the state. The regime in turn started to talk about the necessity of taxing the profits of major industries. The bourgeoisie offered a programme of austerity against rising wages and a new plan for the tighter control of foreign trade to allow more protection for their inefficient industries. The regime organised an 'anti-inflation task force', which attacked the small producers and some of the major distributors which were said to be causing price rises. The bourgeoisie began to criticise the immense political and economic power of the state and demanded more direct participation in the deployment of public funds. All these squabbles eventually led to an agreement which resulted in a change of government from Hoveida to Amouzegar in August 1977.

Amouzegar's cabinet included some direct representatives of the big bourgeoisie and the weight of the technocrats was increased. (The Minister in charge of Foreign Trade was in fact the head of one of the largest capitalist families in Iran). Many of the programmes proposed by the bourgeoisie were adopted by this new cabinet. Basically, nothing was allowed in without first consulting the big Iranian industrialists. Tax law proposals were changed to lean



Oil workers on sit-down strike at Abadan refinery

more heavily on the petit-bourgeois layer. A big propaganda campaign was instigated against 'the unproductive Iranian working class' and the 'high wages' it receives. It was announced that the Chamber of Commerce would start investigating the offenders. It was promised that a fight against corruption would begin. And, the government claimed that it would create 'an open political atmosphere' and grant many freedoms. A commission of enquiry was formed to investigate all the problems of the Iranian economy and in particular to offer some solution as to how to resolve the agricultural crisis. In any case, it was said, the government would start assisting in the formation of 'agricultural poles' (big capitalist plantations) to resolve the problem of shortages of foodstuffs.

The petit-bourgeoisie and the working class did not of course take too kindly to these proposals. The petit-bourgeoisie had been continually attacked by the state—which had instigated the industrialisation process. A process which had meant the ruination of the independent producers. To them, 'the fight against inflation' appeared, and in fact was, an instrument in the hands of the big bourgeoisie to conquer the whole market. The big monopolies producing consumer goods backed by the force of the state had by means of this fight forced the closing down of many traditional units. Many were charged by the Chamber of Commerce for over-pricing their goods and many were ruined by relaxing import regulations and allowing the importation of cheaper goods. The discontent amongst these layers is growing everyday. They think if there was a more democratic state their interests would be represented in a better way. After all they do form the largest single section of the population.

The working class which had previously been constantly promised a share in the profits, good housing, and higher wages was now told to tighten its belt, expect less wages, work harder and be more loyal to the employers. Despite the repression the Iranian working class in the new industries had managed to force substantial wage increases. By exploiting the shortage of skilled labour they had forced the employers to grant their demands. Because of the nature of Iranian industries, the question of training a suitable labour force is very important indeed. The capitalists have paid dearly to develop the necessary skills and cannot afford to lose their workers.

So in this period of economic crisis the bourgeoisie persuaded the government to assist it in fighting against the workers' demands. The government has brought in a new draconian labour law which is in essence a direct attack on the working class. Workers should now have identity cards on which all the information about their previous and current employment is given. This is to stop them from leaving one job for a better paid one. Penalties would be imposed on any firms employing workers from another firm. All this has of course helped to politicise the Iranian working class and prove to it that in order to be able to fight for its own interests it has to win democratic rights.

The regime's projects for the resolution of the agricultural crisis have just begun to be implemented. If and when they are carried out further it would mean an explosive situation in the countryside. The only way that the proposed 'agricultural poles' can be created is by first forcing some of the peasant families off their land. In one or two instances in which this was tried it led to intense peasant struggles. The land reforms have brought the peasantry into direct contact with the state, and if such tensions are allowed to increase the result would be the rapid politicisation of the peasantry.

In the meantime the economic crisis deepened. The competition within the bourgeoisie had become so tense that they began exposing each other. But in Iran this means exposing the state. The role of the state in creating the conditions for industrialisation, financing it, creating its capitalists and parcelling out the market between them has linked every individual capitalist so closely with the state that open competition between them has a direct weakening effect on the authority of the state. The 'ugly face' of each individual capitalist is a direct reflection of the nature of the state. Everyone of them has accumulated their wealth through services rendered to the Royal Court or contacts with other top members of the state bureaucracy.

The Royal Family itself is the most important capitalist family. Many capitalists, in order to obtain the monopoly rights of the market offer the Shah and the other members of the Royal Family (or circles close to them) cheap or free shares in their industries. When the capitalists start exposing each other it means exposing the origins of their wealth and power, and this touches on the role of the Royal Family itself.

All this inter-capitalist squabbling did of course fuel the anti-state social forces and helped to add more political dimensions to their fight. It was within such a context that the mass movement against the dictatorship erupted. The period of economic growth has come to a halt and all the big dreams about 'the move towards the Great Civilisation'* have been shown up for what they are. There is discontent amongst the overwhelming majority of the population, the class struggle has sharply intensified, and to top it all, the authority of the state has been questioned even by the ruling class itself. And the ruling class is unable to do anything about it. They cannot resolve the socio-economic crisis since they themselves are its cause. They cannot change the regime since they themselves are its offsprings and in these troubled times nothing can help them better than the tanks of their Shah.

* reference to a book by the Shah.

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Part Two

The upsurge of the mass movement

The emergence of a deep economic crisis, coupled with the political impasse of the Iranian ruling class, created a favourable relationship of forces which allowed the opposition against the Shah's dictatorship to explode into a powerful mass movement.

The grumbles of the weaker sections of the ruling class, those with the least say in the apportioning of the state's resources, had done much to discredit the wild ramblings of the Shah about a 'Great Civilisation' and to indicate the direction in which the blame for wastages, inefficiencies, corruption and failure should be put. Nonetheless, it was to this very apparatus that the ruling class had to appeal in order to save themselves from the crisis. This could only weaken both the authority of the state and themselves.

The petit-bourgeoisie, which had got the worst deal out of the 'Royal Reforms', had right from the beginning (i.e. since the early 60s) attacked the bureaucracy as a tool of the 'dependent ruling class intent on destroying Iran's culture and economy and offering the country wholesale to foreigners'. It now intensified its attacks on the government and the ruling clique as a whole, deepening the confused impasse of the 'reformers' within the ruling class. In a situation in which the 'reformers' were trying to keep their distance from the government and avoid taking responsibility for its failures, they had nevertheless to urge policies on this very government which meant further ruination of the petit-bourgeoisie.

The working class despite being young, inexperienced in struggle and unorganised, and despite the continuing repression, was now initiating strike after strike. The state would try to suppress them in the way it knew best: i.e. sending in the police and SAVAK, brutally assaulting the strikers, arresting and imprisoning the ring leaders and sacking scores of workers. But the bourgeoisie could not afford the stoppages caused by such methods of strike-breaking in these economically troubled times. However, everytime it backed down a powerful incentive was given for strikes in other sectors. So, some strikes were

brutally put down, but many managed to win their demands. This in turn weakened the ability of the ruling class to impose its austerity plan, thus helping to sharpen inter-capitalist rivalry and all that entailed in mutual exposures and the erosion of the authority of the State and the Royal Court.

It was within this atmosphere of sharply intensified class struggle that popular discontent in the country, which had always existed since the coup of 1953, grew and reached boiling point. This was sharply aggravated by the presence of the huge and ever-growing mass of the urban poor (migrants from the countryside — which in Tehran alone exceeds 600,000), the obscene gap between rich and poor, shortages of all the basic necessities like housing and foodstuffs, and the seeming indifference of the government to all these problems. This, coupled with naked manifestations of corruption and decadence, which thanks to oil revenues had now multiplied ten times in number and magnitude, had brought everybody's patience to its limits. Whilst the government's propaganda machine was announcing, with the usual pomp and splendour, the fact that it would now be possible to travel from Europe to Keesh Island (the Shah's private and exclusive holiday resort in the Gulf, equipped with only the best in everything, including Madame Claude's internationally famous prostitutes) by Concorde, the Shah's troops were evicting the wretched residents of the shanty towns outside Tehran and bringing their huts on top of their heads.

The emergence of a movement of opposition to these brutal conditions was inevitable and as it broke everywhere, the regime tried to suppress it. But this time it did not work. The savage repression meted out by the Shah's regime to crush and destroy any kind of opposition to his rule had now turned into its complete opposite. Every act of repression, instead of suppressing the protests, itself became the spur for further radicalisations and broadening opposition to the Shah's rule. Those who had gathered their energy and hatred against the dictatorship for 25 years, were not going to be stopped by more repression. Furthermore, what the regime was now facing was no longer simple cases of isolated protests which it could crush without so much as a murmur from any other section of the population. Any move by any section against the regime immediately found active sympathy amongst other layers. As soon as the regime tried to suppress any protests the other sectors protested and organised solidarity actions.

In this way, a mass movement for democratic rights and against the Shah's dictatorship developed very rapidly and powerfully in the course of just over a year. In its development this movement reached fresh layers of the population everyday and expanded to the remotest parts of the country. Almost every layer, university and high school students, professors, teachers, lawyers, writers, poets, journalists, shopkeepers, housewives, the urban poor, religious leaders, bank employees, the civil servants, national minorities, taxi-drivers, the industrial proletariat, agricultural workers ... etc., was somehow or other involved in the movement for democratic rights and against all aspects of the Shah's tyranny. Even, political prisoners, victims of the previous or current repressions, began to organise struggles inside SAVAK's dungeons.

As the movement grew it also began to appreciate its own strengths and despite savage reprisals by the regime, it never stopped for long. Every time the

government tried to use the carrot to buy time and diffuse the protests, it only helped to encourage other and more open protests.

Every time it resorted to the stick to crush the protesters it only helped to teach them more militant forms of struggle. Looking at the events of the past period shows how a movement of protest, which began by open letters and petitions requesting elementary democratic reforms directed mostly at the government itself, ended up as mass mobilisations of millions calling for 'Death to the Shah!'. If it was not for the absence of a revolutionary leadership, these mobilisations could have easily ended the Shah's autocracy for ever. Even so, it was only with the help of tens of thousands of soldiers armed with Chieftain tanks, and the not very holy alliance that the forces of reaction mustered internationally, from Carter to Hua Ko Feng, that the Shah could be saved. Even then, just by the skin of his teeth. And that, as we shall see, is not for long!

THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE MASS MOVEMENT.

The development of the political movement against the Shah's dictatorship can be divided into three phases: from the early spring to December 1977, from January to June 1978, and from July to September 1978.

The first phase was marked off by a sudden increase in the number of signed open letters from well known individuals, ex-political leaders, professional groups, newly declared political formations, etc. addressed to the government, protesting at various aspects of the conditions prevailing in the country. Amongst the important ones two distinctively different types could be seen; on the one hand those demanding certain democratic rights from the regime, and on the other hand those offering advice or political programmes on how to change or reform the system. For example, one group of writers and poets wrote a vigorous criticism of the regime's attacks on freedom of artistic and intellectual activities, demanding the legalisation of the banned 'Iranian Writers' Association' and an end to censorship. On the other hand, a number of long-time inactive leaders of the old National Front wrote a letter to the Shah asking him to 'really respect the Iranian Constitution' if he wants to save the country from 'the difficulties which are threatening its future'.

The first type consisted of those layers and groups which had either traditions of struggle for democratic rights or were in a strong position because of the obvious justness of their cause and the wide support it could enjoy or, indeed, the very mildness of their demands. This layer included students, university lecturers, lawyers, writers, poets, intellectuals, teachers and so on. The second type contained new reformist political formations like 'Iran's Radical Movement', leaders of the various shades of the old bourgeoisie, liberal and petit-bourgeois nationalist parties belonging to the pre-1953 period, and all sorts of individuals from the very radical liberal intellectuals to the ultra-nationalists.

Writing letters might not appear to be much of a struggle against the dictatorship, but in Iran this was an important development. By protesting openly and putting their names to letters, individuals could have lost their lives or at least faced imprisonment in the previous period. For a long time none had

dared to even pen letters. But as soon as the first few letters were distributed and it was seen that the protestors got away with it, the flood gates were opened. Within a few months everybody was writing open letters.

This was not unconnected with the demagogy of Carter about 'Human Rights' and the growing international isolation of the Shah's regime. Many simpletons, including some of the old Iranian liberals, really thought that Carter was either going to remove the Shah or put pressure on him to change his ways. Even some high-ranking members of the bureaucracy itself were trying to take their distance from the Shah. Many groups simply found the moment opportune to direct their blows. In any way, the regime was in no position to clamp down on the writers of these letters. It was too busy warding off blows from many other directions. At first it tried to ignore them hoping they might go away. For a time the regime also thought that by allowing the letters to continue it could also prove to the world that the restrictions on political freedoms in Iran were not as bad as the opposition was making it out to be.

But the regime's attitude simply encouraged new protests. It then tried to counter-attack by making claims about its own intentions on 'liberalisation', and by refuting the charges against it. This, of course, was an added incentive: for those who had already written it was a green light to write even more thorough exposures of the regime, for others it was the cue to join in. What was even more dangerous for the regime was that some groups decided to go beyond writing letters and organised actions.

The turning point came when a number of public poetry readings were organised by the Writers' Association. These readings attracted ten to twenty thousand participants every evening and were turned into important political events, exposing the regime's hypocrisy and its 'liberalisation' gimmicks. After 25 years of dictatorship these were the first political meetings organised independently from the regime. Suddenly the tapes of speeches on the regime's record on censorship and left-wing poems were being distributed everywhere. Similar actions were being taken by other layers: students were organising open political forums inside universities, lawyers were forming their own associations and political oppositionists were reviving their organisations.

These were not, however, the only types of struggle taking place. The number of economic strikes increased sharply to an unprecedented number (31 known strikes in the first six months of 1978). The struggles of the university students had taken very militant forms and had spread to include almost every university in Iran. The sharp turn came during the first term in October 1977 when the fight around the demand for the removal of guards from the campuses and the right of the students to have their own libraries spread to many universities. Students were now organising street demonstrations and dispersing as soon as the police came onto the scene. The most important development in this period was, probably, the major fight that erupted between Tehran's poor and the government forces. They refused to leave the areas outside the city limits which they had taken over and built their huts on. After weeks of struggle involving hand to hand combat with the police, occupations of the town hall and demonstrations, they managed to force the government to retreat.

The regime became increasingly worried about the situation, especially since these separate struggles were now gradually linking up with each other and

posing their demands in an increasingly generalised form. The government was preparing itself for a major clamp down, but first it had to make political preparations. This was the purpose of the Shah's visit to Washington in November 1977 — to show the bureaucracy and the vascillating members of the ruling class that Carter still supported him.

He had not even returned to Iran before the brutal reprisals began. The students were beaten up inside the campuses; a number of writers were arrested; meetings were smashed up by roaming bands of thugs organised by SAVAK, some well-known figures were kidnapped and beaten almost to death; bombs were exploded in the houses of oppositionist leaders and in the offices of well-known lawyers. Leading members of the Shah's Rastakhiz Party started inviting the 'patriots', i.e. the SAVAK, to organise 'Revenge Squads' and 'National Defence Guards' to fight the 'foreign dominated troublemakers who want to destroy Iran's stability'.

This crackdown on the opposition did not, however, stop the protests. For the first time a general political strike took place in all Iran's universities; a flood of letters of protest were published; defence committees were formed; even public press conferences in the presence of international observers took place; the political prisoners went on hunger strikes; lawyers issued a writ against the public prosecutor; and street meetings were organised. The most important development was, however, at the end of this phase when the religious opposition to the Shah's regime once again became active.

During the crack down the regime attacked many Shiite religious ceremonies (late November and early December) which were being used to organise support for the victims of repression. In many cities the local religious leaders were sent into exile and some were arrested. Prominent leaders of the Shiite like Ayatollah Khomeini wrote statements condemning the Shah's brutal rule and criticising 'those who expect it to return to constitutional rule'. He also invited all his followers to unite in their protests against the regime and called on the 'Islamic Army' to free itself from the 'shame of enslavement in the hands of aliens'.

This was the background within which the second phase of the mass movement developed. It was sparked off by a vicious and slanderous attack against Khomeini published in *Etelaat*, the government controlled Teheran daily, in January 1978 following direct orders 'from above'.

This provocation immediately brought mass protests in Qom, Iran's most important religious city. For three days all of Qom was on strike and there were massive demonstrations combined with meetings and fiery speeches by the Ayatollahs (the religious leaders) bitterly attacking the regime. The Army was eventually sent in to crush the demonstrations. It opened fire and at least a hundred people were massacred. This brought about mass protests in many other cities. Almost every religious leader condemned the brutal massacre and called for a day of national mourning on 18 February, the fortieth day following the massacre in Qom. What followed was the now famous forty day cycle of mass protests.

The basic character of this cycle which distinguished it from the earlier phase was widespread street demonstrations involving a wide range of social groups: the petit-bourgeoisie, the urban and to some extent, the rural poor, workers, students, etc. The political nature of the protests were, although rather



'Mourning' demonstration on eve of martial law

confused, much more generalised and very clear in so far as they were directed against the Shah and his tyranny. During these mobilisations the demonstrators would attack governmental buildings, offices of the much hated 'All Embracing National Resurgence Party' (Rastakhiz), banks, official social welfare institutes, and anything with imperialist connections, particularly American.

All of these protests were put down by the army and the police and each time scores of people were killed or injured. But the cycle could not be stopped. Forty days after any massacre, another even more massive protest would take place. In the absence of any organisation to co-ordinate action and faced with the tight control of the repressive forces, the masses put to good use this old tradition of mourning the dead on the fortieth day. In this way simultaneous demonstrations were organised in the far corners of this vast country. On the fortieth day of each massacre everybody knew that everybody else was going to demonstrate! Other important struggles also took place. In the Azarbayjan and Kurdistan provinces, in which the two most important oppressed nationalities live, the first signs of a re-emergence of the movement for self-determination appeared. In Azarbayjan, there were a number of demonstrations in which slogans protesting against national oppression were raised and meetings were held using the banned Turkish language. During the whole of the second phase nowhere was the mass movement more widespread and more militant than it was in Tabriz (the central city of the province) on the first of the forty day cycles on 18 February 1978. On this day, demonstrators took over the city for a few hours, and the government had to bring in troops and tanks from the outside and shoot its way through the crowds. The soldiers stationed in the city had refused to shoot. In Kurdistan, the death of a popular Kurdish fighter who had just been

released from jail in June 1978 to a demonstration of 20,000 calling for 'a free and independent Kurdistan'.

Other sectors continued with their struggles: more clashes took place between students and the police; the number of strikes continued to increase and for the first time workers were taking up political demands for free trade unions; many agricultural workers went on strike, and in one important agro-industry, they smashed up all the equipment after failing to achieve their demands; scores of high school students were drawn into political activity for the first time; the Rastakhiz party was beginning to crack up; a number of semi-illegal political newspapers began to be published; many writers simply ignored the censorship and published their books illegally; even the Shah's hand-picked Majlis deputies (the lower house of Parliament) began to openly criticise the government.

It was obvious that the regime's plans which had provoked the cycles of protest had completely failed. By attacking Khomeini, it had sought to stop the spread of the opposition through drawing the religious hierarchy behind the government's plans. It especially feared the fact that Khomeini's 15 years of exile were coming to an end and he might want to return to Iran. The government hoped that by isolating the more radical oppositionists like Khomeini, it would force the more conservative leaders to take a position in support of the regime. But all that it had achieved through these months was, in fact, to place the radical wing at the head of the movement. And the movement now had a truly mass character.

The regime, however, thought otherwise. After the last cycle on 9 May, no further nationwide street mobilisations took place. It appeared that the religious leaders themselves were actively opposing any further mass protests. The masses themselves had become very subdued. The massacres had taken their toll — 4,000 dead in a few months. Even the important anniversary of the June 1963 massacres — when over 10,000 people taking part in a nationwide protest against the Shah's 'White Revolution' were killed by the army and, after which, Khomeini was sent into exile — passed without much incident. Many religious leaders and most of the liberal bourgeois politicians had urged the masses to stay at home in a peaceful day of protest for fear of a possible bloodbath. A period of relative lull had developed which made the government think that it had finally stemmed the tide. But then a third phase opened.

It began completely spontaneously. A number of local incidents in a number of cities led to bloody clashes with the army. And, despite the apparent lull, tensions were running so high that anything could explode the situation. In Mehsed, a 50,000 strong demonstration took place on 24 July chanting 'Death to the Shah'. This followed a funeral the day before which had ended up in clashes with the police. Troops, tanks and helicopters were called in to crush the demonstration leading to over a hundred deaths. The following week solidarity actions were organised in more than 20 cities leading to further clashes with the army. In Tehran, which had so far been quiet, demonstrations started erupting by the hour. In Qom people erected street barricades and fought the army for hours before they were forced to disperse.

What was special about this phase of the mass movement was not only its spontaneous character but that it was the most militant so far. Every demonstration ended up in fierce battles with the police and the army. The

demonstrators had learnt a great deal from the previous clashes. They were no longer prepared to peacefully get shot. They had learnt how to neutralise the tear gas bombs, how to build barricades and how to set fire to tyres and clog-up the tracks on the tanks. Furthermore, their demands were now very clear: every demonstration called for 'Death to the Shah'. This phase was particularly dangerous for the regime, because it was demoralising the army. Unarmed demonstrators were defying the well-equipped Iranian army and even succeeding in holding it off for hours. The situation became especially worrying in Isfahan and Shiraz in early August. Again, local incidents led to clashes with the police. The army was brought in and further clashes took place. In Isfahan a house to house fight with the army developed which continued for two days. Faced with these two mobilisations the government realised that it had miscalculated and overestimated its ability to defuse the mass movement. All that was left to do was to rely once again on the might of its arms. On 10 August, troops occupied Shiraz and martial law was declared in Isfahan. It soon became clear, however, that the martial law was not as effective as the government wished. In a number of incidents the soldiers simply refused to shoot. The population did not take the martial law seriously.

The government now decided on a clear course of action: a total clamp down in the whole of the country. But it had to prepare the ground for such large scale repression. The little Hitlers in SAVAK cooked up the most inhuman conspiracy: to set a packed cinema on fire, blame it on the 'Moslem fanatics' who are against such aspects of 'modernisation' and then use it as a pretext to crack down on the opposition. Thus it was on 17 August that the Shah went on the radio and television to warn the population that 'whilst I want to give you great civilisation, they want to give you a great fear'. Forty eight hours later on 19 August, the 25th anniversary of the CIA coup, a cinema in the poor part of Abadan was set on fire with over 700 people locked inside. They were all burnt to death.

For a while it seemed that the regime's conspiracy was working. But the situation rapidly changed and the whole plan backfired. In Abadan itself the whole population quickly realised who had been behind the fire. Many who had been present at the scene (the cinema was burning for half an hour) had found enough evidence to know that it was the work of the government itself. The next day a massive demonstration was organised in Abadan demanding that the 'Shah must be burnt'. For four days these demonstrations continued, growing more massive and getting more militant each day. The real truth about the fire soon reached every corner of Iran. Demonstrations were organised in many other cities attacking the regime for its barbarous act.

The anger of the whole population was becoming uncontrollable. The regime's attempt to find scapegoats simply made the situation worse. The tension was becoming dangerously explosive. So the ruling class cooked up another manoeuvre: a change of government. On 27 August, the Shah shuffled his entourage, dropping Amouzegar and electing Sharif Emmami, to lead the government to give the appearance that he had finally retreated in the face of opposition. The aim of this manoeuvre was to divert attention from the Abadan massacre and buy enough time to prepare the previously decided 'strategy' of brutal repression: The new prime minister promised 'a rapid move towards a

totally open political atmosphere' and formed what he called 'a government of national reconciliation'. He also announced that he wanted to negotiate with the political and religious leaders of the opposition. For a few days the government made it appear that press censorship had been relaxed. Interviews with leaders of the opposition were published in the semi-official dailies and rumours were circulated that a visit had been arranged to Najaf to appease Khomeini. A 'free election' was promised for next summer and 'freedom of activity' was guaranteed for 'legitimate' political parties'

The manoeuvre seemed to have fooled most of the so-called political parties. There was even a sudden rush to form new parties. In a few days 14 parties had announced their presence. Some notable oppositionists were giving their views on the pros and cons of giving the government 'time to prove itself'. As for the Abadan fire: it was not even mentioned. On the first day of the new cabinet it was announced that the Iraqi government had arrested somebody who was responsible for the fire and had given him to the Iranian authorities. No more has been heard about it since.

The masses were not, however, fooled by all these manoeuvres. That it was a manoeuvre was obvious to many observers. Firstly, the composition of the cabinet showed that the Shah did not plan any 'reconciliation' but in fact was preparing for a major new attack. The new cabinet consisted of individuals even more reactionary than Hoveida's ministers. The prime minister himself was one of the most trusted servants of the Shah. His minister of the interior was General Abbas Gharabaghi, chief of the National Gendarmerie. Secondly, whilst the leaders of the 'legitimate' parties were flirting with the new government, the secret service was rounding up the militant activists and the radical religious leaders in various localities. What is even more indicative is the fact that two days before the change of government a top-secret order was sent to the chiefs of all the armed forces, the police and gendarmerie to put their forces on the alert, to cancel all leave and to call back anybody already on leave. Troop movements reported during these days, show that the army had orders to move towards those cities which were centres of clashes in the earlier period and which were not close to any army divisions. It was clear that the ruling class had made up its mind that it needed the Shah and was preparing for military rule. It only needed time and an opportune moment to strike.

In the meantime, despite all the manoeuvres, a new wave of demonstrations had begun, spreading to every city, town and village. There were sometimes up to a dozen demonstrations each day in every city. Two days after the change of government, at least ten demonstrations took place in Tehran alone. On the same day in Qom, the city was the scene of the biggest demonstration it had ever seen — the demonstration lasted until dawn the next day. Two days later in Meshed, 60,000 people took part in a march which ended up in clashes with the army. In Tabriz, a city which since the uprising in February has been under occupation by the army, there were clashes with the army virtually every day.

Whilst all these demonstrations were occurring a massive strike movement of the workers began. Most of the major factories in Tehran, Tabriz, Ahwaz, Arak, Qazvin and Behshahr went on strike. In a strike in Tabriz the workers issued a statement saying that the official (i.e. government controlled) union was from their point of view dissolved, and that they intended to hold elections

to elect their real representatives. In another strike in Ahwaz, in reply to the bosses claim that they could not grant any wage increases due to small profits the previous year, the workers demanded the opening of the books.

When these struggles culminated into the massive mobilisations of millions in the early party of September the ruling class knew that it had to move quicker than it had planned. On 4 September the celebrations marking the end of Ramazan (the month of fasting) were turned into peaceful marches of over four million all over the country. In Tehran nearly 400,000 people took part in a march which continued for over 14 hours. The army was mobilised but they did not open fire. People were chanting 'Brother soldiers, why do you kill your brothers?' and throwing flowers at them. What was most noticeable was the support for the marchers amongst the population. All along the route people had gathered outside their houses offering food and water to the demonstrators.

On the same day it was announced that another demonstration would take place on 7 September to commemorate the martyrs of the past month. Next day the government banned all demonstrations. Some of the conservative religious leaders advised everyone to stay at home in order 'not to give any excuse to the regime', but people defied all threats and advice and came onto the streets in even greater numbers than on 4 September. In Tehran over a million took part in the most impressive demonstration of strength, freely fraternising with the army and even bringing tears to the eyes of the soldiers.

The government knew that it could not rely on the troops to confront such massive numbers. They tried a few times to stop the march but they finally decided to give in. The demonstrators were jubilant, most of them thought they had already won the fight: chanting 'Death to the Shah' in front of soldiers in a banned demonstration! The demonstration was growing by the minute, everybody along the route was joining in. A call was made to have another demonstration for the next day. It was to be for the release of all political prisoners. People were confident that there would be an even bigger turn out. But then came Black Friday.

At 6am on Friday 8 September, the government announced martial law in 12 cities, including Tehran, for six months. It was a desperate attempt to stop the demonstration before it reached uncontrollable numbers. People had already started to assemble at 5am not having heard about the martial law. What followed was the most savage butchery of defenceless people ever seen — even in the Shah's Iran. In Tehran, at least 4,000 were killed. This figure is based only on the number of bodies buried in Tehran cemeteries. Truckloads of bodies were taken by the army to unknown destinations. It is reported that many bodies were taken to the central parts of the Kavir, the vast deserts in Iran. Up to the late afternoon sounds of machine gun fire could still be heard in Tehran.

The ruling class thought once again that they had bought time for their Shah, but the Iranian masses returned relentlessly to the struggle. Seven days after the massacre 80,000 people defied the martial law and the ban on assemblies to gather at Behesht Zahra, Tehran's main cemetery, where some of the victims of Black Friday were buried. A new wave of sporadic demonstrations broke out in 20 cities. And most important of all, an unprecedentedly widespread strike movement was initiated by the workers.

Part Three

The forces of the opposition

In the political developments of the past year and a half the most striking feature has been the growing influence of the Shiite hierarchy within the mass movement. This was particularly marked in the later phases of the movement, before the imposition of the martial law. During this period the Shiite leaders, especially those under the influence of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini, emerged as the main political force at the head of the mass movement. In the mobilisations of early September, the millions who were calling for the overthrow of the Shah were also demanding the return of Khomeini and the establishment of an 'Islamic government'.

This popular support for the religious leaders has been used by the Iranian ruling class to discredit the mass movement. The regime has tried to divert attention from its own failures and the progressive anti-dictatorial nature of the mass movement by claiming that the main opposition to the Shah is religious and reactionary. They have said that whilst the Shah promises a 'Great Civilisation', the opposition wants a return to the 'dark old days'. This has also been used by the imperialists to justify their support for the Shah's bloody rule. In this way the smiling mandarin in the White House and the socialist whizz-kid at Her Majesty's Foreign Office can carry on talking about their 'respect for human rights' whilst at the same time sanctioning the daily massacres of the Iranian masses. In the land of the capitalist governments and their servile press the heroic fighters for democratic rights in Iran are turned into 'mad barbarians' who just love to stand in front of bullets rather than accept the 'great civilisation' offered to them by their imperialist masters.

We have already explained what really lies behind this mass movement and how nonsensical it is to characterise it as a religious movement. Regardless of whatever force that may be at its head and despite whatever demands through which it may express itself, the mass movement has absolutely nothing to do with religion of any kind, let alone a reactionary one. This was a movement of opposition to the brutal dictatorship of a monarchy which has taken the majority of the population to the verge of total ruin through the so-called reforms imposed by international capitalism. A monarchy which boasts of its servility to 'Western interests' and is prepared to align itself with the most

hated reactionary forces in the world. As we have seen, the movement against this regime developed spontaneously and in the course of just over a year, drew the active support of the vast majority of the population. A movement which, despite brutal repression by the Shah's troops, a loss of more than 10,000 dead and the imprisonment of many of its fighters, and despite the martial law, continues to develop and is rocking the Iranian monarchy to its foundations. To call this a 'right-wing religious movement' is the height of hypocrisy and stupidity to which only the most decadent imperialists can rise. So how is it to be explained that this very movement seems to have put its trust in Khomeini and the other oppositionist religious leaders and is prepared to demonstrate in the shadow of the tanks and guns in order to pronounce to the world its support for these leaders? The most common explanation which has been put forward by many observers, on the left as well as on the right, is that the Iranian masses are deeply religious and politically immature, hence, their participation in the class struggle and their opposition to the Shah's regime can only express itself through religion. The left has used such explanations in order to justify an opportunist policy of liquidating its own programme and tail-ending the religious leadership. Whilst the right has relied on it to whip up support for the claim that the backward Iranians are not mature enough for democracy.

Through this type of explanation every bankrupt political force has managed to hide behind religion. The bourgeois nationalists, the Stalinists and the Maoists are now only one step behind the eventual declaration that they have in fact always been devout Shiites. Simultaneously the autocratic reaction, which has not got a leg to stand on, is now attempting to frighten the middle classes into supporting the 'firm but progressive' dictatorship of the Shah against so-called religious reaction. In fact, all that this proves is the bankruptcy and hypocrisy of these political currents rather than 'religious fanaticism of the backward masses'. That such explanations are extremely naive can be shown by simply remembering one important fact in the history of the political movements of the 20th century in Iran. However much the Iranians might be religious and politically immature, can it be said that they are more so today than they were, say, 70 or even 30 years ago?

How can it be claimed that the Iranians were more politically mature during the time of the Constitutional revolution of 70 years ago than they are today? At that time there had not even developed a political party in Iran. Nevertheless, the leadership of the movement was not in the hand of the religious hierarchy. Or alternatively, who can prove that the mass movement of the post Second World War period was less religious than those of today? At that time the vast majority of the population had no national means of social communication other than the religious network. Nevertheless the leadership of the movement was either in the hands of the Stalinist Tudeh Party or the bourgeois National Front.

It is true that in both of these instances, the religious leaders played an important role in the political leadership of the mass movement. But, this constituted only **an element** within a much broader leadership; and even then it was only temporary and was rapidly overshadowed by other political formations. So how is it that many decades later, one of the most broadly based

mass movements that Iran has ever seen gives its total support to the religious leaders who are no longer playing a subordinate role but acting as an **independent political force?**

Many factors have contributed in allowing the Shiite hierarchy to occupy such a leading position in the mass movement. The single most important factor, is however, the crisis of political leadership in Iran. Both in a conjunctural sense and in a broader historical sense.

In the historical sense, the Stalinist bureaucracy has blocked for a long time all possibilities of the development of a revolutionary proletarian leadership in Iran. Other than a few years of activity by the first nuclei of Iranian social democracy (formed in 1906) during the Constitutional Revolution, and the early years of the Iranian Communist Party (formed in 1920), there has been a total absence of a genuine workers party which could significantly influence political developments in Iran.

The Moscow bureaucracy forced the young CP to back Reza Shah and, during the Moscow trials, executed almost all its capable leaders. In fact, by the early 1930s it had already destroyed the Iranian communist movement. When later on, in the early 1940s, the Stalinist bureaucracy helped the formation of a new party (the Tudeh Party) it forced it not to even declare itself as a workers party. As the name of this new Stalinist creation suggests (the mass party), they were trying to apply the popular front policies in the very unique conditions of Iran. In the absence of any notable bourgeois party and given the insignificance of the Communist Party, the Stalinists could not form a popular front by forcing the workers parties into a coalition with the bourgeoisie. Hence, they formed a single new party, already equipped with a class collaborationist 'popular' programme, and under their control right from the beginning. Nowhere has a Stalinist party betrayed a revolution so blatantly as the Tudeh Party did in Iran. Nowhere has the Moscow bureaucracy sacrificed a revolutionary movement for its own narrow interests so cynically as it did in Iran in the early 1940s.

At its height the anti-imperialist movement was calling for the annulment of all the colonial concessions to foreign imperialists, in particular the oil concessions. In reply to popular sentiment, the Tudeh Party organised demonstrations to demand the granting of an oil concession to the Soviet Union. In order to get these concessions the Tudeh Party entered an openly pro-imperialist coalition government, put down the strike movement which had paralysed the British controlled oil industries and sacrificed the Azerbaijan national movement. It was these policies which helped place a loose formation of bourgeois nationalists calling itself the National Front (Jebhe Melli) under the leadership of Mossadegh, at the head of the mass movement. The National Front, which only wanted a redistribution of the fruits of the exploitation of the Iranian workers and peasants, in favour of the indigenous bourgeoisie, could of course only lead the mass movement into total defeat. It demobilised the masses, worked through 'constitutional means', and tried to keep the monarchy. In this way it simply allowed reaction to prepare the conditions for a CIA backed military coup in 1953.

The memory of this defeat stays fresh in the minds of the masses. The betrayals of the Tudeh Party and the cowardice of the National Front have not



been forgotten. In the meantime no other political alternative has developed which can fill the vacuum. The forces of revolutionary marxism remain very weak. The vanguard, which drew some of the lessons of this defeat, instead of breaking totally with Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism, fell into the new trap of Maoism and all kinds of petit-bourgeois radicalism copied from the four corners of the world. It was inevitable that some other force would fill this gap. The objective conditions and the political development of the recent period, particularly after the Shah's 'White Revolution', allowed this alternative to be the religious leaders. Already, before the 1953 coup, a number of bourgeois politicians had started forming groups and circles with Islam as their main ideology.

What, however, brought the religious hierarchy to the forefront was the events of the early 60s, when the 'reforms' encouraged by imperialism began to be implemented. Both the main traditional political parties, the Tudeh Party and the National Front (which had by this time regrouped itself), failed completely to oppose these reforms. The Tudeh Party totally capitulated and the National Front vacillated and played with the idea of joining the government. In any case, neither of them organised any opposition to those reforms. The Tudeh Party hailed them as 'progressive' and claimed that they

marked 'a retreat of world imperialism in the face of the advancing socialist camp'. The National Front was completely disarmed since the Shah was now carrying out policies which had been the main pillars of their own programme for 'an independent Iran'. The best that these parties could offer was the slogan: 'Reforms, Yes; Dictatorship, No!' The only significant group which put up any opposition was a section of the religious hierarchy headed by Ayatollah Khomeini. In June 1963, they mobilised mass demonstrations in a few major cities which were brutally crushed by the army. Thousands were killed in these demonstrations and many of the religious leaders were arrested. Khomeini himself was forced into exile.

The Iranian regime claimed that the opposition of the Shiite hierarchy to the 'White Revolution' was due to their backwardness and opposition to the liberation of women and the land reforms. It is true that many of the religious leaders considered these reforms as a threat to their own authority and thought that through them 'Islamic values' would be eroded. But they were most vocal in their opposition to what they saw as a policy of selling out Iran's interests. In any case, as far as the masses are concerned the reasons behind the Shiite opposition in the early 60s is immaterial. Now that, after 15 years, the devastating results of these reforms have become obvious to everyone, what people remember is not why Khomeini and his followers opposed the Shah's reforms but the fact that they were the only significant group which **did** oppose them right from the start.

It was within this political context that the mass movement against the Shah's regime has developed over the last year and a half. In the 60s the political vacillations of the Tudeh Party and the National Front had helped to turn the religious opposition into an independent political force. Now, with the new upsurge in opposition to the Shah's dictatorship, the bankruptcy of these groups helped to place the religious leaders, especially Khomeini who has been the most consistent in his opposition to the Shah, at the head of the mass movement.

On the most fundamental political task of the day, i.e. the overthrow of the Shah's regime, Khomeini has proved to be more radical than both the Tudeh Party and the National Front. In the course of a few months, the movement for democratic rights became generalised around one central demand 'Down with the Shah!'. With this development the popularity of Khomeini grew. Whilst he had consistently opposed any compromises with the Shah, the National Front was simply calling for 'a return to Constitutional Monarchy'. But it was around this very 'Constitutional Monarchy' that all the forces of imperialism and reaction had concentrated and centralised themselves. The mass movement was not to be channelled into a move for the return of a constitution which considers the Shah as 'a God given gift to the Iranians'. Instead it chose to identify itself with Khomeini who had always denounced all such talks as 'a deception by a threatened regime!'

As far as the Tudeh Party is concerned the situation was even worse. Throughout the period up to the imposition of the martial law in September, the TP was very vague on the question of monarchy. It was simply pushing the idea of a 'national coalition government' which was to include 'those sections of the ruling classes opposed to the individualistic dictatorship of the Shah'. In its programme the TP has even offered a bait to those sections, indicating that 'with the help of the socialist countries they can enjoy a safe market unhindered by

competition of goods from the imperialist countries'. The Moscow bureaucracy itself has gone even further in clarifying what lies behind the TP's opposition to the Shah. They have shown that it amounts to a mere diplomatic game of bluffs designed to frighten the Shah into accepting the necessity of leaning also on Moscow's bureaucracy. In applying this policy they have always shown their willingness to support the Shah's regime and to enter into agreements directly with the Shah despite their designs for a coalition with the above mentioned 'sections' of the ruling class.

On the basis of this so-called policy of 'putting pressure on American imperialism' Moscow has justified the most blatant support for the Shah. For example, last year, i.e. when the mass movement of opposition to the Shah's rule had just begun in Iran, whilst even Carter was being forced to admit that the Shah's regime left a lot to be desired, the Stalinist bureaucracy invited the Shah to a tour of Eastern Europe and gave the most savage butcher in modern history an honorary degree in Law! In a country which has suffered for decades at the hands of imperialism no foreign support for the Shah goes unnoticed by the masses, even when it is covered up by Stalinist demagoguery about 'forcing the imperialists to retreat'.

It is therefore clear why, when left with a choice between the TP, NF, and Khomeini, the mass movement decided to put its support behind Khomeini. Within the prominent opposition group he was offering the most consistent policy. No other viable alternative existed either. There were a number of other opposition groups which sprang up inside the Majlis (Parliament) and even inside the Shah's single party, Rastakhiz. But most of these were insignificant and much more to the right than the NF or TP. In any case, the masses would not trust anybody who had some history of collaboration with the dictatorship.

The other organisations on the left can be divided into two groups: those active inside Iran and those outside the country. Among those inside, the most prominent were the two guerilla groups: Sazeman Mojahedin Khalgh (the Organisation of the Crusaders of the People) and Sazeman Cherk-haye Fadaii Khalgh (the Guerilla Organisation of the Devotees of the People). They began guerilla activities about eight years ago and had some support amongst students and intellectuals. These groups were much weakened by the repression and by the time the mass movement began they had basically ceased to exist as a significant organised force inside Iran. They still retain some support within the student movement abroad. In any case, their policy of individual heroism was just not applicable to the condition of a mass movement and it completely by-passed them. Over the last couple of years not much has been seen to indicate that they are still active.

Among the groups outside the country, the largest force is made up of an assortment of petit-bourgeois radical sects all somehow or other influenced by Maoism. Most of these groups have no political justification for their separate existence other than their opposition to each other. They have no significant base inside the country and the little influence that they did have has been completely eroded by the open support given to the Shah by Peking. Inside Iran, there is such a hatred for Peking's policies that none of the sects even dare admit that they are Maoists.



The masses turned to the mosques as organising centres

The forces of revolutionary marxism are as yet rather small. The only organised currents are around two journals, **Payam Daneshjoo** and **Kandokav** which began activity only a few years ago. They have already managed to make an impact on Iran's national politics and their influence is growing. Nevertheless, their forces are very small and this is especially important when dealing with a rapidly developing mass movement because newly radicalised layers are drawn, at first, towards those currents which offer possibilities of organisation.

Herein lies the second reason behind the apparent domination of the mass movement by the religious leaders. Under conditions of severe repression and suppression of basic democratic rights, and in the absence of any underground organisation, the mass movement could only turn to the mosques as centres for assembling and organising political activity.

This was particularly important when it was noted that the two main political groups, the Tudeh Party and the National Front were unwilling to mobilise

the masses. The NF thought that American imperialism and important sections of the Iranian ruling classes were under pressure to change the political situation in Iran and bring about a certain measure of liberalisation. Hence, all their political actions were based on a strategy of persuading these 'powerful interests' that a change was necessary and that they could trust the NF to carry them out smoothly.

In doing this, they could not afford mass mobilisations. Firstly, they know that the overthrow of the Shah by a mass movement would open up an 'uncontrollable' (revolutionary) situation and that the Americans and the Iranian ruling class would not agree to such an overthrow. Secondly, they know that if they are to neutralise the claims of the Shah that without him and his dictatorship 'all power would slip away', they have to show that the mass movement is 'a responsible movement' and that it can be controlled within some sort of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Any action in which the masses take things into their own hands would directly cut across such a strategy of compromise. The NF, therefore, shied away from any such actions. In fact in a number of instances it has denounced certain actions publicly and has called many others 'unfortunate incidents provoked by the regime'.

The Tudeh Party, starting from similar political premises, tried to show to the ruling class that it has a base within the mass movement and that if it were to be called into a coalition it would bring this base under control. In this, the TP is no different from Stalinist parties elsewhere, except that, whilst in many other countries it does actually have a base, in Iran it has to rely on a game of bluff. The support for the TP is not very significant and its apparatus is not large enough to enable it to bureaucratically control the movement. In any case, the spontaneous nature and the explosive dynamic of the mass movement does not allow such control. Thus the TP faces a dilemma. If it was to try to mobilise and organise it would simply reveal its own lack of a base. And, if it does not claim a base, there is no reason why any section of the ruling class should turn to the Stalinists — even if such a project did exist within the ruling class.

The TP has tried to resolve this problem by tail-ending the mass movement. By saying some of the things that the masses are saying, the TP tries to show that the masses are saying them under the influence of the TP. This might fool the bureaucrats in Moscow into believing that the money spent on the TP is money well spent, but it does not fool the masses which are experiencing through their own activities the inactivity of the TP. In a few areas in which the TP has had a base this has been used, in fact, to suffocate the movement. A very good example is the Iranian Writers Association in which the TP has managed to build up some kind of an influence, basically due to the absence of any competition. This base has been used to turn the Writers Association into a TP front. Thus, contrary to its early days, in which the Association did play some role in the mass movement, it has now become a dead horse, completely by-passed by events.

It is thus clear why the mass movement turned to the Mosques. It was only there that various layers and individuals could meet, organise activities and co-ordinate their opposition to the Shah. This, of course, helped to increase

the influence of the religious hierarchy, especially when it is considered that there already did exist a religious opposition and that the Shiite hierarchy is very susceptible to mass pressure.

The Shiite hierarchy, unlike religious hierarchies elsewhere, for example the Catholic Church, is financially independent of the State. It is almost completely run on religious dues and contributions collected directly from supporters through the Mosques and other religious networks. These contributions are passed up the hierarchy to the religious leaders of the various regions — the Ayatollahs. The Ayatollahs, in turn, spend the money on running the mosques, the theological schools, various charities and so on. This money cannot be invested anywhere else and, hence, the Shiite hierarchy is not tied up financially through the ruling class to the State. The Shiite hierarchy is, therefore, basically an independent structure directly tied up to its followers and totally dependent on their support. This situation has placed it in a peculiar position vis a vis the monarchy and the masses. A position which has created, on the one hand, a constant source of friction with the dictatorship and, on the other hand, a significant sensitivity to the concerns of the masses.

The Pahlavi monarchy, in its determination to increasingly militarise every level of social life and suffocate all independent organisations and activities of the masses, has tried constantly to bring the running of religion under its direct control. This has been done in two ways. Firstly, by creating another parallel hierarchy financially dependent on the state, and secondly, by intervening in the existing hierarchy in order to promote pro-Shah elements. Under this combined pressure of the mass movement and the monarchy, a gradual rift has developed within the religious hierarchy in which one wing has been forced to lean more on the masses and has moved increasingly to the left in its opposition to the Shah. Khomeini is now the leader of this section of the religious hierarchy.

These developments have, of course, been particularly sharp in the course of the past eighteen months. Under the pressure of a constantly growing mass radicalisation and the turn of the masses to the mosques, the lower echelons within the religious hierarchy have tended to reflect the sentiments of the oppressed. The turn of these layers to those leaders within the hierarchy which have opposed the Shah, like Khomeini, has enabled these leaders to strengthen their own positions vis-à-vis the pro-Shah leaders. This has, in turn, made the whole religious opposition more vocal and more radical.

Of course, the religious opposition, even in its most radical form, is still expressed through a convoluted religious ideology. But the growing predominance and the popularity of the leaders of this religious opposition within the mass movement does not signify a religious renaissance. Despite the declarations of the religious leaders and despite the propaganda of the imperialist press, Islam or an 'Islamic state' is not the goal of the masses. What attracts the masses to Khomeini is his gradual shift from a position of opposition to specific policies of the Shah, to a demand for the overthrow of the Shah, and now to the demand for the overthrow of the monarchy. A shift which itself reflects the growing radicalisation of the mass movement and its rising level of consciousness.



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Part Four

The tasks of revolutionaries

Since the imposition of martial law we have seen a significant change in the extent and intensity of the fight against the Shah's regime. A qualitatively new stage in the development of the mass movement has opened up. After 25 years of the most intense and barbaric repression, the oppressed masses in Iran have entered the revolutionary road.

Conditions are now ripe for overcoming the defeat suffered after the CIA coup of 1953. The militancy and the depth of the political radicalisation proves that the Iranian masses are no longer willing to endure the miserable conditions of life under capitalism imposed upon them by the Pahlavi regime. They have become conscious of their strength and in the face of the machine guns and the Chieftain tanks of the Shah's troops are more loudly than ever calling for 'Death to the Shah!'. The country-wide martial law which was imposed to block the revolutionary upsurge is now proving to be ineffective.

After decades, once again every city in Iran speaks the language of revolution. The most important single factor which has brought about this qualitative change is the entry of the Iranian working class into the arena of opposition to the Pahlavi regime. The Iranian working class has begun to champion the democratic aspirations of all the oppressed and to move towards solving the crisis imposed on Iranian society by the Shah's capitalist rules. During Autumn 1978 a massive wave of strikes spread to every corner of the country. Over 1.5 million workers became involved in strike action which is paralyzing the ruling class. Steelworkers, railway workers, miners, civil servants, teachers, bank employees, agricultural labourers, journalists, oil workers, all went on strike.

This is the first time in Iran's history that such a massive wave of strikes has developed. The scale of the strikes and the level of militancy is absolutely unprecedented. It is only apt that the Iranian working class has begun its battle with an almost general strike. What makes this strike wave particularly important is that it is not primarily around economic demands. Without any trade union organisation or previous experience the Iranian workers have combined economic and political strikes in an original and well-planned way.

Their demands are a combination of demands about wages and hours (including sliding scales of hours and wages), conditions of work, access to company books, control of production quotas and of overt political demands for the freedom of political prisoners and an end to martial law.

In the heat of the struggle against the monarchy and under the threat of military rule, even economic strikes have assumed a political character. In a number of cases where the strikers originally put forward purely economic demands and won their strike, they went straight back on strike with political demands! Strike committees elected by and answerable to mass assemblies of workers sprang up everywhere. In a number of localities different strike committees have managed to link up and organise solidarity actions. In many instances strikes were combined with occupations of workplaces, and in some cases demonstrations were organised which succeeded in drawing the active support of other social layers in the localities.

The appearance of the workers on the scene has of course played an important role in changing the relationship of forces vis-à-vis the martial law and boosting mass mobilisations. In open defiance of martial law, demonstrations have continued in many cities. In some cities the masses have taken over the control of the city for up to a day. In a few instances embryos of popular militias have developed. In the face of these developments the Pahlavi regime is on the retreat. The political apparatus of the dictatorship is disintegrating and it has no alternative but to resort more and more to military rule and rely on imperialist support. But, the instruments of repression are no longer effective and every act of brutality and wholesale massacre draws new layers into political activity and brings the downfall of the dictatorship closer.

The ruling class and imperialism have, however, no viable alternative other than keeping the Pahlavi regime. All the forces of reaction have concentrated around the monarchy. Iranian capitalism is closely tied up with the monarchy. Imperialism dominates Iranian society through the monarchy. They all know that a revolutionary overthrow of the Shah's regime would lead to the total destruction of the state and the unfolding of the social revolution in Iran. But the longer the monarchy stays the deeper becomes the radicalisation and the more resolute the determination of the masses. Every layer of the oppressed masses is beginning to realise that the only way to get rid of the Shah is by a revolutionary overthrow. The constantly growing and radicalising mass movement and the inability of the ruling class to contain it has created a pre-revolutionary situation with insurrectionary tendencies. The army is gradually becoming demoralised. There is increasing fraternisation between the masses and the soldiers. All the various components of the Iranian revolution are beginning to converge.

The international implications of a revolutionary overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy are enormous. This regime has been built up as a vitally important 'sub-imperialism' in order to police the oil-rich region of the Middle East. Its overthrow would drastically alter the relationship of forces in this region to the detriment of imperialism. This would provide an enormous boost to the revolutionary struggles in the whole Middle East. The Iranian revolution is,

through the oppressed nationalities on its borders (Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Baluchis ...), closely linked with the political revolution in the USSR, the Arab revolution, and the revolution in Afghanistan and the Indian subcontinent.

For these reasons, the Stalinist bureaucracy, the rulers of Peking, and all the imperialist powers will do everything in their power to block the revolutionary upsurge in Iran. It is true that US imperialism cannot engage easily in military adventures of the scale we saw in Indochina. But the gravity of the crisis in Iran might compel it to intervene in support of the Shah. The presence of more than 40,000 American 'advisers' could provide the stepping stone for a larger military intervention. It is, therefore, of vital importance that an international movement of solidarity is organised in defence of the Iranian revolution. It is the duty of every revolutionary, especially in the imperialist countries, to help in mobilising mass campaigns against the support of imperialist powers to the Shah. No arms for the Shah!

As for revolutionaries in Iran, the central task is the formation of a mass revolutionary party capable of organising and leading the working class and its allies to overthrow the Shah's regime and to lead the socialist revolution. The most important missing element in the present situation is precisely such a Bolshevik-type proletarian party. Its absence is the one factor which is preventing the rapid transformation of the present pre-revolutionary situation into a revolutionary one.

Without a revolutionary party there is no guarantee that a revolutionary overthrow of the Pahlavi regime can take place. The central aim of all revolutionaries today must be to make the present upsurge of the mass opposition to the Shah result in a revolutionary situation that will make the fall of the dictatorship coincide with the beginning of the Third Iranian Revolution aimed at the overthrow of the capitalist system and the destruction of the bourgeois state. A revolutionary proletarian party formed around a revolutionary programme of action which combines economic, democratic and transitional demands is the means through which the Iranian proletariat can place itself at the head of all the oppressed layers of the population and find the responses adequate to the central problems of the struggle against the Pahlavi regime.

The preparatory work of the Iranian Trotskyists in this field has already created the political basis for building such a party. They have insisted that at the present stage of the mass movement the proletariat must distinguish itself in the field of political slogans not by rejecting democracy but by struggling resolutely, audaciously and energetically for it and championing the democratic aspirations of the masses.

In contrast to the schemes of bourgeois nationalist, the petit-bourgeois radicals and the Stalinists, the Iranian Trotskyists have insisted on the necessity for the overthrow of the monarchy and the convocation of a freely elected and popular constituent assembly. They have also emphasised the importance of linking the call for a constituent assembly and the struggle for the democratization of the entire country with the uprooting of imperialist domination, a radical agrarian programme, the establishment of the right of

all oppressed nationalities to self-determination and the liberation of women.

Other political currents have also called for the overthrow of the monarchy and the convocation of a constituent assembly. The qualitative shift in the revolutionary upsurge has even forced the Stalinists to accept these demands. The Tudeh party has in the past few weeks made a declaration calling for the overthrow of the monarchy, the formation of a 'national coalition government' and the convocation of a national assembly which would change the Iranian constitution to establish a democratic republic.

We also call for a republic, but for us the establishing of a republic is not merely a matter of replacing the Shah with a President. It is a matter of purging the refuse of the past from the whole of society. The proletarian policy calls for the establishment of a republic in which peasants, women and the oppressed nationalities are all emancipated. The proletariat's aim in calling for a constituent assembly is not so that a new constitution can be drawn but rather so that a focus can be provided for the struggles of all the oppressed layers for emancipation. What the proletariat calls for is a revolutionary constituent assembly through which all the oppressed can realise that the only democratic republic is a workers republic.

No bourgeois government, including those that go under the guise of national coalitions will ever be willing or able to accomplish such elementary tasks. It is only a workers and peasants government that can provide a way out of the impasse imposed upon them by the Shah and the imperialists. A government which breaks with the bourgeoisie and bases itself on the independent organizations of the toilers. Only such a government can ensure the convocation of a truly revolutionary and popular constituent assembly.

Alongside these demands we also advance demands of a transitional character: nationalization of all the major industries, banks and insurance companies, workers control of industry and the planned regulation of the economy. The contradictory development of Iranian society under capitalism and the diversity of the problems inherited from the past necessitates the combination of democratic slogans with transitional and purely socialist slogans. By fighting for these demands, which must form a key part of the measures carried out by a workers and peasants government, the Iranian proletariat will prepare the way for a planned economy and the establishment of a socialist society.

The exact **course** of the Iranian revolution cannot be predicted. Many factors will determine it including how long the death agony of the Shah lasts. The further the Pahlavi regime is prolonged the more discredited will become all bourgeois forces who have failed to give any meaningful support to the mass movement. Likewise, every day that the Shah lasts the greater the possibility of further and deeper splits emerging in the Iranian army — which would have to remain the backbone of any bourgeois regime emerging from the crisis. There will be no bourgeois coalition of 'national salvation' without an Iranian army for a spine.

Hopefully, many of the questions concerning the course of the Iranian revolution will have been answered by the Iranian masses themselves by the time this pamphlet is printed! Meanwhile Iranian revolutionaries will champion the demands through which the revolutionary overthrow of the

Shah will be assured: the declaration of a republic, the convocation of a constituent assembly and the formation of a genuine workers and peasants government.

It is through fighting for these demands and uniting in action with all forces supporting these demands that the small forces of revolutionary marxism presently existing in Iran can rapidly create the conditions for the emergence of a truly mass revolutionary party. It is also through the struggle for these demands that the masses themselves will begin to throw up organs of popular power — soviets. On the day these two combine the final victory of the Iranian revolution will be assured!

VICTORY TO THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION!
VICTORY TO THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS OF IRAN!



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- ساختار سرمایه داری ایران
- مسئله ارضی در ایران
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