

Revolution and Counter-revolution in Iran: A Marxist View - The policy of the Fourth International and the Khomeini regime

Saturday 17 February 2018, by [NIBKIN Saber](#) (Date first published: 1984).

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The following document was published by "Socialism vs Enghelab" (Socialism and Revolution) in 1984. It was written in early 1983 by Saber Nikbin, then a member of the International Executive Committee of the USFI (United Secretariat of the Fourth International), as part of the pre-world congress discussions and represented the views of the now disbanded Iranian Socialist Workers Party (HKS).

The HKS was very critical of the USFI as it had de facto supported a grouping that had developed illusions in the Khomeini regime.

A resolution based on the recommendations of this document was passed by the IEC (International Executive Committee) of the USFI immediately following the world congress of that organisation, which called for the expulsion from the USFI of the supporters of the American SWP in Iran who had collaborated with the Khomeini regime, public self criticism by the USFI of its mistaken positions on the Iranian revolution and support for the regroupment project initiated by the Iranian comrades. To this day, the USFI has not yet published that resolution [*The 1983 report to the IC was published [1]. The Iranian organisation adopted the resolution presented here in 1984, after this IC.*].

Part One : The Present Situation

Almost five years after the overthrow of the Shah's regime, the fundamental features of the present reality of the Iranian revolution all indicate a complete reversal of the revolutionary movement which began in the 1976/77 period and resulted in an armed insurrection in February 1979. The results are clear: the loss of all the gains of the exploited and toiling masses, the re-establishment of a vicious dictatorship more barbaric than the Shah's rule, the re-emergence of a brutal capitalist "order", and the reintegration of the Iranian economy within the world imperialist system. For those who in order to justify their refusal to break from Khomeini, still talk about the "gains" of this revolution, let us review these main features of the present situation.

1. The Situation of the Masses

a. Organizational Gains

The Iranian revolution was marked, above all else, by the fact that it represented the beginnings of a period of direct intervention of the masses in their millions in determining the fate of the social order. The extent and depth of this intervention was not comparable to the entire previous historical period in Iran or indeed for that matter to any other revolutions in recent history. In fact, the Iranian revolution would always remain an excellent example of how a mass movement in its development can overthrow the political and military power of a vicious bourgeois dictatorship.

Furthermore, the revolutionary upsurge resulted in numerous forms of self-organization of the masses. The fate of the revolution, in fact, depended on the extension and development of these organs: the workers, peasants and soldiers shoras (councils), neighbourhood committees, etc. Many sections of the population which had been inactive for a long period were brought into the struggles; including the women's movement in defence of equal rights, the movement of the oppressed nationalities for self-determination, the struggles of the unemployed for jobs and social security, the student movement for the independence of the educational system, etc.

The shora movement which despite all its shortcomings was the most significant of all these and resisted the attacks of counter-revolution the longest, is now completely crushed. Its "legal" fate has been left to the future decisions of the Islamic Assembly which has already constitutionally limited its powers to an "Islamic", "consultative" and "collaborative" body with the participation of the bosses and under the direct control of the state. If they are ever revived under such limits, they would obviously not differ greatly from the Shah's corporate "syndicates", i.e., the tools of capitalist repression in the factories. Today, however, no organizations of the working class are permitted to exist, by the laws of the Islamic Republic.

b. Economic & Social Gains

The revolution was in its basic social aims, a revolt against the injustices of the Shah's "White Revolution" and the economic crisis it had brought about by the late 70s. It did bring immediately in its wake many social and economic gains of importance for the vast majority of the masses.

There was an extensive takeover of the largest sector of the private and the state owned large-scale industry by the workers, and the beginnings of an imposition of workers' control of production and distribution, the level of which has not been surpassed in recent revolutions in the underdeveloped capitalist economies. The peasants' seizure of most large estates, the independent village committees' distribution of land, the establishment of peasants' cooperatives, and the cutting off of the "middle men" usurers and profiteers were important features of the revolutionary period.

These developments marked the dynamics of the continuing revolutionary struggles after the overthrow of the Shah's regime. None of these gains have been consolidated. Today it can be clearly stated that no social layer of the exploited and oppressed feels that it has gained anything out of the "revolution". Even the most basic improvements in the standard of living of the masses have either been eroded or pushed back - e.g., the more or less general increase in minimum wages, the shortening of the working week, the improvements in the social securities, housing for the poor, etc. Instead, we now have runaway inflation, massive unemployment, longer working hours, more homeless, and an ever increasing migration from the countryside to the cities. The depth of the economic misery for the vast majority of the masses cannot be compared even to the worst years of the last 3 decades.

c. Democratic Rights

The political pattern of all the revolutionary upsurges in Iran's modern history indicate that the central political demands of the masses have always been around the question of democratic rights.

The February insurrection brought about many democratic rights, the struggles for which have marked the entire history of the last 80 years of political movements.

For the first time, the Iranian masses enjoyed the basic rights to freedom of expression and organization, the right to engage in political activities, to demonstrate and strike, the right to elect officials, etc. All these gains have also been brutally suppressed. They do not even exist at the level of the so-called “new revolutionary” Islamic Constitution. The present degree of the democratic rights actually practised or recognised by the state is only comparable to what existed before the beginnings of the 20th century.

The only “right” recognised by the clerical rulers is that of complete subjugation of everything to the arbitrary rule of the mullahs. The repressive form of the “republican” state is such that now the new ruling bourgeois factions can intervene even in the private lives of citizens. What the masses are allowed to believe, wear, eat or drink are all decided by the state. The central demand of the Iranian revolution for a truly democratic and constituent assembly representing the will of the masses has not been realised.

Instead of the sovereignty of the people we now have an Islamic Council of Guardians appointed by the clergy that can overrule any decisions that it may consider to contradict the Islamic code. Indeed, for almost a century, Iran has not been as undemocratically run as it is today. The fact that the Islamic state is a lot more repressive than an ordinary capitalist dictatorship is also clearly indicated by the way women are treated in Iran. The reactionary religious attacks on the most basic rights of women cannot simply be explained as being caused by the crisis of capitalism. It has a lot more to do with the specific clerical rule and its antiquated ideology.

2. The Reconstruction of the State

a. Democracy & Dictatorship

The actual regime that has replaced the Shah’s dictatorship and that has now taken hold of all reins of power has proved to be more willing and better equipped to unleash the most barbaric inhuman repression against the oppressed and toiling masses.

The historical task of the Iranian revolution in democratising the state has been pushed back by a regime that even in its demagogic “legal” expression openly claims that all power rests with one man who is completely outside all forms of secular control. In Khomeini’s Islamic “Republic” no representative body can make any decisions that contradict his wishes as the chief faghih (top mullah). He can decide on who may become a candidate in an election, overrule the actual results of any elections, change and alter any social or political institution, control and distribute all the social resources as he pleases, etc.

In the place of a monarchist dictatorship, there is now established in Iran a clerical dictatorship which claims to have a far more unlimited absolutist “divine” power. The separation of the mosque from the state which has been the most elementary demand of the movement for democracy for over a century is now pushed even further out of reach than it was before the Constitutional Revolution of 1907-09. Capitalism, which in its period of growth under the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran was forced to remove certain functions of the state from the hands of the Shiite clergy, has now resorted to a theocratic form of rule to defeat the revolution. The Islamic Republic is nothing more than a form of government in which a clerical sect considering itself outside the “earthly” control of the masses has proclaimed itself the supreme ruler of the fate of society.

The ultra-centralised state, which was formed with the help of the imperialist powers after the

Russian Revolution to block the advance of Bolshevism, had to be based on a system of national privileges for the Farsis and the total suppression of the national rights of all other nationalities. The Islamic rulers who claim Iran recognises no sacred borders or nationalities have, however, faithfully followed the Pahlavi path as far as the rights of oppressed nationalities in Iran are concerned. Any victory in the struggles of these nationalities for their national rights is considered a major threat for the centralised state apparatus. The Iranian Kurds who are heroically defending their rights to self-determination are threatened with total physical annihilation. From military occupation of the Kurdish areas, the Tehran regime has now “advanced” to forced eviction of entire communities by the use of systematic bombing of villages and the destruction of crops, which has led to the devastation of entire regions.

b. Repressive Forces

Despite the importance thus placed on the so-called ideological apparatus of the state, the repressive instruments of the state have also grown to frightening proportions.

The destruction of the Shah’s secret police, the army, the military courts, etc., were the most immediate objectives of the revolutionary movement. Even before the actual overthrow of the Shah’s regime, its instruments of repression were weakening and disintegrating under the blows of mass mobilisation. Five years later, however, not only have all these been reconstructed to almost their pre-revolutionary strength, but also, there has appeared in addition, new and even more formidable instruments of repression, which claim legitimacy because of having “grown out of the revolution”.

Besides the rebuilt army and the secret police, there is now a whole network of the so-called “revolutionary institutions” (nahads) incomparable in their brutality to anything that existed before. The Islamic Pasdaran (Guardians) Army, the Imam’s Komitehs (neighbourhood police), the Islamic Anjomans (associations operating in every factory or institution), the Islamic courts, the paramilitary forces of the hezbollah (supporters of the “Party of God”), etc., have together meted out the worst repression seen in recent history anywhere in the world. Any opposition to the “unity of the word” (the word of Khomeini) can result in the execution of the culprit. In the last two years alone, the Islamic regime has executed 50 times more socialists than the Shah’s regime did in its 30 years of rule. The number of political prisoners has increased at least tenfold, mostly held without any charges and without any information about their whereabouts. The moral, psychological and physical destruction of political opponents practised by Khomeini’s regime has scarcely been surpassed by Hitler.

c. The Bureaucracy

The enormous size and power of the state bureaucracy has been a focal point of popular struggles in Iran. During the Shah’s rule, its dimensions grew to unprecedented levels (almost over 1.5 millions). The largest part of the social wealth was in fact unproductively swallowed up by this bureaucracy. Many institutions were created to simply legitimize “official” bribery for the “social base” of the dictatorship. Today, the size of this bureaucracy living off the back of the masses has more than doubled. The integration of the instruments of clerical rule into the reconstructed bourgeois state apparatus has resulted in one of the largest bureaucracies in the backward countries. In addition to the over 1.8 million “normal” state employees, there is now a clientele base of over 1.3 million paid mercenaries of the regime. Furthermore, in addition to the so-called “mass revolutionary base” of the regime (consisting of over 200,000 Pasdarans, 300,000 committee men and all the other more loosely set up associations like the Basij – mobilization corps – or the Islamic anjomans), a large proportion of the Shiite clergy itself with its entire network of mosques and hangers-on is now also either directly paid by the state or indirectly living off the proceeds of nationalised industries.

There is now in Iran an absurd economic situation in which, despite the fact that the oil revenues are back to their high levels (\$23 billions last year), and that much of the more openly corrupt consumption of the military-police apparatus of the Shah have been stopped, the real expenditure on development has dropped to a fifth of the pre-revolutionary period, whilst the various “charitable” foundations of the mullahs divert twice that amount for the wellbeing of the clergy and its henchmen.

3. The Return of the Capitalist Order

a. The New Capitalist Class

What could be considered the specific feature of this revolution as compared to the previous ones in Iran, was its obviously social anti-capitalist character. The largest share of native capital was expropriated after the revolution. Five years later, still over 60 percent of the Iranian large scale industry remains “nationalised”. The suppression of the mass movement and the re-establishment of the bureaucratic state apparatus has, however, rapidly created the necessary conditions for the return of a capitalist “order”, harsher, more corrupt and more backward than before. A new layer of capitalist profiteers has moved in to replace the Shah’s entourage. This layer, with the backing of the clergy (to whom it has political and social-familial links) and through the channels of the state, has rapidly amassed enormous wealth. This new capitalist ruling class, which is extremely backward in its outlook, has come out of the Bazaar merchants and is marked by a penchant for hoarding and speculation. “Quick profits” is the motto of this new “nationalist” bourgeoisie. It has no qualms about the barbaric forms of accumulation it uses in its rush to gain what was denied to it under the Shah.

The scarcity in most basic necessities, the runaway inflation and super-exploitation of workers and poor peasants are the only noticeable characteristics of the “new” Islamic economics. Under the banner of Islam, the worst aspects of backward Iranian capitalism have become inviolable “sacred” laws. The proposed new Labour Codes leave the capitalists a free hand in deciding the duration of the working day, as long as the individual worker has agreed to it according to a “contract”. Given the fact that there are now over 4 millions unemployed, this fact alone means that capitalism can extract as much surplus out of the individual workers as it may see fit. A committee in each factory in which the representative of the bosses and the Ministry of Labour sit beside the “representatives” of the workers (not freely elected by them), can terminate even this so-called “contract” if the bosses demand it. No form of collective bargaining is considered to be Islamic.

The Council of the Guardians of the Islamic Constitution has declared capitalist or landed private property to be sacrosanct and not subject to any limitations. The much publicised but meagre land reform laws which provided for compulsory sale of land by large landlords to the landless peasants has, therefore, been annulled because it was considered to be against Islam. Already, forced evacuation of the peasants from lands they occupied after the revolution has been more or less completed. Where this was not possible, a crop sharing arrangement, reminiscent of the period before the Shah’s land reforms, has been enforced.

The other equally demagogic proposal for the nationalization of foreign trade has turned into a law facilitating the monopoly of not only foreign trade but also the internal trade for a group of pro-regime capitalists. Being granted an import licence and the permission to have foreign exchange is the surest way of becoming a member of the ruling capitalist clique. The benefits from the difference between the “official” rates of exchange and the actual market prices alone can turn a lumpen merchant into a tycoon.

Khomeini’s Islamic regime, whatever grudges it may have against any specific group of capitalists, is

proving daily that it is in the service of private property and class rule, based on exploitation of the majority by a handful of reactionary profiteers. If anything, the concentration of property and the rates of exploitation today, are higher than ever before.

b. Anti-Imperialism

The anti-imperialist rhetoric of the Iranian regime has attracted much attention. The reality shows, however, that today the economic, political and military dependence on imperialism is, if not deeper, no less than before. The Islamic rulers have shown that to remain in power they are prepared to be as servile as may be required and to pay as high a price as may be demanded.

Of all the exploitative and oppressive secret treaties which the Pahlavi regime signed with various imperialist powers, only one which was known to the public and much hated has been actually declared annulled by the new regime. Even in this case, the actual content of the treaty remains to be published. In order not to upset U.S. Imperialism, the Iranian regime did more. It also, at the same time, cancelled another entirely different treaty: the 1921 treaty with the Soviet Union.

The Islamic regime has granted over-generous compensation for all the foreign capitals which it was forced to nationalise, despite the fact that most of the companies involved owed many times their assets to Iranian Banks. It has also completely written off the so-called "loans" that the Shah had been forced to give to U.S. friends. This alone accounts for \$9 billions. It has not seriously pursued its claims on a \$20 billion arms deal with the U.S.A., the money for which was already paid by the Shah. It has capitulated before the exorbitant claims of many U.S. companies, including the Chase Manhattan Bank which owes \$3 billions to Iran. It is also estimated that only because of the U.S. Embassy takeover in Tehran, the "anti-imperialist" Khomeini has paid up to \$9 billions.

The value of Iranian imports from the major imperialist countries is back at its highest levels under the Shah. These now account for over 90 percent of the total, the largest portion of which is spent on raw materials and basic foodstuffs rather than machinery. Joint ventures with imperialism are once again flourishing. Almost without exception, all the consumer goods produced in Iran under licence from international monopolies are being paid for as under the Shah. All that has changed is the names of these goods.

Many foreign capitalists are openly declaring their joy at the opportunities for huge and quick profits available in Iran. The only thing which is keeping the direct involvement of imperialist countries at a low level is the still unstable political situation, especially because of the Iran-Iraq war.

The dependence of Khomeini's regime on imperialism for arms is now a well known fact. Other than the usual American and West European suppliers, Israel, South Africa and South Korea have been added to the list. It is now clear that even during the "hostage crisis", the flow of U.S. arms never stopped.

c. International Alliances

The foreign policy of the Iranian regime is the best indicator of its international alliances. Every concrete measure that it has undertaken internationally, leaving the empty rhetoric aside, has been within the framework of defending the interests of reaction. It has openly offered an anti-communist united front with Turkey and Pakistan. The Iranian regime is already cooperating with these military dictatorships in suppressing Kurdish and Baluchi movements. It has offered lucrative trade deals to induce these two most important allies of U.S. imperialism into a revival of the old treaty between the three countries under the Shah.

The policy of "neither East nor West" has meant in the Middle East a convergence of Iranian policies

with the interests of some imperialist powers, despite its contradictory aspects. Within the non-aligned movement, they are in agreement with the anti-communist bloc.

Nevertheless, some petty-bourgeois nationalist factions within the Iranian regime have developed, alongside of their deep hatred of Communism and the USSR, a call for the non-intervention of the U.S.A. in the region and a rejection of all "Western values" including democracy. This has resulted in a tendency to agitate and campaign against "the Great Satan" (U.S.A.) and its allies in the Middle East, in a way which has influenced some of the activities against the U.S.A., Saudi Arabia and some of the Gulf Sheikdoms, particularly in Lebanon. These have, however, been mostly within the context of creating room for manoeuvre and have also, been directly reactionary and pro-capitalist in their local effects.

The last claim of Khomeini's regime to the anti-imperialist mantle is its "holy war" against the Iraqi regime, which is presented as the tool of U.S. imperialism and a Zionist stooge. This war is, however, serving best the interests of U.S.A. and Israel, both of which are directly or indirectly supplying Iran with arms, ammunition and spare parts. Military presence of U.S. imperialism in the region is directly linked to this war.

Thanks to Khomeini's regime, the U.S.A. has built; four military bases in this region and is openly collaborating in joint military manoeuvres with the reactionary sheikdoms in the Gulf. The war has also been instrumental in strengthening Israel which, after the overthrow of the Shah's regime has become the only strategic ally of U.S. imperialism.

The consolidation of the bourgeois state in Iran and the political strengthening of the Iraqi Baathist regime are both the results of the war. The destruction of human lives and of economic resources has deeply weakened both countries while imperialism is reaping the benefits. Both regimes are, therefore, provided with enough support to continue the war without, however, either side being allowed to gain a decisive superiority.

Four years of war has decisively shifted the balance of forces in the region in the interests of U.S. imperialism. The Iranian regime is at present the main instrument in bringing this about. Khomeini's interests in continuing this war are clear. The militarization of social life, the justification of suppression of all legitimate demands of the masses, the consolidation of the most cynical factions within the regime and, most important of all, a return to the situation of becoming a dependent capitalist regime under the cover of having to get help from any possible source.

The second part of this article deals with the rise of the revolutionary movement in Iran in 1978 and how the counterrevolutionary forces around Khomeini were able to take a complete hold on power. This was due mainly to the failure of the left-wing parties to provide a revolutionary strategy. In 1978-79, the left as an independent tendency within the mass movement did not exist. It simply merged with the Khomeini dominated movement, tail ending the reactionary leadership.

Part Two : The Lessons of the Revolution

The facts of the present situation [Editor's note:1983] in Iran indicate that the revolutionary mass movement has subsided, and is unable to confront the counter-revolution, which has taken complete hold of power, based on a reconstructed and a more formidable repressive bourgeois state. These facts show that the new regime is rapidly creating all the necessary conditions for the reestablishment of an even more corrupt and exploitative order integrated into the world imperialist system.

How has the Iranian revolution resulted in such an outcome?

1. Victory of the Counter-revolution

a. Counter-Revolution in Iran

The newly established counter-revolution has in fact come out of the revolution itself. This is the peculiarity of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The very same forces which claimed the leadership of the February overthrow have now taken total control of a repressive state and are leading the counter-revolutionary drive of the Iranian bourgeoisie and world imperialism. There must be no confusion on this. The imperialist, the ousted bourgeois factions, the internal forces of the old dictatorship, have only been able to intervene and influence the course of events in Iran indirectly and through Khomeini's leadership. He is, and has been throughout this period, the leader of the counter-revolution.

To hold, therefore, that because of the dislike for the Islamic regime by imperialism, revolutionaries must give it support, is to commit a grave mistake. The logic of such a position would inevitably lead to capitulation in the face of the actually existing and presently active counter-revolution. The path of real struggle against imperialism goes through the overthrow of this regime, not simply because this regime is blocking the path of revolution but because it is in fact placed, kept and supported there by the imperialists themselves.

The Islamic Regime is not just some bourgeois nationalist regime which has come to power as a result of a national liberation struggle, albeit (because of its class character) an inconsistent "anti-imperialist" force; it is the actual counter-revolution against a revolution which should have and could have resulted in the first truly workers state in Asia. If anybody can claim that this regime poses a threat to imperialism, they must either also simultaneously prove that imperialists are not the main beneficiary of the counter-revolution or say that the Iranian Regime is not the active representative of this counter-revolution in Iran.

To say also that, because the regime which has "come out of the revolution" has not yet been overthrown by imperialism or the monarchist bourgeoisie, hence the revolution is still continuing, albeit in a distorted form, is to entirely misjudge the fact that the actual establishment of this Regime represented the first and some would say decisive victory for the counter-revolution. This was led by Khomeini's faction, and now that this faction has concentrated all power in its hands, we must say that the counter-revolution has been victorious, the very same force which came out of the leadership of the revolution.

It is also now absolutely clear and well documented that long before the February insurrection, important sections of the army, the secret police and the bureaucracy went behind Khomeini. U.S. imperialism also directly intervened to bring about a negotiated settlement between the chiefs of the armed forces and the bourgeois-clerical leadership, not to mention many of the biggest bourgeois entrepreneurs who gave Khomeini huge sums of money to organise his "leadership".

Given the broadness of the mass movement and its radicalism, the only way that the bourgeois counter-revolution could have succeeded in defeating the revolution was by "joining" it. This could have been possible only by supporting a faction within the opposition to the Shah that could ensure a degree of control over the masses. This was one of the most (if not the most) important factors in placing Khomeini at the head of the mass movement.

The reasons why the Shiite clergy, especially Khomeini's faction, was well suited for this task should be obvious. The clergy has always been an important institution of the state, well trained in

defending class society and private property. After all, the Shiite hierarchy has been the main ideological prop of the state. Khomeini himself had come from a faction which had already proven its loyalty to the ruling class by helping it in the 1953 coup.

It was also the least hated instrument of the state, because it was not a structural part of what it was supporting. Unlike the Catholic Church, it had always kept its distance from the state. Especially because of the post-White Revolution period of capitalist development, the clergy had been relegated to a secondary position. Indeed, because of this, a growing faction within the hierarchy had been forced into a position of opposition to the Shah's regime. This could now be utilised as a passport inside the mass movement.

Given the weakness of the bourgeois political opposition, which was not allowed to operate under the Shah, the clergy, with its nationwide network of mullahs and mosques, provided the strong instrument-cum-party necessary for "organising" and channelling the spontaneous mass movement. It could also provide the type of vague populist ideology needed to blunt the radical demands of the masses and to unite them around a veiled bourgeois programme.

Given the predominance of the urban petty bourgeois and the peasant migrants in the early stages of the mass movement, the call of the clergy for "Islamic Justice", "Islamic economics", "Islamic army", and "Islamic state" could immediately find a willing mass base.

To deny, therefore, even today, that Khomeini's counter-revolutionary drive coincided with its efforts to place itself at the leadership of the revolution, is to go against all the facts now known to millions of Iranians themselves. To deny also that from the beginning it was helped in these efforts by the ruling classes and their imperialist backers is to misunderstand the main course of events in the Iranian revolution.

b. Bourgeois Factions

It is, therefore, a total mystification to characterise the Iranian revolution as a "popular anti-imperialist revolution led by bourgeois nationalist forces". This completely misses out the specific counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie and its political tool within the revolution.

The political and economic crisis of the 1976-78 period, which set the scene for the mass unrest, was made up of different and contradictory factors. Alongside the mass movement of protests against the Shah's dependent capitalist dictatorship, there were also important rifts inside the bourgeoisie as a whole, both within the pro Shah sections and between the pro and anti-Shah sections.

These bourgeoisie oppositions to the Shah's rule were transformed as the revolutionary crisis grew and deepened: There was, firstly, a movement for the reform of the Shah's state from within the top "modernist" bourgeoisie, which favoured the limitation of the Royal Family's absolute powers and was for a certain degree of rationalisation of the capitalist state. The requirements of further capitalist development themselves necessitated these reforms.

This faction had already formed itself within the Shah's single party (rastakhiz - Resurgence) before the revolutionary crisis. It had the support of an important section of the technocrats and bureaucrats inside Iran, and of influential groups within the U.S. establishment. As the crisis deepened, this faction became increasingly vociferous in its opposition to the Shah. It began to use the threat of the mass movement as a leverage in its dealings with the Shah. The ousting of the Hoveida's government and the formation of Amouzegar's cabinet was a concession to this faction.

The development of the mass movement was, however, pushing other bourgeois oppositionists to the forefront.

This faction knew that, in order to ride the crisis, it had to hide behind bourgeois politicians less associated with the Shah's dictatorship. In no other way could it hope to enjoy a certain degree of support inside the mass movement. The reemergence of the corpse called the National Front and the rise of newly created bourgeois liberal groupings, (e.g. the Radical Movement) were linked to this trend.

There was also an opposition to the Shah from within the more traditional sectors of the bourgeoisie (the big bazaar merchants and the small and medium sized capitalists from the more traditional sectors of the industry).

The White Revolution and the type of capitalist growth which followed it had also enriched these layers. Nevertheless, they were more or less pushed out of the main channels of the state-backed capital accumulation (monopolistic positions within the foreign licensed consumer goods production) and hence out of the ruling class.

The structural crisis of the Iranian capitalism in the mid-70's had resulted in the sharpening of the attacks by the Shah's state on these layers which still had control over a section of the internal market. This hold had to be weakened, to allow the monopolies to resolve their crisis of overproduction. The consumer goods oriented and technologically dependent industrialisation meant a strong tendency for bureaucratic control of the internal market through the state.

To these layers, opposition to the Shah's rule was a matter of life and death struggle. They could in no way be satisfied with the type of reforms that were being proposed by the other factions. They demanded a more radical change within the power structures. Whilst the reformist factions vehemently opposed any radical change that could shake up the power of the ruling class as a whole, this faction's interests were in no way harmed by demanding no less than the removal of the Shah's regime.

As the mass movement grew, it became obvious that this faction could decisively outbid the others. Through the traditional channels of the bazaar economy, it could draw on the support of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the enormous mass of the urban poor linked to it. This faction had, in addition, many links with the powerful Shiite hierarchy. Ever since the White Revolution, the traditional bourgeoisie and the Shiite clergy had drawn closer and closer together.

An important lesson drawn by a section of the bourgeoisie after its defeat in 1953 was precisely that, without an Islamic ideology and without the backing of the mullahs, it could never ensure enough mass support to enable it to pose as a realistic alternative both to the Shah and to the left. Bazargan's and Taleghani's Freedom Movement represented this trend. This "party" was now offered an opportunity to save the bourgeoisie in its moment of crisis.

The formation of Sharif Emami's cabinet represented a move by the Shah's regime to also include this faction in whatever concessions it had to give. "The government of national conciliation" as it called itself, could, however, neither satisfy the two bourgeois factions, nor quench the mass movement which by now had gathered a new vitality because of the gradually developing general strike.

Throughout his period, Khomeini was popular because he appeared to be consistently calling for the overthrow of the Shah. But at the same time he was preparing to reach an agreement with the regime. In fact it was precisely in this period that, with the help of powerful forces within the regime itself, Khomeini's "leadership" was being established over the mass movement. By September 1978, a certain degree of control was exercised which could have allowed a compromise at the top. What put a stop to this was the developing general strike.

The stage was thus set for the opening of the pre-revolutionary period of September 78 to February 79, marked by the further isolation of the Shah's regime, demoralisation of the army and the police, the radicalisation of the masses and the complete paralysis of the entire bourgeois society because of the very effective general strike.

c. Bazargan's Government

U.S. imperialism and the pro-Shah bourgeoisie were now forced to go a lot further in giving concessions to the mass movement. The removal of the Shah from the scene and the establishment of the Bakhtiar government was in its time and in itself a very radical concession by the dictatorship. It was hoped that in this way the reformist faction, which was already made to look more acceptable, would be strengthened and thus force the more radical faction into a compromise. It was, however, already too late for such compromises. The mass movement was becoming extremely confident of its own strength and the prevailing mood was that of not agreeing to anything less than the complete ousting of the Shah. Furthermore, any politician who tried to reach a compromise with the Shah, immediately lost all support. In fact, even the National Front was forced to renounce Bakhtiar.

This explains the so-called "intransigence" of Khomeini's stand. By denouncing Bakhtiar (with whom his representatives in Iran were nevertheless holding secret negotiations) and supporting the mass movement, he was strengthening his own hand vis-a-vis both factions of the bourgeois opposition. He was forcing the more popular figures within these factions to accept his "leadership" and preventing them from reaching any compromises without his involvement.

The military circles and the imperialists were also by this time prepared to give up a lot more. There was a growing restlessness within the army. The pro-shah hard liners were preparing for a coup against Bakhtiar. This would have completely finished off the army and with it the last hope of the bourgeoisie in maintaining class rule.

It was becoming obvious that a compromise had to be reached with Khomeini. And that was exactly what took place. Secret negotiations between Beheshti and Bazargan on the one side and the heads of the army and the secret police on the other side were held in Tehran. The arbiter was the U.S. representative General Huyser, whose job was to ensure that the army would keep its side of the bargain. Major sections of the ruling class had been pushed by the course of events, and the encouragement of the Carter administration, to accept sharing power with the opposition. What was hoped was a smooth transition from the top to a Bazargan government.

Bazargan had emerged as the acceptable alternative because he was the only one who could bring about a coalition involving both major bourgeois factions, whilst at the same time being more associated with the by now more powerful Khomeini leadership. Khomeini was also forced to accept such a deal because this provided the best cover for the clergy's own designs for power.

At that time the clergy could not make any open claims on political power. Khomeini, to alleviate the fears of the bourgeoisie, and to keep his own options open within the mass movement, was constantly reassuring everybody that, once the Shah was gone, he would go back to Qom and continue with his "religious duties". Khomeini was thus allowed to return to Iran from exile and his appointed provisional government was preparing to take over from Bakhtiar.

The February insurrection was, however, not part of the deal. Some of the now staunch supporters of the Shah within the chiefs of the armed forces who opposed the U.S. backed compromise, tried to change the course of events by organising a military coup. This resulted in an immediate mass response and insurrection, which was initially opposed by Khomeini. But his forces had to join in later, because otherwise they would have lost all control over the mass movement and with it any

hope of saving the state apparatus.

The only way to divert the insurrection was to “lead” it. The army chiefs and the bureaucracy were prepared to give their allegiance to Khomeini and his Revolutionary Islamic Council, since this alone could save them from the insurrectionary masses. It was thus that the Bazargan’s Provisional Revolutionary Government, as it was called, replaced Bakhtiar’s. The blessings of Khomeini, therefore, ensured the establishment of a new capitalist government over the head of the masses. In this way, it is obvious that what appeared as “the leadership of the Iranian revolution” basically played, from the beginning, the role of an instrument of bourgeois political counter-revolution, imposed from above in order to roll back the gains of the masses and to save as much of the bourgeois state apparatus as was possible under the given balance of social forces. The ruling class was as yet in no position to resort to further repression.

d. The Clergy

Khomeini was, however, not doing all this service to play the second fiddle. He was simply preparing for the take over of all power at a more favourable moment. He represented a faction of the clergy that was bent on establishing a more direct role for the Shiite hierarchy ever since the Mosadegh period. This faction, in cooperation with the then head of the secret police, made a move in the early 60s for power, but failed. History was now providing it with an opportunity that it could not allow to slip away, especially given the fact that the bourgeois class was extremely weakened and hardly in a position to put up any resistance. The latter, with the approval of the imperialist master, had called on the clergy to save it in its moment of trouble by sharing power. What followed next in the post revolutionary period can only be understood if the designs of the clergy for power are taken into account.

In the beginning, the clergy did not have the necessary instruments for exercising power. The Khomeini faction did not even have hegemony inside the Shiite hierarchy. Many clerical heads opposed the participation of the clergy in politics. It could not rely on the existing institutions in the state either, since they were entirely unsuitable to clerical domination. Amongst other reasons, the bureaucracy itself was all opposed to clerical rule anyway. Even the Prime Minister designate, who was the most “Islamic” of all the bourgeois politicians, resisted any attempts by the mullahs to dominate the functions of the state. A period of preparation was thus necessary.

With the direct backing of Khomeini, this faction first organised a political party: The Islamic Republican Party. This was simply presented as one newly formed party among others. Later on, however, this party pounced on all others and it has now replaced the Shah’s single party. Through the networks of pro-Khomeini mullahs, it established an entire organisation of neighbourhood committees and Pasdaran units supposedly to help the government to keep law and order and to resist the monarchist counter-revolution.

Revolutionary Islamic Courts were also set up to punish the Shah’s henchmen. These courts quickly executed a few of the most hated elements of the old regime, but only in order to save the majority from the anger of the masses. The Imam’s committees, the Pasdaran Army and the Islamic Courts, rapidly replaced the Shah’s instruments of repression.

All these moves were initially supported by the bourgeoisie, which realised that it was only through these measures that it could hope to finish off the revolution and begin the “period of reconstruction.” The newly created “revolutionary institutions” were serving well the Bazargan government, constantly reassuring it of their allegiance to it. Later on, however, they became instruments of the clergy in ousting the bourgeois politicians from the reins of power and indirectly dominating the state apparatus.

Khomeini also forced an early referendum on the nature of the regime to replace the Shah: Monarchy or the Islamic Republic? Despite the grumbling of the bourgeois politicians, they had to accept this undemocratic method of determining the fate of the state, because the other alternative was the formation of the promised constituent assembly. The election of such an assembly during that revolutionary period would of course have created many threats to bourgeois rule.

The referendum was thus held and of course the majority voted for the Islamic Republic. The mullahs knew that the masses could not very well vote for the monarchy! It was later claimed that, since 98 percent of the people had voted for an Islamic Republic, hence the constituent assembly must be replaced by an assembly of “experts” (khobregan) based on Islamic law. The small assembly, which was therefore packed with mullahs, had of course a majority who suddenly brought out a constitution giving dictatorial power to Khomeini as the chief of the experts.

The clause of velayat-e faghih (the rule of the chief mullah) was resisted by the bourgeois politicians, but the clergy pushed it through by a demagogic appeal to the anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses and through the controlled mass mobilisations around the U.S. embassy. The masses were told that now that we face “this major threat from the Great Satan” we must all vote for the Islamic Constitution. With an almost 40% vote, this became nevertheless the new constitution.

Hence, Khomeini’s clerical faction co-operated with the various bourgeois groupings in joint efforts by the ruling class to prevent the total destruction of the bourgeois state and in diverting and suppressing the Iranian revolution, whilst at the same time, always strengthening its own hand and trying to subordinate other factions to its own rule. It used its advantageous position within the mass movement to bypass the bourgeois state whenever it suited its own factional interest. But it was also forging a new apparatus of repression that was being gradually integrated into the state as the competition with other factions was being resolved in its favour.

2. The Defeat of the Mass Movement

a. The Revolutionary Movement

Despite Khomeini’s Islamic counter-revolution, the mass revolutionary movement developed and broadened after the overthrow of the Shah’s regime. The fact that Khomeini had his own designs and was already serving the bourgeoisie, did not, of course, deter the masses from pushing forward with their own demands. In fact another myth of the Iranian revolution is that Khomeini held complete sway over the masses.

The fact that Khomeini has never consented to any free elections, even immediately after the insurrection which was the period of his high popularity, shows that he himself did not believe this myth. He did certainly have a mass base and its hard core was the best organised and the more active section of the masses. But, it in no way did this section of the masses reflect the mass movement as a whole.

The vast majority of the revolutionary masses knew why they were against the Shah and what could satisfy their needs. The experience of the revolution itself had also taught them about their own strength and the necessity for getting themselves organised. Even when they were submitting to Khomeini’s leadership, which even before the insurrection was imposed by the use of force, they had also their own projects.

It is extremely simplistic to portray the mass movement as having a homogeneously confused consciousness with total illusions in Khomeini. Despite Khomeini, the workers organised shoras (councils), threw out the capitalists and their managers, including those appointed

by Imam's government. The peasants occupied the land, despite a call to wait for the Revolutionary Council's permission. The national minorities began to organise themselves, despite the open repression of the new regime. Women demonstrated for equal rights in direct opposition to Khomeini himself. Students took over the running of all the educational establishments, despite the appeals by the "leaders" to return to their studies. The masses did not give up their arms, despite the call by Khomeini himself. The soldiers resisted attempts by the new regime to dissolve their shoras and themselves began to purge the army of the old officers.

Only a few weeks after the insurrection, mass demonstrations in opposition to the Khomeini's appointed government were being organised in many cities. The first leftist May-Day demonstration in Tehran drew over 300,000. Within the first few months, the Fedayeen and the Mojahedeen were seen by the masses to constitute forces to the left of the Khomeini's leadership and because of that closer to their aspirations. These groups rapidly developed a mass base, if not more numerous in some important sections of the masses, at least comparable to that of Khomeini's within the working class. Even the bourgeois liberal groupings had a considerable base in the beginning.

Thus, there certainly was mass support for the left. Whilst for the regime, despite all its machinations, there never really was a majority. Other than the first presidential elections, every other election organised by the Islamic regime has been boycotted by more than 60% of the electorate.

By the summer of 1979, Khomeini had lost all support amongst the oppressed nationalities (i.e. the majority of the population), and in the populated Northern provinces. In all major industrial centres, e.g., Tehran and Ahwaz, Khomeini's support was minimal. Among the students, the new regime could barely count on the support of 10 to 15 percent. Within the lower ranks of the army, a similar situation existed.

Six months before the ousting of President Bani Sadr, over 2 million people demonstrated in Tehran in defiance of the Khomeinist forces, whilst Beheshti could only draw less than 150,000 in a rival assembly. In the first round of the Majlis elections, at the height of Khomeini's anti-imperialist demagoguery, and despite the rigged machinery which controlled the polling stations, the left on its own gathered over 1.5 million votes. (Add to this another 2 millions if you include Mojahedeen.) The masses did have illusions in Khomeini, but not for long, and in no period was this true of the majority of the struggling layers; even the regime itself has been forced to admit that it is not relying on majority support amongst the workers, poor peasants, national minorities, women, soldiers, students, etc!

b. The Schism of the Mass Movement

The weakness of the revolutionary mass movement was based on another factor, the fact that it was immediately split by the imposition of the Khomeini leadership. There was after all, alongside the popular revolutionary upsurge, an Islamic counter-revolution led by Khomeini. The latter, which was well organised and had the backing of the state apparatus, was mobilised not only against the forces of the old regime but also against the revolution. Especially in the decisive early stages, when the boundary between the two was unclear, the revolutionary masses could not put up the necessary resistance against what appeared to many of them as apart of themselves. The fact that the majority of the groups on the left also fell for this, of course, did not help.

When Khomeini's faction was imposing its own slogans on the mass demonstrations against the Shah, the left did not protest. When Khomeini appointed his Provisional Revolutionary Government, the Fedayeen, Mojahedeen, Tudeh Party and many other groups gave it support. When the newly set up Islamic Courts were issuing sentences of execution in secret trials against the members of the old

regime, the left was hailing this. When the regime began to attack the rights of women under the banner of “down with the Westernised prostitutes (sic)”, the left at best ignored it as being a “women’s” problem and having a secondary importance. When the freedom of the press was under attack, because it at first affected only the bourgeois press, the left did not resist. But soon afterwards, the left press was also shut down.

When the working class came under attack by the new regime, it was under the banner of “the Islamic shoras”. Many militant workers who had themselves radicalised under the influence of the earlier mobilizations dominated by Khomeini’s leadership, could not by their own experience realise what exactly was happening. They did not resist these attacks because they involved a section of the working class itself. The memory of the earlier “united” mass movement still haunted everybody. When bands of thugs organised by the Islamic Republican Party began to openly attack any independent meetings or demonstration, the usual tactic of “resistance” was to call on them: “unity, unity, the secret of victory!”. They were after all the very same people who had participated in the fight against the Shah.

Later on, when the counter-revolutionary designs of Khomeini’s forces had become clear to everyone, it was, however, too late. Khomeini had by this time lost most of his mass base, but what was left was a lot more efficiently organised and well tempered into a strong instrument of repression. Furthermore, Khomeini’s faction was never a passive observer of the erosion of its base. It used all the forces of the state under its command (the completely controlled mass media, the institution of Friday Prayers, made-to-order demonstrations, etc.) to demagogically whip up support around vague anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist rhetorics. The occupation of the U.S. embassy in Tehran was probably the best example of this method.

Having been defeated in Kurdistan and having become extremely unpopular after the first eight months of attacking the Iranian revolution, the U.S. embassy takeover provided a good cover. Khomeini’s faction blamed everything on Bazargan’s pro-U.S.A. policies, took over the state and diverted the masses’ attention from their actual struggles to a mullah show in front of the U.S. embassy. When the workers fighting for their independent shoras were forced by other workers to abandon their struggle in the factory and go to the “den of spies” to hear the latest exposes about the “liberals” and the speeches of pro Khomeini mullahs, it was not easy to resist.

Gradually the masses were, section by section, in successive waves of attacks, beaten into submission to the rule of the Imam. Whilst the revolutionary masses did not have any leadership and were not united, the forces of the Khomeinist counter-revolution were directed from a well placed and well-organised centre, which could command all the instruments of repression and stupefaction. The outcome of this struggle was clear, especially when it is considered that many political organisations claiming to represent the interests of the masses were in fact the mouthpieces of the counter-revolution.

c. Khomeini’s Base

The composition of the mass base of Khomeini itself was also a major factor in contributing to the confusion of the masses and their defeat. Khomeini’s instruments of repression fed from the social forces that were the most downtrodden and least privileged sections of the population. “Khomeini’s soldiers” were recruited from the huge layers of the urban poor (the unemployed peasant migrants) and the pauperised petty bourgeoisie. Thanks to the Shah’s White Revolution many peasants were forced to come to the urban centres looking for jobs, whilst the limited industrialisation could only absorb a small proportion of them. The consumer-goods-oriented industrialization was also gradually eroding the petty bourgeois share of the internal market and forcing these layers into increasing reliance on family labour. The average size of the urban petty bourgeois family had increased to 7.6

members in the 70's.

These two layers represented an enormous reservoir for the instruments of repression. The urban poor alone represented around 20 percent of the population of most major cities. In Tehran, for example, they numbered over 700,000 in 1976. The Iranian petty bourgeoisie represents by far the largest single social layer. These layers were extremely atomised under the Shah's rule and were left without any independent social outlook. Their vague ideas of social justice could easily be diverted by Shiite demagoguery. To them, even the poorest sections of the industrial proletariat appeared privileged. The phrase coined by the Shah's bureaucrats to designate the shanty towns inhabited by the urban poor – "out of bounds" – described also their social status. As far as the Shah's dictatorship was concerned, over 5 million were out of the boundaries of "civil" society.

For many individuals within these layers, to become even a member of a vicious hezbollahi gang was an enormous social progress. To become an armed Pasdar was to become "the king of the neighbourhood". To be actually recruited into the various instruments of repression meant to be able to go and beat the "hell out" of "those privileged heathens"; and to get duly paid for it too. The Islamic regime has obviously not bettered the situation of the majority of these elements. Nevertheless, even "promoting" a few individuals in each neighbourhood was enough to make the rest hopeful. These layers were for a long period actively and fanatically falling behind Khomeini's demagoguery en masse.

The only way they could have been won to the side of the revolution was by being shown a better way to achieve their demands. This necessitated independent organizations and a fight against the capitalist state. This could not have come out of these layers by themselves. An example had to be offered for them. And the only class capable of this was the working class, led by the revolutionary proletarian party.

If the working class could have taken the lead inside the mass movement in confronting the state and gaining improvements in their conditions, the way would have been shown to these layers. There was no objective social reason why they should have become a tool of Khomeini. Especially if the working class had taken up their demands for jobs and housing.

The working class demonstrated its objective strength and its potential for leading the entire mass of the workers and oppressed during four months of general strike which was what really broke the back of the Shah's dictatorship. It did not however, develop its own nationwide independent organization or the political leadership to enable it to pull behind itself the underprivileged layers. It was instead pulled down by these sectors.

3. The Failure of the Left

a. The Absence of a Revolutionary Party

The basic cause of the failure of the Iranian revolution was, however, the absence of a revolutionary proletarian organisation with a revolutionary strategy and programme rooted in the vanguard layers. There was not even one revolutionary organization of any significance which had a programme reflecting, albeit in a distorted way, the objective necessities of the Iranian revolution or providing a consistent and clear perspective for the revolutionary masses.

The basic lesson of the Iranian revolution is indeed the fact that, unless such an organization already exists before the revolutionary upheaval, it would be extremely unlikely that it can come about in the course of the revolution itself. Given the rapidity with which the revolutionary crisis changes and transforms, given the complexity of social class formations and alliances in the more developed of

the backward countries and given the relative strength of the bourgeois formations, it is extremely difficult for a revolutionary force of any considerable size to grow out of the revolution itself, unless it has already established roots and traditions within the masses.

There were small nuclei of revolutionaries who fought for a revolutionary programme and who even grew rapidly in influence and strength within the first few months of the revolution. But this was hopelessly insufficient to affect the course of events. In each wave of repression or in sudden turns of the political situation, every revolutionary group lost most of what it had accumulated in the previous period. The first open attacks of the new regime led to opportunist capitulationist deviations. Within the first year, there were splits in almost all the revolutionary groups.

In countries like Iran, where the revolutionary periods are usually sandwiched in between long periods of severe repression in which mass organizations cannot develop, the importance of a revolutionary organization capable of offering a political and organisational lead to the masses becomes more acute. Any organization that does not already have a base inside the mass movement before the revolution cannot develop its forces rapidly enough to enable it to assist the masses to organise themselves.

The semi-Stalinist Fedayeen organization and the neo-radical bourgeois Mojahedeen who had fought the Shah's regime, rapidly grew into mass organizations of enormous dimensions. Neither, however, had a revolutionary leadership based on a revolutionary strategy. Neither was capable of understanding the actual dynamics of the Iranian revolution. Both ended up by betraying the revolution. The former fell victim to a class collaborationist counter-revolutionary strategy of the pro-Moscow Tudeh party, the other returned to its origins and became part and parcel of the bourgeois liberal opposition.

The experience of the Iranian revolution proved once again that, in our epoch, unless the revolutionary leadership fights consistently for a clear strategy of working class power, it will inevitably end up in the camp of reaction. Class collaboration was the death knell of the Iranian revolution. Without an anti-capitalist proletarian strategy, compromises with the bourgeois counterrevolution were inevitable.

The only way the mass of oppressed and toilers could have been won over to the side of the proletarian revolution was by the proletariat itself showing in action that it alone could defeat the bourgeoisie. The Iranian left was, however, trying to win the mass base of Khomeini by dampening a clear-cut class struggle and offering the compromise of a democratic republic with the bourgeois and petty bourgeois layers.

No other group epitomises this better than the Tudeh Party. This group, which is the oldest and with the longest-standing traditions, had divided the Iranian revolution into three stages: the anti Shah people's front, the democratic anti-imperialist front and the non-capitalist "path of development" which was to lead peacefully to socialism.

The Tudeh Party, which was even prepared to include in its fronts anti-Shah monarchists, found the actual alignment of class forces in the revolution beyond its wildest dreams. It immediately capitulated to the counterrevolutionary coalition of the bourgeoisie and the clergy.

When the rift between the two developed, it hailed Khomeini's faction as the truly revolutionary anti-imperialist force, giving it unconditional support. It dismissed the protests of the masses against the undemocratic practices of the Islamic regime by labelling it "a bourgeois liberal craving for democracy". The bourgeois counter-revolution was establishing itself by suppressing the democratic rights of the masses, but the Tudeh Party was hailing the temporary imprisonment of a few U. S.

Embassy personnel as the greatest forward step of the revolution.

Without the active support of the Tudeh Party, which had many professionals in its ranks, it would have been a lot more difficult for the clergy to crush the mass movement. The Tudeh Party provided the clergy with many managers and foremen for the nationalised industries, propagandists within the state-controlled newspapers, T.V. and radio and even political interrogators in Khomeini's jails. The present fate of the Tudeh Party itself is the best proof of what such a policy can lead to.

b. Capitulation to Khomeini

Not having a revolutionary strategy, the left failed to understand the driving forces of the Iranian revolution and the character of the contending forces inside it. In every phase of the rapidly changing revolution, it made fundamental mistakes. In the decisive early period, these mistakes ensured an easy victory for the counterrevolution.

In the period leading up to the February insurrection, the left as an independent tendency within the mass movement did not exist. It simply merged with the Khomeini dominated movement, tail ending the reactionary leadership.

The only left group in Iran (and we are not exaggerating!) that criticised the appointed government by Khomeini was the HKS. Otherwise, no left tendency was distinguishable from the Khomeini leadership.

The left should have called on the masses to resist any attempt at appointing a government from above. It could not have won, but this would have placed it in a better position at a later period.

Immediately after the insurrection, the left heeded the calls of the joint army-clergy military revolutionary command (which was later proved to have been headed by a CIA agent). Many of the members of the old regime arrested by the masses were handed over to the clergy. The "Revolutionary Islamic Courts" were hailed by the left. The first declarations of the majority of groups on the left hailed Imam Khomeini for leading the revolution to victory.

A few months later, it was absolutely clear where the main danger against the revolution lay. The bourgeois government was rapidly pushing back the gains of the masses. The only proper course of action was to organise for the defence and extension of democratic rights and against all attempts by the new regime to curb them. The central slogan for that period was the call for the immediate convocation of a Constituent Assembly.

Most groups ignored all this. These were considered "subordinate" demands, whilst the so called "class demands" were reduced to purely economic reforms. The counter-revolution, however, succeeded in blocking the anti-capitalist dynamics of the Iranian revolution by limiting precisely the democratic rights of the masses.

The left were also less interested in helping to organise the independent organs of the self activity of the masses than they were in their own badly put-together groups. No real efforts were made to extend the independent organization of the masses or to fight to democratise them and prevent the clergy's zealots inside them from imposing the will of the counter-revolution.

The Stalinist traditions of the Iranian left and its bureaucratic approach to the mass movement strengthened substitutionist tendencies whereby each group was trying to form its own "mass organizations" kept "pure" and "independent" from any admixtures.

In this way, instead of patient and consistent intervention in the actually existing Shora movement

and instead of struggling for their nationwide unity as a basis for the more general fight for a workers' and peasants' government, all the major groups were at best trying to form their own "real" shoras.

This proved fatal for the course of the revolution. In the favourable early periods of the revolution, the Shora movement was left at the mercy of the Khomeinist forces. By the time the counterrevolutionary nature of the new regime had become an obvious actuality, the forces of reaction had already built a nationwide network of emasculated shoras which were utilised to crush the resistance of the working class.

The stagist concept of the Iranian revolution accepted by the vast majority of the left, meant that it always looked for alliances with the bourgeoisie rather than concentrating its efforts on building the independent force of the Iranian proletariat. The left in effect was tail-ending bourgeois politics throughout the revolution.

It went behind Khomeini in fighting the Shah and behind bourgeois opposition to the Shah in fighting Khomeini. It never offered a clear independent programme. Hence every demagogic manoeuvre by the counter-revolution caught the left off-guard. The U.S. embassy takeover, for example, completely outmanoeuvred the left, not to mention the hysterical chauvinism which drowned the left in the early stages of the Iran-Iraq war.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, as far as the fight for democracy was concerned, bourgeois liberal opposition or even the monarchists appeared to be more radical than the Stalinist left, whilst in anti-capitalist demands, Khomeini's counter-revolution went a lot further than the left, which stuck to its minimum programme geared to the democratic stage.

Part three : Tasks and Perspectives

1. For the Overthrow of the Regime

a. Demands of the Masses

The consolidation of Khomeini's clerical rule has corresponded with the defeat of the revolutionary mass movement. Without the overthrow of this regime, there is absolutely no possibility for any further developments of the Iranian revolution. Khomeini's leadership, in the course of establishing the power of the counter-revolution and reconstructing the bourgeois state, has completely isolated itself. What remains of the Islamic "revolution" today is simply a vicious, repressive dictatorship hated by the vast majority of the Iranian workers and peasants. The central political demands for the majority of them is the overthrow of Khomeini's regime.

The balance of forces at present is, however, extremely unfavourable for actually posing such a perspective on the immediate agenda. It is clear that a period of political and organizational preparatory work is necessary. Such preparation must be concentrated around the main unrealised demands of the Iranian revolution which, despite the present defeat, remains fresh in the memory of the masses.

The demand for a democratically elected constituent assembly, reflecting the will of the masses and basing itself on their self-organization is still a central demand capable of uniting the vast majority of the oppressed and toiling masses in revolutionary action. This must be linked to the fight for the revival of the Shora movement, which reflects the most immediate experience of the masses. All gains of the revolution were achieved in the course of that movement and were lost with its defeat.

The fight against Khomeini's reactionary war drive and the demand for an immediate end to the war with Iraq is a key issue in the present political period, reflecting the interests of the vast majority of the workers and peasants.

These demands should also be linked to a series of democratic, economic and social measures, which would indicate what tasks should be on the agenda of the future constituent assembly. These must include the demand for the right of national minorities to self-determination (and national constituent assemblies), full and equal rights for women, workers' and peasants' control of production and distribution and a workers' and peasants' plan for dealing with the present crisis of capitalism.

These demands and the fight for such a programme, can provide the means for bringing together in a common movement all the sections of the masses in the necessary fight to overthrow Khomeini's regime.

b. Bourgeois Stability

The Khomeini regime, by suppressing the revolution and reestablishing the rule of the repressive bourgeois state, has created the necessary conditions for the return to a "normal" bourgeois rule. The Islamic counter-revolution is now being rapidly transformed into an openly capitalist drive for stabilisation. This has, however, created a situation in which the clerical rule of the Khomeini faction is becoming increasingly unacceptable to the bourgeoisie. Khomeini's leadership has carried out its historic service to the bourgeoisie and its imperialist masters. It is therefore now being asked to step aside and clear the path for a return to direct bourgeois rule.

The enormous economic crisis, the destruction caused by the war, the massive unemployment, the collapse of the Iranian industry and agriculture, linked with the extreme unpopularity of the present regime, is increasingly preparing the political atmosphere not only for a change to a normal bourgeois republic but even for a return of the monarchy. Khomeini's rule is popularising the Iranian monarchy day by day.

This transformation is, however, going on in a contradictory and crisis-ridden way. The rule of the clergy is basically incompatible with the normal functioning of the bourgeois state. The bourgeoisie accepted this rule only as a transitional and temporary measure, whilst Khomeini's faction of the clergy is not prepared to give up the power it has gained so easily. The chronic instability of the Islamic regime must be viewed within such a context.

The resistance by the clergy against bourgeois monarchist or republican opposition from within and without, should not be viewed as in any way reflecting the pressures of the Iranian revolution. It is simply a result of the clergy's attempt to cling to power as long as possible. Khomeini's regime should not be viewed as a normal bourgeois regime which clearly understands the needs of the class which it represents. It is at best an extremely backward tool for the bourgeoisie which the latter must now get rid of, if necessary by force. Revolutionaries must not by any means slacken their determination to fight for the overthrow of this regime because of the fact that bourgeois forces oppose it too. In fact, every day that the barbaric Islamic regime remains in power, the more popular will become the normal rule of the bourgeoisie.

The stability of a normal bourgeois rule that may follow Khomeini will have a direct relation to the struggle of the masses today in overthrowing the Islamic republic. Unless the masses organise themselves to carry out this task today, the bourgeoisie will eventually establish an even more stable rule on the ashes of the Iranian revolution.

2. *Rebuild the Workers' Organizations*

a. Workers' Movement

Basing themselves on the fighting and organizational traditions of the Iranian working class, revolutionaries must concentrate their efforts on stimulating all the factors that can contribute to the reorganisation of the workers' movement.

The experience of the Iranian revolution and the role of the general strike in the revolutionary upsurge of the masses has already proven beyond doubt the central social and economic position of the Iranian proletariat. It was shown that the growth of capitalism in the last few decades has decisively placed the Iranian working class at the head of all revolutionary changes in Iran. What can bring about a favorable balance of forces against the Islamic regime today is the organization of the working class.

If they were to throw their organised weight behind the struggles of the vast majority of the population against Khomeini, there would be no reason why the revolutionary situation could not be revived. In any case, this is the only way to put an end to the dreams of the bourgeoisie for a return to "the good old days".

It must not be forgotten that the defeat of the Left would lead to renewed attacks against the working class. This must create opportunities in the not too distant future for a revival of workers' organizations.

b. Workers' Vanguard

Despite the repression, the possibility does exist for the working class to organise and unite its efforts to resist the capitalist offensive. The revolution, the long period of workers control, and the Shora movement have instilled in the Iranian working class a revolutionary experience which must be utilised in organising the present fight. This experience, gained through active revolutionary struggles, has thrown up an entire layer of militant workers, which although it has been beheaded by the Islamic counter-revolution, has not been totally destroyed. It is to this layer that the main task of reorganization must fall today.

Indeed, based on its own experiences, there already exists such a movement inside the working class. In many major industries, efforts are underway to form independent, militant, underground workers' action committees to prepare for the intervention in the daily struggles. In many factories, clandestine workers' circles or committees already exist and are active. The many strikes which have been organised in the last two years of the worst phase of repression indicate the potential which still exists inside the working class. Revolutionaries must base themselves on this current and try to help build, extend and unite the movement for factory committees. This must be carried out in the course of struggles for the immediate demands, as well as in the fight against the imposition of many new capitalist laws which are trying to deny all working class rights in the face of a capitalist offensive to push up the rates of exploitation.

A propaganda campaign on the basic tasks of the Iranian revolution and on the way the working class can prepare for a general strike to bring about revolutionary changes would pave the way for future resumption of mass action on a broader scale and would give the necessary political direction to the activities of the present factory committees.

c. The Oppressed

The major ally of the proletariat, i.e., the poor peasants (including those migrating to towns) are also

beginning to realise that the way to defend the gains of the revolution is to fight against the attacks of the new regime. Revolutionaries must take notice of the new mood amongst these layers for rebuilding and reviving their own independent organizations (e.g., peasant shoras and neighbourhood committees). The rising wave of struggles against the return of the large zamindars is providing the new basis for the reorganization of the poor peasants. Similarly, the aggravation of the housing question is providing the impulse for the urban poor to reorganise themselves into neighbourhood committees.

Rebuilding the organizations of all the oppressed (the poor peasants, soldiers, women, youth) must go hand in hand with attempts to link them all up with factory committees. The producers' and consumers' co-operatives which developed out of the revolution (and which have now become instruments of state rationing systems) have already provided the masses with a rich experience in how to extend and develop links with other social layers. The struggle against the emasculation of the co-operatives by the central government can provide the basis for uniting all the oppressed in a common fight against Khomeini's regime.

3. Building the Revolutionary Party

a. The Left

The defeat of the Iranian revolution is reflected particularly in the way in which the entire force of the left has been decimated. Almost the entire leadership of all the revolutionary organizations has either been physically destroyed or forced into exile. The vast majority of the leading cadres of the opportunist and class collaborationist groups have publicly denounced Marxism and declared their submission to "Imam's line". The mistakes, vacillations and open betrayals by these groups have created a condition of deep demoralisation inside the working class vanguard and a sense of suspicion towards the left in general. A long period of patient work is needed to rebuild the influence of the left among the workers and toilers of Iran. On the other hand, however, these defeats have also shown the complete bankruptcy of Stalinism and petty-bourgeois populism, which have been for a long time the historical scourge of the Iranian left. What has been defeated is opportunism and class collaboration.

Revolutionary socialism has not been in any way vilified in the eyes of the vanguard by the experience of the Iranian revolution. It is now proven to many militants of all groups that only on the basis of a revolutionary socialist strategy can there be any real hope of rebuilding a truly revolutionary leadership. The ideological and political conditions are therefore ripe for building the solid foundations of the nucleus of a new revolutionary party. Inside many organizations on the left, revolutionary socialist currents critical of the opportunist tradition are taking shape. Denunciations of Stalinism and the stagist theory of revolution are now a common feature of many developing trends. The revolution itself has ended the debate and the doubts on the centrality of the role of the Iranian working class. Within the present situation, those elements provide a basis from which to begin the fight for building a revolutionary party.

b. Regroupment

It is, therefore, clear that this fight must have as its main task the regroupment of all revolutionary currents that are developing today. A regroupment drive would also facilitate and speed up the formation of similar currents in other organizations. A non-sectarian and patient approach to the process of regroupment of the revolutionary left in Iran, involving an open and democratic discussion of all the major issues of the Iranian revolution, the balance sheet of the left and the lessons to be drawn, is vitally needed today.

The process must also be linked to a resolute struggle against opportunism and class collaboration and a consistent defence of revolutionary socialist principles on the basis of which a truly revolutionary strategy can be built. All forces claiming to be revolutionaries must show this in action, by cleansing their own house first. It is only in this way that the revolutionary left can regain its influence inside the vanguard and rebuild its links with the mass movement.

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] The report presented by Duret on the Iranian Revolution four Years After was published just after the IEC meeting by *Inprecor* in French and *International Viewpoint* in English (*IVP*, March/April 1983 issue).