

The Iranian Revolution

Past, Present and Future

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Chapter 1

The Historical Background

Iran is one of the world's oldest countries. Its history dates back almost 5000 years. It is situated at a strategic juncture in the Middle East region of South West Asia. Evidence of man's presence as far back as the Lower Palaeolithic period on the Iranian plateau has been found in the Kerman Shah Valley. And time and again in the course of this long history, Iran has found itself invaded and occupied by foreign powers. Some reference to Iranian history is therefore indispensable for a proper understanding of its subsequent development.

The first major civilisation in what is now Iran was that of the Elamites, who might have settled in South Western Iran as early as 3000 B.C. In 1500 B.C. Aryan tribes began migrating to Iran from the Volga River north of the Caspian Sea and from Central Asia. Eventually two major tribes of Aryans, the Persian and Medes, settled in Iran. One group settled in the North West and founded the kingdom of Media. The other group lived in South Iran in an area that the Greeks later called Persis—from which the name Persia is derived. However, both the Medes and Persians called their new homeland Iran, meaning "the land of Aryans".

By 600 B.C. the Medes had become rulers of Persia. About 550 B.C. the Persians led by Cyrus overthrew the kingdom of the Medes and formed their own dynasty (the Achaemenid Empire). By 539 B.C., still in the Cyrus period, Babylonia, Palestine, Syria and all of Asia Minor as far as Egypt was included in to the Achaemenid Empire. In the period of the Darius road, shipping lines were introduced, along with gold and silver coinage. The royal roads from Sardis to Susa and the postal system functioned with marvellous efficiency. At its peak in 500 B.C. this vast empire stretched westwards to the land that is now called Libya, eastwards to what is now Pakistan, from the Gulf of Oman in the South to the Aral Sea in the North. The Indus Valley was also part of the Achaemenid Empire. Achaemenid art influenced India, and even later the Maurya dynasty of India and its ruler Asoka owed much to Achaemenid influence. Likewise in Asia Minor and in Armenia Iranian influences were strong long after the fall of the Achaemenids. There was such an influx of Iranian words into Armenia that for a long time researchers thought that Armenian was an Iranian language rather than a separate branch of the Indo-European family.

In about 513 B.C. the Persians invaded what is now Southern Russia and South East Europe and came close to conquering these areas also. Darius once again sent his Great Army to Greece in 490 B.C., but it was defeated by the Athenian forces at Marathon. Again his son Xerxes invaded Greece in 480 B.C. The Persians defeated a force of Spartans after a fierce battle at Thermopylae. But they suffered a crushing defeat at Salamis and were driven out of Europe in 479 B.C.[2] [3] After suffering defeat in Greece the Achaemenid Empire was weakened and fell into decline. In 331 B.C. Alexander of Macedonia conquered the empire, defeating a huge Persian army at the

battle of Arbela. This ended the Achaemenid Empire and Persia become part of Alexander's empire.

The conquest of the entire Achaemenid Empire by Alexander was regarded as a great tragedy by the Iranians, a fact which is reflected in the national epic *Shah Nameh*, which was written down by the poet Firdausi about the beginning of the 11th century A.D. More than ten years after Alexander's death in 323 B.C., one of his generals called Seleucus established a dynasty that ruled Persia from 155 B.C. After that the Parthians won control of Persia. Their rule lasted until 224 A.D. The Parthians built a large empire across Eastern Asia Minor and South West Asia. During the last 200 years of their rule, the Parthians had to fight the Romans in the west and the Kushans in what is now Afghanistan.

About 224 A.D. a Persian named Ardashir overthrew the Parthians and seized the empire. After more than 550 years under foreign rulers Persians again ruled Persia, and this Sassanid dynasty lasted for more than 400 years. During those years Iranian art flourished, roads, irrigation and city-building all improved, but the war between the Persians and the Romans continued throughout much of the Sassanid regime. The Sassanid civilisation reached its high point in the mid-6th century A.D. Persia won several victories over the Roman, and re-conquered land which had been part of the Achaemenid Empire. Persian troops actually advanced to the walls of Constantinople, at that time the capital of Byzantine (East Roman Empire). But they were defeated there and forced to withdraw from all the land they had conquered.

The Sassanid Empire was much more centralised than the preceding one. Zoroastrianism becomes the state religion. But during the regime of Shapur I a new religious leader and movement made their appearance when Mavi proclaimed himself to be the last and greatest apostle of Jesus. In the end he was executed. His religion was later called Manichaeism. Under the Sassanid dynasty the exploitation and extreme oppression of the people reached its peak. Slavery had reached its limits and entered into crisis. Massive migration of the poor peasants had taken place in the towns as a result of the intolerable tyranny of the feudal nobility. But in the towns they were still treated like slaves. The accumulated oppression suddenly exploded in the form of a revolutionary movement led by Mazdak.

Mazdak was a great revolutionary of that time and his movement, like that of the early Christians, which developed under similar conditions, had a communistic content. His teaching demanded the equal distribution of wealth, forbade more than one wife, and advocated the elimination of the nobility and feudalism. Mazdak's revolutionary ideas took firm root among the slaves and the poor peasants. His movement lasted for 30 years from 494 A.D. to 524 A.D. In the reign of King Noshervan Mazdak's movement was brutally suppressed and thirty thousand of his followers were put to death, but ultimately Noshervan was compelled to carry out social and agrarian reforms. Mazdak's revolutionary movement is one of the most inspiring class struggles in the history of Iran. This tradition has left deep marks on the long course of Iranian revolutionary movements.

In the mid-7th century A.D. an event took place which transformed the destiny of Iran. Arabian armies conquered the country and most Iranians were converted to Islam. The reason for the rapid success of the new religion is not difficult to see. Despite all its

glittering achievements, the Sassanid Empire was characterised by extreme oppression of the downtrodden masses. Nevertheless, for the Iranian world the advent of Islam meant not liberation but defeat and conquest by an alien people. It changed the whole course of Persian history. By introducing Islam, the Arabs superseded the ancient Persian faith Zoroastrianism, and from then to this day Persians have been Muslims. But their brand of Islam was from the beginning somewhat different to that of other Muslims. They filled it with a specific Iranian colouring when the Persians adopted the heterodox Shia form of Islam and used it as a weapon against the Arab overlords.

For several centuries the language of the conquerors, Arabic, replaced the Pahlavi tongue (middle Persian) the language used by Persians during the Sassanid period (the period of the Second Persian Empire). The imposition of an alien language impeded the creative development of Persian literature and poetry. And it was precisely here that the national spirit reasserted itself. The first branch of literature to break away from dependence on Arabic after about two centuries of cultural domination was poetry. This was no doubt due to the strength of the oral tradition in the transmission of poetry. However, Arabic influence remained strong and when Persian re-emerged as a written language in the 9th century it was written in the Arabic script. For some five centuries the majority of works written by the Persians in the field of theology, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and even history were written in Arabic. By the middle of the 8th century, however, Iran had become a world centre of art, literature and science.

During the 9th century, Arab control weakened and Iran broke into a small number of kingdoms under various Iranian rulers. But soon a new enemy emerged on the horizon. By the mid-11th century, Seljuk Turks from Turkistan had conquered most of Iran. The Seljuks and other Turkish tribes ruled until 1220. In that year the Mongols led by Genghis Khan swarmed over the whole area, wreaking havoc. They destroyed whole cities, slaughtering many thousands of people and put a sudden and ghastly end to the Abbasid caliphate. The Iranian epic is spattered with the blood of these national calamities; every page is full of reports of ruined cities and the appalling devastation perpetrated by the nomadic barbarians. But this too was merely a passing episode in Iranian history. After 1335 the Mongol empire in Iran disintegrated in its turn and once again an empire was replaced by a string of minor dynasties. Between 1381 and 1404 Iran was ravaged by the repeated invasion of yet another conqueror from the steppes, Taimur—known in the West as Timurlane ("Timur the lame"). But given the nature and organisation of these "hordes", the death of the supreme chief is normally a signal for disintegration and the dispersal of the horde. Thus, Taimur's empire in Iran did not long survive its founder.

In the late 15th and early 16th centuries a Turkish tribe gained control over several regions of Iran. In 1501, the tribal leader Ismail was crowned king and founded the Safavid Dynasty, the greatest representative of which was Shah Abbas who ruled from 1587 to 1629. He halted the invasions by Ottoman Turks and Uzbek tribes from Turkistan. Shah Abbas and his successors strongly supported the development of architecture and the arts. Isfahan, which became the Safavid capital in 1598, was known as one of the most civilised of cities. In those days Persians used to call Isfahan *Nisf-e-Jahan* ("half the world"). The promulgation of Shiism as the official religion of the Safavid state acted as a unifying force within the Safavid Empire and enabled the Safavids to channel widespread latent Iranian national feeling. On the other hand, it

brought the Safavids into direct conflict with the Ottoman Empire and led to two centuries of intermittent warfare between those two powerful states.

The Safavid dynasty ruled Iran until 1722, when an Afghan army invaded the country and captured Isfahan. In 1730 Nadirshah, a Turkish tribesman drove the Afghans out of Iran and became king. He proved to be a formidable conqueror. In 1739 Nadir Shah took the city of Delhi in India. He plundered India and brought back an abundance of treasure. But Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747, after which there followed a chaotic period where various Iranian leaders contested for power.

In 1750, Karim Khan, a Kurd of the Zand tribe gained control of Iran. After Karim Khan's death in 1779 war broke out between the Zands and the Qajars (a Turkoman tribe from the Caspian Sea region) During this period Iran lost Afghanistan and other areas that Nadir Shah had conquered. The Qajars defeated the Zands in 1794 and their dynasty ruled Iran until 1925. Finally the Qajar monarchy, proving incapable of developing a modern economy, gradually fell under the sway of western imperialism. They disposed of Iran's economic resources to imperialist concessionaries in return for trifling amounts of money that satisfied their immediate financial needs and their daily luxuries.

Increasing dissatisfaction with the incompetence and corruption of the monarchy, together with resentment against foreign economic domination and imperialist political pressure, found expression in a mass movement. The revolt of Bab in 1844 was suppressed by the monarchy but the movement left behind a tradition of revolution that took the shape of various religious sects like the Bahai movement. Once again the mass movement erupted against the Qajar foreign policy of granting concessions to the British Tobacco Company. This resentment turned into a widespread movement and insurgencies flared up in different places. The outcome of this radical movement was ultimately the demand for constitutional reforms, which were implemented in 1906.

The movement for democratic reform was led by an unstable alliance of the merchant class and religious institutions which drew their support from the *bazaaris*, the shopkeepers and other lower class elements in the towns. The Monarchy was forced to concede a constitution in which bourgeois-democratic rights, like free speech, freedom of association and of assembly were granted and merchants and traders allowed limited rights of representation in a majilis (parliament).

In 1826 Russia invaded Iran. Tsarist Russia wanted to expand its territory and gain an outlet to the Persian Gulf. The Russians inflicted a heavy defeat on Iran in 1827, after which the two countries signed the treaty of Turkomanchai. The agreement gave tsarist Russia the land north of the Aras river, which remains the boundary between the two countries today. In 1856 Iran tried to recapture its former territory in north-western Afghanistan, but British imperialism declared war on Iran. And in 1857 Iran was forced to sign a treaty under which it gave up all claims to Afghanistan. The influence of British imperialism and tsarist Russia in Iran increased during the second half of the 19th century, and in the early 1900, a British Corporation, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, began to control the oilfields of south-western Iran.

During the First World War, Iran became a battleground even though it remained neutral. Russian tsarism was interested in defending its oil supply in Baku and the

Caspian Sea. The Russians were involved in a ferocious struggle with the Turks in northwestern Iran. The British imperialists, for their part, were defending their interests in the Khuzistan oilfields. In 1920 Seyed Zia-al-din Taba Tabai, an Iranian politician, and Reza Khan, a cavalry officer, overthrew the Qajar dynasty. In October 1925 Reza crowned himself Shah and became the founder of a new dynasty, the Pahlavis. During his 20 years in power he suppressed the Kurds, Baluchis, Qashqis and other rebellious movements and ended the semi-autonomous rule of the Arab Sheikh Khazal who had British Imperialist protection in Khuzistan.

In the Second World War which began in 1939, Iran once again declared its neutrality. But the allies wanted to use the Trans-Iranian Railway to ship war supplies from Britain to Stalinist Russia. However, Reza Shah was to some extent under the pressure of Hitler's Germany. By late 1930 more than half of Iranian foreign trade was with Germany which provided much of the machinery for Iran's industrialisation programme. He therefore refused to co-operate, and so in 1941 the British imperialists and Stalinist Russia invaded Iran. They forced Reza Shah to abdicate, placing his son Mohammad Reza Pahalavi on the throne. The new Shah allowed them to use the railway and to keep troops in Iran until the end of the war.

The presence of British imperialist troops in Iran during the war stirred up the mass movement. In the majles (parliament) a group of nationalists led by Mossadeq demanded an end to British control of the oil industry. In 1951 the majles voted to nationalise the oil industry but the Prime Minister refused to implement it. He was dismissed and replaced by Mossadeq. Alarmed by his anti-imperialist policy, on 16 August 1953 the CIA launched a coup against Mossadeq. On 19 August the Shah returned to power.

Again in 1960-61 the political and economic crisis came to a head, when the majles election was massively rigged. Political and economic unrest lead to a general strike which was suppressed brutally by the help of the notorious secret police agency, the Savak. The Shah introduced the so-called White Revolution programme of agrarian reform combined with education and health measures. From 1963-73 politically and economically Iran was relatively stable. Steadily rising oil revenues enhanced economic growth. In 1973-74 world oil prices quadrupled, and Iran's oil revenue increased from 5 billion dollars to 20 billion dollars a year.

The Shah attempted to use these funds to turn Iran overnight into what he described as the fifth most powerful nation in the world. With this illusion in mind, he celebrated the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the first Persian Empire by Cyrus in 550 B.C. in 1971. But the boom in oil revenues was accompanied by rapid inflation, massive migration into urban areas, a housing shortage with insufficient infrastructure and a widening gap in incomes. These conditions provoked a deep resentment among the workers, peasants and middle classes which erupted in an explosive revolutionary mass movement. General strikes by workers paralysed the system. But owing to the false policies of the Tudeh Party (the Communist Party), the revolution was hijacked by the fundamentalists.

At the peak of the movement, Khomeini was in France, where he got the support of the French ruling class, who saw in him the means of derailing the revolution. In fact, the real force behind the revolution was the Iranian proletariat, particularly the oil workers.

After hijacking the revolution, Khomeini was unable to crash the working class, which was organised in *shuras* (Soviets) until 1981. After capturing the state power, he executed more than 6000 political workers of the opposition. There were continuous clashes and splits within the IRP (Islamic Republican Party), which the leadership attempted to counter, on one hand by organising suppression of internal opposition, and on the other, by launching terrorist organisations in the Middle East and other Islamic countries.

The Khomeini regime backed the Hamas, Hizbullah fundamentalist wings as a means of diverting attention from the internal tensions in Iran. The social composition of these groups was mainly lumpen-proletarian. The irony is that before the 1979 Revolution in Iran this kind of organisation was financed by the CIA and the Israeli Secret Agency Mossad, in order to split the working class of the Middle East along religious lines.

By means of such methods they succeeded in controlling the factionalism inside the IRP and consolidated their reactionary regime. In September 1980, Iraq invaded Iran and a bloody war of attrition continued until 1988. On 3 June 1989 Khomeini died and was succeeded as Iran's supreme religious leader by ayatollah Ali Khomeini. The factional fighting at the top reached a critical stage, which was expressed in the 1997 election, and again in the 18 February 1999 election. On 11 March Saeed Hajjaarian, one of the architects of Iran's reform movement was shot. More recently there have been periodic bomb attacks in different parts of the centre of Teheran. Bombs have rocked Pasdaran in the North-West of the capital. This shows that the regime which seemed to many to be set to last forever has entered into a state of terminal crisis. How could it be otherwise? History did not end with the proclamation of the so-called Islamic Republic of Iran. How could it? Contrary to the reactionary dreams of Khomeini, history has never proceeded in accord with any subjective plan or the preconceived ideas of individuals, least of all when these ideas have an entirely unscientific character. For a time, it is true, even the most delirious reaction may prevail, taking advantage of the crying contradictions in society and in the consciousness of the masses who have only just awakened and are striving to find the way to the road of revolution.

Under peculiar and exceptional circumstances, Khomeini and his followers were able to hijack a revolution that was none of their making. The present work aims to explain exactly how this occurred. The victory of fundamentalist reaction in Iran would have been unthinkable without the disastrous policies pursued by those parties and groups which should have provided the working class with the necessary leadership. In particular, the Stalinist Tudeh Party played a pernicious role which effectively handed the workers of Iran, bound and gagged, into the hands of Khomeini.

The regime of the ayatollahs has lasted more than two decades. But all the signs are that it has exhausted itself. A new stage of the Iranian revolution is opening up before us. The whip of the counter-revolution, as Karl Marx predicted, has reawakened the revolutionary movement. The knot of history, which was broken after 1979, has once again been retied in Iran. It is the task of the Iranian Marxists to arm the movement with clear goals and objectives. On this basis, victory is guaranteed. But the prior condition is that the new generation of revolutionary workers and youth study the lessons of the past and draw the necessary conclusions. If the present work assists in this task, its aim will have been fulfilled.

Notes:

1. Carlton J. Hayes, *Ancient Civilisation*, pp. 172-3.
2. Herododotus, *The Persian War*, pp. 100-2.
3. T. R. Glover, *The Ancient World, (Wars of Greeks and Persians)*, p. 93.
4. N. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, p. 107.

Chapter 2

Notes on the History of Iran

Between the 11th and the 19th centuries, approximately 15 dynasties ruled Iran. Nearly all were of nomadic Central Asian origin and, with the exception of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), none was long-lived. This series of nomadic dynasties recurred almost cyclically. Historians and anthropologists have argued that, in the context of pre-capitalist methods of warfare, nomads generally possess superior military power compared with settled people and are consequently able to conquer them. Once nomads become the ruling power, however, they in turn undergo a process of sedentarisation, and their military superiority disintegrates.[1] Historically, nomads have used military force to supplement their means of livelihood by plundering the wealth accumulated by settled civilisations.[2] Each invading tribe viewed both the land and its revenue as objects of plunder. The treatment of land as an object of plunder, together with the need to reward the functionaries of a new dynasty, meant that each conquest was accompanied by a massive confiscation and redistribution in favour of a new ruling elite. Each change of dynasty was equally accompanied by plunder and redistribution. The cyclic recurrence of nomadic dynasties thus arrested the development of private ownership of land.

The relatively longer period of stability under the Safavid dynasty, however, had lasting effects on property relations, moving away from the arbitrariness of the cycle of nomadic rule and dynastic changes. The development of the productive forces received a new impetus at the beginning of the 19th century. As in the case of tsarist Russia, and later Japan, the source of this impetus was competition and pressure from without. The more developed capitalist nations of the West embarked on a phase of colonialist expansion in the East. Russia was confronted with the growing power of Sweden, and later with France and Germany. Trotsky wrote that: "It was not the Tartars who compelled old Russia to introduce firearms and create the standing regiments of *streltsi*, it was not the Tartars who later on forced her to form knightly cavalry and infantry forces, but the pressure of Lithuania, Poland and Sweden." [3]

However, despite its backwardness in comparison with the countries of Western Europe, Russian tsarism was more developed than Iran. In its military conflicts with its northern neighbour, the Qajar dynasty suffered two major defeats at the hands of the relatively modern Russian army, resulting in heavy territorial losses. From this date, the combined effects of the growing penetration of foreign influence in Iran and the attempts by the Iranian rulers to build a modern army caused the disintegration of the old tribal dynasties.[4] Iran was compelled to enter the road of capitalist development. But from the very beginning Iranian capitalism had a belated, weak and sickly character. The 19th century was accompanied by a slow but steady growth of the productive forces. Throughout the century the population nearly doubled, urbanisation grew and agriculture expanded. Handicrafts and exports increased. In the second half of

the century, however, the imports of manufactured goods from the imperialist countries undermined the production of local handicrafts.

The modern era in Iran can be divided into three sub-periods. In the first period which opens with the 19th century, Iran can be described as a semi-colony with relatively little participation in the world market. This period culminates in the constitutional revolution of 1906 (under the impact of the Russian revolution of 1905) and ends with the beginning of the extensive production of oil in 1908. The second period (1908-53) is marked by the growing integration of Iran (although still a semi-colony) in the world market. This period is accompanied by growing oil production and industrialisation, and the growth and increasing concentration of the working class. The dispute over oil sovereignty and Iran's share of the revenue are characteristic features of this period. These conflicts reached a climax during the social uprising (1941-53) that followed the abdication of Reza Shah (1926-41). The period ended with the rise and fall of the nationalist movement of Mossaddiq (1951-53). The third period (1953-79) is marked by the growing participation of Iran in the world market as a sovereign state, with considerable control over its oil resources, rapidly rising oil revenues and very rapid economic growth.

However, Iran's feverish economic expansion did not signify a reduction of internal contradictions. On the contrary. The increase in oil prices did not significantly benefit the masses who were hit by mounting inflation. The gap between obscene wealth, accompanied by "western" ostentation, and grinding poverty became unbearable. The growing social tensions could not be held down by the extreme brutality of the Shah's Savak, with its combination of 20th century American technology and medieval oriental savagery. By trying to control the situation by repression, the Shah was creating something analogous to a pressure cooker with the safety valve clamped shut. The superficial appearance of tranquility and order inevitably gave way at a critical point to the most violent explosion.

The period after 1979 was marked by the nationalisation of certain industries, banks and financial institutions and the confiscation of the wealth of the Shah. On the other hand, there was the eight years' war with Iraq, splits in the IRP, the victory of Khatami, and the return to a process of privatisation and "open-market liberalism". The fourth period will be discussed in the last chapter, which outlines the perspectives for Iran.

The law of combined and uneven development in Iran

The first period which runs approximately from 1800-1908 was marked by the weak development of capitalist productive relations. The majority of the population living in the countryside depended upon agriculture and the pre-feudal mode of production and partly upon nomadic means of livelihood. Less than ten percent of the population lived in the towns, and worked mainly as traders and *bazaaris*. (The term *bazaaris* signifies the class of traditional petty-bourgeois small shopkeepers and street traders.) In this period Iran's most important products were silk and textiles, both of which were ruined by cheap products from Britain. Later on high demand in the West for Persian carpets enabled a certain development of small industries in that sector. A class of traders and small carpet industries emerged and was strengthened.

By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, foreign investment continued to flow into Iran, with the participation of local shareholders in the most modern sectors like road construction, the fishing industries of the Caspian Sea, and the telegraph. The majority of manufactured goods were produced by artisans in a host of tiny workshops, but there were also small factories involved in the carpet-weaving and leather industries and also a number of mines and print-shops. According to one study of the period the largest carpet factory was in Tabriz and employed 1500 workers.

In 1908, oil was discovered in the South West of Khuzistan, and in the same period the establishment of the railways led to a growing integration of the economy. This, together with the concentration of the working class, heralded the final victory of capitalist relations in Iran. In the second period, British imperialism ruthlessly exploited the Iranian oil industry and made fabulous profits from it. Between 1912 and 1933 alone, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC) made profits of £200 million, of which only £16 million was paid to the Iranian Government in direct royalties. Between 1945 and 1950, APOC paid only £90 million in royalties to the Iranian government, and earned net profits of more than £250 million.[7]

The scale of Iranian industrial production was such that by 1920, it was employing 20,000 workers, and by 1940, 31,500 workers, one of the largest concentrations in the Middle East. By end of 1925 the Shah had adopted a programme intended to protect local industries and to provide state incentives for private entrepreneurs. The state based itself on the revenues from oil and taxes, rather than on foreign loans. In contrast to the dynasty that preceded it, a large part of the oil revenues were utilised for defence and to modernise the state and army. In his 20 years in power, the Shah spent more than £260 million on industry. After 1930 new groups of large industries were established. Hundreds of small plants, mainly in textiles, foodstuffs and construction materials emerged. The size of the working class radically increased, often concentrated in large factories. In this respect, Iran resembled tsarist Russia in the early period of its industrial development.

Most workers were still employed in small workshops but after the development of the textile mills in Isfahan, Kerman, Yazd and Teheran, the number of workers increased steadily. The law of combined and uneven economic and social development was in progress. Due to the domination of the world market by imperialism, Iran's industrialisation process could not take place in a classical way. Because Iran was an important energy source, the exploitation of its oil resources by British imperialism led to a very limited and one-sided form of development. The British capitalists were only interested in securing their own interests. Thus, the growth of industry produced an extremely uneven pattern of development, in which the establishment of advanced industries was limited to the major cities—Teheran, Tabriz, Isfahan, Kerman and some other centres. The requirements of the oil industry led to the establishment of advanced industries in Khuzistan—an area which had not changed in centuries—yet most of the country remained backward. Industrial capital was still the exception, not the rule. Commercial capital still played the predominant role.

These distortions meant that only a combined and uneven pattern of development was possible. The most advanced social and economic forms were found alongside the most primitive ones. Alongside the bright lights of modern petrochemical plants, there was

dim lamp-light in villages without electricity. In front of industries utilising the most up-to-date technology, the small artisan continued to use methods which had not changed in centuries, if not millennia. Modern houses complete with American kitchens stood beside slums where meals were cooked over smoky charcoal and wood stoves.

The third period was again characterised by a dramatic increase in oil revenues. By 1965, the latter amounted to \$522 million and by 1969, \$938 million. Huge sums were spent on the state apparatus. \$10 billion was invested to expand the infrastructure and manufacturing Industries. Ninety foreign companies invested in Iran in 1969, half of them based in the USA.[8] But the state was still the main source of industrial growth, and was responsible for 40-50 percent of all investment. Economic growth was drastically increased thanks to the rise of oil prices in 1973. By December 1973, prices had been pushed up to \$11.65 a barrel as compared to a price of \$1.79 in 1971. Iran's revenues rose accordingly from \$938 million in 1969 to \$22 billion in 1974.

The five year plan was launched with a \$69 billion development programme. Skilled workers' wages rose rapidly, increasing the influx of people from the countryside to the towns. Between 1956 and 1971, millions of peasants moved to the cities. By the mid 1970s, an average of 380,000 were migrating each year. This produced a negative impact on agriculture, where production fell and food prices increased. In just two years rents rose by up to 300 percent in Teheran. A few made fortunes from property speculation and commission dealings. But acute inflation hit the workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie hard.

Increasing numbers of shanty towns sprang up, lacking the most basic human amenities. Terrible poverty loomed over the masses. In this situation, the Shah—that supposedly wise and "progressive" ruler—halted the development programme. The outcome was a sharp fall in exports, intensifying the already existing mess. The working class replied by stepping up trade union activates in the factories, where they carried on the dangerous work of organisation and agitation under the watchful eye of the Savak agents. The insecure position of the state in the industrial plants frequently forced the authorities to get their agents elected as leaders of the so-called legal trade union organisations set up by the state, called "Syndicates". Syndicate members were the main element of state control within the working class. These stooges played an essential part in undermining the workers' movement and mobilising forces for pro-regime rallies and demonstrations.

The second method of policing was through the direct presence of secret police agents, under the guise of such factory Institutions as *Hefazat* and *Entezamat* (Security Bureau). These were the *de facto* branches of the Savak inside the factories. Each plant had a few direct informers. *Entezamat* and *Hefazat* were run almost totally by army colonels and officers who were directly linked to Savak. The presence of army colonels in the factories and the hierarchical structure of management turned the factories into barrack-like places of terror. Yet all this strict control over the workers did not prevent strikes. Some estimates mention 20-30 strikes per year after 1973. Leaving the figures aside, the failure of the state's strategies to secure the regime and to de-activate the working class by it is quite plain. The secret police were compelled to resort to the use of military force to counter collective labour action. There are numerous examples of troops surrounding striking plants—for example, the Tabriz tool making plant, the Tractor Sazi

company in Tabriz, the Pars metal factory and Renault are some examples from the 1970s.

Capitalist development of Iran after the First World War and especially after the Second World War had profoundly changed the country. Capital had penetrated Iran and left its marks on every section of society. The countryside had undergone some changes since the land reforms of the 1960s. But the fundamental structure of rural society had not changed. Rapid economic development was accompanied with the concentration of capital in a few hands. Forty-five families controlled 85 percent of the largest companies in 1974. Capitalist development had also created a mighty working class in Iran, and thereby completely transformed the class balance of forces. This fact was strikingly shown in 1979 when the proletariat played the decisive role in the revolution.

Notes:

1. Ibn Khaldun, pp. 257-395.
2. Ibid., pp. 249-294.
3. Leon Trotsky, *Results and Prospects (Peculiarities of Russia Historical Development)*, p. 39.
4. Abrahamian, pp. 52-3.
5. N. Keddie Page, *The Roots of Revolution*, pp. 40-62.
6. W. Floor, *Industrialisation in Iran*, p.7.
7. J. Bhahrier, *Economics of Development in Iran*, p. 171.
8. Ibid., p. 186.
9. Assef Bayot, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, p. 65.

Chapter 3

The Communist Party of Iran

The emergence of the communist movement and ideas in Iran, in its real sense, began in the Baku oil fields of Russia before the 1917 Revolution. Thousands of Iranian immigrant workers had been employed by the tsarist regime in the oilfields where they worked shoulder to shoulder with Russian, Azeri and Armenian workers and came into contact with Bolshevik propaganda and agitation. These workers played a significant role in the development of the Communist Party of Iran. Nearly 50 percent of the workers in the Baku oilfields were Iranians many of whom were in contact with the Bolsheviks who were working in the oil workers' unions.[1] Official figures show that 190,000 Iranians went to Russia in 1911, and 16,000 returned home in the same year.[2] But unofficial estimates show that no fewer than 300,000 Iranian workers migrated to Russia every year. These workers were mainly from Azerbaijan and Gilan, but were also drawn from other parts of Iran. Iranian workers were so influenced by the Bolsheviks that whenever they came back to Iran, they brought the tradition and ideas of the Russian Marxists with them. For the first time in the history of Iran they chanted the famous slogan of the Communist Manifesto: *Kargaran-e-Jahan Mottahad Shaweed* ("Workers of all Countries Unite!")

Iranian revolutionaries were linked with the activities of the Russia Social Democratic Party from the very beginning. When *Iskra* (the "Spark") began publication in December 1900, the Iranian revolutionaries used to transport copies to Baku through Persia. These revolutionaries came to be known as Social Democrats.[3] Regarding the affairs of *Iskra* Krupskaya once wrote to Torkhan, asking him whether she could send it to Russia through Tabriz. In a letter to L.Y. Galperin, Lenin also wrote of a further shipment to Persia via Vienna, which he said was only a recent experiment, so it was "premature to talk of failure; it may be successful." [4] Galperin was in charge of sending *Iskra* to Baku (by Russian Social Democrats) in the spring of 1901. He organised the Baku Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). The Committee's function was to manage the secret printing and transportation of illegal literature from abroad, and its distribution inside Russia.

Many Bolsheviks even participated in the *Mashrutiat* (Constitutional) movement between 1905 and 1911 and lost their lives along with Iranian revolutionaries. Gartovk, the Tsar's ambassador in Iran, wrote to the Russian government on 2 October 1908, that the artillery commander Sattar Khan (The leader of the Tabriz revolt) was a sailor of the famous Battleship Potemkin, who had fled to Romania but later returned to Iran, where he joined the revolutionaries. The ambassador further wrote that revolutionary literature was being shipped from Tabriz by Russian revolutionaries.[5]

About that time parts of the Communist Manifesto were translated into Persian when a group of Russian revolutionaries led by Sergo Orjonikidze came to Iran in 1909 in order to carry out revolutionary activities. His wife wrote about this in her book *The Path of*

the Bolsheviks. Lenin himself was in touch with some of the Transcaucasian Bolsheviks, who were in Iran during the period of reaction after the defeat of the 1905 Revolution. The Transcaucasian Bolsheviks played an important role in spreading the ideas of Marxism in Iran during the Constitutional Movement against the Qajar dynasty.[6]

However, initially the Iranian Social Democratic movement was dominated, not by Marxism, but by trends akin to Russian Narodism. Alan Woods in his recent book *Bolshevism, the Road to Revolution* writes: "The Narodniks were motivated by revolutionary voluntarism: the idea that the success of the revolution can be guaranteed by the iron will and determination of a small group of dedicated men and women. The subjective factor of course is decisive in human history. Karl Marx explained that men and women make their own history, but added that they do not make it out side of the context of social and economic relationships established independently of their will." [7]

Terrorism is basically a petit-bourgeois tendency, completely alien to the working class tradition. That the movement should resort to such methods in the early days is merely a reflection of the underdeveloped phase of the struggle. It was the direct result of the low level of socio-economic development in Iran. The slow, sluggish development of the productive forces found its reflection in the undeveloped class structure of Iranian society at a time when the working class was still in its infancy. To the young progressive students and intellectuals, it seemed that society was in a state of complete stagnation. In their impatience they concluded that there was no way out of the crisis of society other than by means of the gun and the bomb. Although this was incorrect even at that time, it was at least understandable at a time when the capitalist mode of production was still in a primitive stage of development. The working class was still in an embryonic phase. So the students sought a base among the discontented peasantry. The latter was really very oppressed in the clutches of feudal landlords and occasionally launched desperate attacks on the feudal landlords and nobility. But the prevailing backwardness of the village masses, their ignorance and illiteracy, and the scattered and unorganised nature of the peasantry, meant that, on their own, they could offer no way out. Only by finding a powerful revolutionary ally in the towns could the peasantry rise to the heights demanded for a real revolutionary transformation of society.

These early revolutionaries were brave and sincere people, dedicated to the cause of the people's freedom. They thought that through these methods they would bring about a change in society and put an end to oppression and exploitation. But despite their courage, they lacked the necessary theoretical understanding to lead the revolution. They spent a lot of their time in discussions about how to kill the Shah and the hated aristocrats and feudal lords. On one occasion they sent a gift parcel to the governor of Marand City on behalf of his close friends who lived in countryside. When the Governor opened the parcel, the bomb exploded and he was killed. But usually they were not so successful.

The aim of these young people was to target only the cruel officials and despotic rulers. The majority of their organisational activity revolved around acts of individual terrorism against feudal landowners and members of the nobility. For a time, living in fear of assassination, the government officials were in a constant state of panic. Among the revolutionaries was one outstanding figure, Hyder Khan Amougly, who, on the instruction of the Central Revolutionary Council, attempted to kill the King, Mohd Ali

Shah. On 15 February 1908, having failed in his first attempt, he made a second attempt, when he planted a bomb under the rostrum where the king and his officials were expected to stand. However, the second effort was no more successful than the first.

Even if they had succeeded, such actions did not have the slightest effect in weakening the regime, let alone overthrowing it. The mistake of the terrorists is to imagine that the state rests upon individuals. But that is not the case. One reactionary governor is replaced with another, and the state is reinforced with new repressive measures and powers. The Iranian monarchy could not be overthrown by terrorist bombs but only by the revolutionary movement of the masses. The primitive methods of individual terrorism, as we have observed, corresponded to the relatively undeveloped nature of class relations in Iran at this time. The proletariat was as yet in its infancy. The revolutionaries succeeded to some extent in getting a base in the youth, in the peasantry and among weak and oppressed tribes. They were very devoted to the cause of the poor people, and went to the villages where they worked with the peasantry, attempting to convince them to struggle, but, like the Russian Narodniks before them, they got no serious response from them. Sometimes they were so frustrated with their lack of progress that they abused the peasants, with still less of a result than before.

To the degree that they attempted to get a base in the masses, they were not really terrorists. They were really searching for the way to end the system by revolutionary means. They were certainly not like the terrorists of today who play an entirely negative role in the revolutionary struggle. At a time when the power of the proletariat is clear to all, and when no-one can seriously dispute the leading role of the working class in the revolution, these people try to drag the movement back to its prehistory, resorting to the method of individual terrorism which was condemned by Lenin and all the Russian Marxists. Such methods can only sow confusion, weaken the revolutionary movement and lower the self-consciousness of the proletariat, while strengthening reaction and the state apparatus which they claim to be fighting against. Such methods do not further the cause of socialist revolution and the working class but, on the contrary, they help the agents and mercenaries of imperialists to prolong their rule by sabotaging the movements of the working class and detracting the real path of revolutionary struggle.

These outmoded and primitive methods of struggle were only a transitory phase which to a great extent were rendered obsolete once the infant workers entered the political arena. One of the first examples of this was the movement of the printworkers and the leather factory workers in Teheran, who presented an ultimatum to the majilis that if their demands were not met, they would stop work. The government reacted to this threat by launching repression against workers, who replied by going on strike. This was the first strike launched by the workers in the history of Iran, and this first strike succeeded in winning a reduction in working hours from 14 to 10 hours a day. This was their first experience of how power can be achieved by the joint action of the working class. The strike's impact was so great, that in every revolutionary circle debates started on the role of workers and their potential. This strike changed the attitude of all serious revolutionaries. As the strength and cohesion of the working class grew, and its social role became increasingly clear, the old revolutionaries modified their old methods of struggle, and began to look seriously towards the workers.

A whole series of newspapers appeared in this period, and a growing number of articles on Marxism began to be published. The Soviet scholar Ivanov has uncovered a number of polemics between Iranian revolutionaries with Kautsky and Plekhanov.[8] According to those documents, on 16 October 1908, a meeting was held in which one group of Social Democrats expressed the opinion that Iran had reached the stage of capitalism. In their view, the revolutionaries should not give any support to the bourgeoisie, who would merely exploit the situation for their own benefit, as they had done in the French revolution. The bourgeoisie was incapable of playing a progressive role, but would harm the working class movement and the revolution.

There were, in fact, many different tendencies within the *Hemmat* ("ambition") group which was formed by exiled Iranians in Baku in 1904 in co-ordination with the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP). The *Hemmat* group was actively involved in the Mashrutiat ("constitutional") movement in Iran. This group went through many splits, during which one splinter group formed the Mujahideen (fighter) group. The main demand of this group included the setting up of a majilis (parliament), the right to vote, freedom of the press and land distribution. In 1916 they entered into collaboration with the Bolshevik Party. The old exiled Iranian revolutionaries, together with the Mujahideen (a split-off from the *Hemmat* organisation) formed a new origination, the *Hezb-e-adalat* ("Justice Party"), which became the backbone of the future Communist Party of Iran. One year later, an event occurred that changed the entire course of world history.

The 1917 October Revolution in Russia was an inspiration for Iran. The Iranian revolutionaries performed their proletarian international duty, fighting in the ranks of the world working class against the counter-revolutionary forces during the civil war in the Soviet Union. Between 1907 to 1915 two secret pacts were concluded between the Tsar and British imperialism which would have meant partitioning Iran into spheres of influence. The October revolution immediately published the secret treaties and abolished all the tsarist colonial expansionist policies. Iran was a prime example or the cruel colonial policy pursued by Russian tsarism in collaboration with the so-called western democracies in which the national rights of colonial peoples were treated like so much small change. The October revolution proved to be a practical bulwark against all sorts of national oppression. For the first time in modern history oppressed nationalities found a firm protector in the shape of the Workers' State under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. Inspired by the October revolution, the Iranian masses even used to sing revolutionary songs like *khosh khabar badai nasim shomal keh bema mirasad zaman vesal* ("A new of joy is being carried to us by the north wind, It reached us in to the form of mingling of two sweet hearts.") [9]

The inspiration and energy which the Iranian masses drew from the October revolution also found a more practical expression in a series of uprisings. After the war Iran was in a state of great instability. In April 1920 revolutionaries in Azerbaijan established their own national government; later in Gilan and Khorasan insurgencies flared up against the weak, fragile and unstable regime in Teheran. The insurgents set up their own independent republics. In the cities the population, radicalised by the experience of foreign occupation and the victory of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, was also in a state of revolutionary ferment. The industrial working class led a new wave of struggle in the major cities. By 1921 the unions claimed 20,000 members in the oil industry alone. By November 1921 the workers' movement had gained such strength

that, under the influence of the newly-formed Communist Party of Iran, a Central Union Council was formed which was affiliated to the Red International of Labour Unions established by the Communist International.[10] In 1921 the printers, postal workers, teachers, oil workers and dockers went on strike. Despite the small size of the working class the level of struggle was high. A message of revolutionary greeting was sent to Trotsky, which reads:

"The Revolutionary War Council of the Persian Red Army, organised by the decision of the Council of Peoples' Commissars of Persia, sends its red greetings to the Red Army and Red Navy. After passing through great hardships and undergoing all kinds of privations, we succeeded in crushing our internal counter-revolution which was merely an agent of imperialism. By the will of the toiling masses, the Red Army in Persia was organised with the purpose of destroying the enslavement of the Persian people."

The message ends with the slogan: "Long live the fraternal union between the Russian Red Army and young Persian Red Army!" The message was signed by the chairman of the Revolutionary War Council Mirza Kuchk Khan, Commander of the armed forces Ehsan Ullah and member of the Revolutionary War Council Muzaffar Zadeh. In reply to this message Trotsky wrote that the news of the formation of the Persian Red Army "has filled our hearts with joy".[11]

The Adalat party was established and started two newspapers *Hormat* ("Respect") in Persian and *Yoldash* ("Comrade") in Azerbaijan. By the end of 1919 some leading revolutionaries of this group joined up with another revolutionary organisation The Train of the Red East, which was very close to the Bolsheviks and fought against the counter-revolution in Central Asia. The Communist Party of Iran was formed in June 1920, but at the very beginning there were differences of opinion among the members. Some maintained the line of the Bolsheviks, while some held the line defended by the Old Bolsheviks prior to Lenin's April theses. Others were still on the Menshevik position. These differences surfaced in the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East, which was held over seven days in 1920, with the participation of 204 delegates. The Iranian delegation held a series of meetings to discuss the problems of the revolution but could not arrive at any clear conclusion.

The defeat of the Gilan Soviet Republic had produced frustration and confusion and people started blaming each other for the defeat. Owing to the sharpness of the internal differences, the Party actually established two separate Central Committees. This was clearly untenable. On 25th January 1922 the Communist Party of Iran held a meeting in which the representatives of the Comintern also took part, most probably on Lenin's insistence. Prior to that the Party's Central Committee wrote many letters to Lenin regarding the situation in Iran and the Party's position. At the end of the meeting, the existence of two Central Committee in the Party was rejected. In order to maintain unity, a united Central Committee was organised, made up of 20 members. The former local committees and Central Committee were dissolved. Finally, it was decided to hold the next Plenum of the Central Committee on 1 May 1922.

However, at this meeting the differences on Iranian perspectives and methods were not properly resolved. A large number of newspapers emerged in that period and different political views were expressed in the pages of these magazines and newspapers. Among these were: *Kommunist* ("Communist"), *Enkelabee-e-Sorkh* ("Red Revolution"),

Haqeqat ("Truth"), *Kar* ("Work"), *Reykan* ("Arrow"), *Khalq* ("People"), *Javagheh* ("Spark"), *Peyak* ("Ambassador"), *Nassihat* ("Advice"), *Edalat* ("Justice"), *Iran-e-Sorkh* ("Red Iran"), *Eghtesadeh Iran* ("Iranian Economy"), *Peykar* ("Struggle"), *Nohzat* ("Movement"), *Satareh Sorkh* ("Red Star"), etc.

The Communist Party of Iran experienced many twists and turns throughout the decades after its formation in June 1920. Those decades were marked by major historical events in Iran: the rise and fall of the Gilan Soviet Republic, the collapse of Qajar dynasty and the formation of the new despotic Pahlavi dynasty, militancy of the urban masses especially the working class, waves of strikes etc. The Communist Party of Iran was very active; it started work among women and formed different organisations, such as *the Society for Evolution*, *the Awakening of Women* and *Patriotic Women*. These organisations not only educated women, but also provided technical knowledge for the handicraft industries. The Party had also organised a cultural wing which played a very important role in spreading ideas to the masses in a simple way. Plays and dramas played a significant role in the development of the organisation among broader layers of the masses. The most popular and famous ones were *Shah Abbas Darbaray Mobaraza*, *Enkalab-e-Murdom-e-Tabraiz* and *Nadir Shah Afshar*.

In the Sixth and Seventh Plenums of the Comintern (February 1926 to November-December 1926), the Iranian Communist Party general secretary appealed to the Comintern for help in dealing with the Iranian Party's internal crisis. In the Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern—a special meeting held to discuss the Iranian Party's problems and perspectives—it was decided that the next (second) congress would be held on September 1927, where they would discuss the matter further. The second congress of the Iranian Communist Party was duly held in underground conditions in September 1927. Twenty delegates took part, and on the agenda was the international situation, the characterisation of the Reza Khan regime, the national question, organisational problems, the constitution of the Communist Party of Iran, the activity of the Komsomol (youth) and work on the women's front.

The most important item on the agenda was the characterisation of Reza Khan who had proclaimed himself king under the newly-established Pahlavi dynasty on 12 December 1925. Besides the other issues, this was the centre of conflict in the Party. Different opinions were put forward, with some defending the view that the coup d'état of Reza Khan meant the abolition of feudalism and the domination of the bourgeoisie, while others maintained that the coup was a just a palace revolution, and had no effect on property relations. Some argued that to fight against imperialism, the Party should ally itself with Reza Khan, while the other section characterised him as an agent of imperialism.

Once again the Party did not reach a conclusion and the differences remained inside the organisation. In reality, what had happened was that after the October revolution in Russia, the crisis of the Qajar dynasty had reached an acute stage. There was a split at the top between the monarchy, the nobility and the aristocratic section of the Bureaucracy, which was the spinal column of the central government. They were past masters of the art of conspiracy and intrigue inseparable from tribal politics. On the other hand, the army was split, and there were uprisings of the oppressed nationalities. The workers were militant, infuriated by the presence of foreign troops and affected by the impact of the October Revolution.

A civil war-like situation prevailed in society. In his autobiography, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi has given some interesting information about the situation at that time. He wrote that the soldiers did not receive regular salaries because the government was too weak to collect taxes. One day when the foreign secretary was hosting a dinner for foreign visitors, it was found that there were no funds available, so they were compelled to shop around in the bazaar and borrow money to pay for the banquet. Social and economic disintegration was undermining the fabric of society. In Teheran people would not come out of doors at night for fear of cut-throats. Iran's once famed roads had deteriorated to the extent that to go from Teheran to Meshad one had to travel via Russia, and to travel from Teheran to Khuzistan in the north-west one had to go via Turkey and Iraq.[12]

Reza Khan, who was an army officer, manoeuvred in different units of the army to build up support, and finally led a coup d'état on 21 February 1921. Balancing in Bonapartist fashion between the different classes and between the conflicting sections at the top, he seized power. At first he leaned on the *bazaaris* defending them against foreign goods, and also won the support of nationalists and workers. But once having consolidating himself in power, he launched an attack on the workers and on the Communist Party.

After 1928 the workers participated in new waves of struggle; they were in a strong fighting mood. On 4 May 1929 the oil refinery workers gathered to present their economic demands, and this gathering turned into an anti-government political demonstration. They shouted anti-regime slogans and demanded the resignation of the government. Other factory workers joined the demonstration with revolutionary enthusiasm. The armed forces arrived and brutally attacked the workers with their swords and the workers replied with sticks and bricks. Many workers were arrested and the movement spread to other cities. In Abadan a 20,000-strong demonstration came out in protest against the armed forces' brutal attack on the workers. Again skirmishes took place between the army and the workers. This situation lasted for three months. More than three hundred workers were arrested, and ultimately the government was forced to support the movement. But again in 1931 the workers organised a big strike. This took place in the Vatan textile factory at Isfahan where the workers forced the management to increase their pay by 40 percent and accept a reduction in working hours from 12 to 9 hours a day. In the north, 800 underground trade union workers went on strike.

In that period the Communist Party of Iran made considerable headway in different areas. But as far as the political differences and ideological problems were concerned, they remained unresolved. In the meantime, events in Russia took a sharp turn which had far-reaching effects in all the Communist parties of the world. In order to defeat Trotsky and the Left Opposition, Stalin had leaned on the right wing section of the Russian Communist Party. This led to the rise of the kulaks (rich peasants) which by 1928 threatened the very existence of the Soviet state. In his book *Russia from revolution to counter-revolution* Ted Grant explains how Stalin had burned his fingers badly in his attempts to lean on the capitalist elements in Russia (the kulaks and Nepmen). This had its reflection in the sphere of foreign policy and the work of the Communist International. In China, the attempt to conciliate the national bourgeoisie led to the subordination of the Communist Party to Chiang Kai-Shek and the Kuomintang, with catastrophic results. In Britain, the attempt to conciliate the Trade Union bureaucracy led to the defeat of the general strike and the undermining of the

British Communist Party. Now Stalin turned the Comintern sharply in the opposite direction. He carried out a "left" u-turn, which was immediately adopted by all the sections of the Comintern. Ted Grant writes:

"In violation of its statutes the international had not held a conference for four years. A new congress was called in 1928 which for the first time officially introduced into the programme of the International the anti-Leninist theory of 'socialism in one country'. It also proclaimed the end of capitalist stability and the beginning of what was termed the 'Third Period'. In contrast to the period of revolutionary upheavals following 1917 (the 'First period') and the period of relative capitalist stability after 1923 (the 'Second Period'), this so-called 'Third Period' was supposed to usher in the final collapse of world capitalism. At the same time, according to the once-famous (but now buried) theory invented by Stalin, Social Democracy was supposed to have transformed itself into 'social fascism'." [13]

This turn of the Communist International directly affected the Iranian Party. At the Sixth congress of the Comintern, which was held in July-August 1928 in Moscow, the problem of internal differences in the Communist party of Iran surfaced again. Up to that period the Party was dominated by the right-wing line, but it now abruptly adopted an extreme ultra-left position, following the latest zig-zag of its Stalinist masters in Moscow. This did not happen only with the Iranian Communist Party but was a world-wide development. For a number of years, all the Communist parties pursued this ultra-left madness, which, by splitting the powerful German working class, directly led to the victory of Hitler in 1933.

Thus, practically overnight, the Communist Party of Iran stumbled from the rightist position of supporting Reza Khan Pahlavi to an ultra-left position. They consistently fought against democratic forces and argued that there was no difference between democracy and fascism. This had disastrous results. The growing militancy of the workers' movement in those days was turned by the CP into adventurism. The many blunders that flowed from this incorrect policy provided the basis for the dictator Reza Khan's repressive regime. He easily got the majles to pass the anti-Communist Act of 1 June 1931. He banned the Communist Party and started a massive campaign of executions directed against Party workers and trade union activists. He executed many of the best workers and youth and the best revolutionary poets. More than two thousand workers were arrested.

After such severe repression and defeat, despair, frustration and factionalism prevailed in the rank and file of the Party. Many workers left the Party, which once again found itself isolated. The Party went underground and was based mainly on intellectual and student circles. They started a new magazine *Doniya* ("World"), the readership of which was limited to these circles. The regime banned the magazine, and the members of this circle were arrested and put on trial. This trial was popularly known as "the group of fifty-three". All were given sentences of three to fifteen years' imprisonment, but the group's leader Dr. Taghi Arnai was killed in jail in 1940.

One year after the catastrophe of Hitler coming to power in Germany, Stalin ordered the Comintern to perform another somersault, lurching to the right with the so-called policy of the Popular Front, that is, a policy of uniting with the "liberal" bourgeois (whom they had earlier denounced as "radical fascists") against fascism. In 1939, Stalin changed the

line once again, after having signed a pact with Nazi Germany. The Popular Front was hastily abandoned. When Stalin signed the non-aggression treaty with Hitler, Trotsky declared the signing of the Treaty with Hitler supplied one extra gauge with which to measure the degree of degeneration of Soviet Bureaucracy and its contempt for the international working class, including the Comintern.[14]

Right up to the moment when Hitler attacked the USSR, the master of the Kremlin imagined that he had outmanoeuvred him. Having supposedly secured his rear by signing the Hitler-Stalin Pact, Stalin was looking forward to the spectacle of Germany and Britain slugging it out while he looked on from the sidelines. As Trotsky pointed out, Stalin was effectively acting as Hitler's quartermaster. From the outbreak of Second World War right up until June 1941, when Hitler attacked Russia, Nazi Germany received a large increase in exports from the USSR. Between 1938 and 1940 exports to Germany rose from Rbs 85.9 million to Rbs 736.5 million which greatly assisted Hitler's war efforts.[15] Having abandoned every trace of a revolutionary internationalist perspective, the Stalinists were drunk with illusions, while Hitler was preparing a devastating blow against them. This is what disarmed the Soviet Union in the face of its most terrible enemy. However, all this was cut across in 1941 when Hitler launched his attack on the USSR. As early as 1931 Trotsky had predicted that if Hitler came to power, then Germany would declare war against the Soviet Union. Now this perspective was shown to be correct.

The political situation in Iran took a serious turn in 1941 when Hitler attacked the Soviet Union on June 22. Seeing the danger of German activities in Iran, British imperialism and Stalinist Russia suddenly sprang into action and addressed a memorandum to the Iranian government demanding:

1. The breaking off of diplomatic relations with Germany and Italy.
2. That the Iranian government facilitates transportation of allied war material by road, rail or air routes.
3. That Teheran must allow the deployment of allied troop in Iranian territory.

Reza Khan rejected those conditions and was forced to resign in favour of his son. Mohammed Reza Khan, the obedient tame watch dog of imperialism, who became king on 16 September 1941. His first action was to expel all Germans and Italians from Iran. His second was to release all political prisoners, including the group of 53 (*Doniya*). The majority of that group supported the new regime, and proclaimed it as "anti-fascist" in character. With incredible alacrity, the Tudeh Party performed a 180 degree somersault, just like their master Stalin, and switched to a policy of support for the Allies against Germany. Under these circumstances, the switch on foreign policy was immediately reflected in an equally violent turn in domestic policy. Without a word of explanation, the Party dropped its anti-British line and switched to a policy of complete support for the "democratic" Allies against Germany.

Slavishly following the Moscow Line, the CP even decided to change its name. Their first priority was to form an "anti-fascist" front and publish a newspaper *Mardom* ("The People"). The *Hezb-e-Tudeh Iran* (i.e. the Tudeh or "masses' party of Iran") came into being on the second of October 1941. The first conference of the Tudeh Party took

place on 9 October 1942 with 120 delegates present. They emphasised the defence of Soviet Russia and decided to give "critical support" to the Reza Khan regime. These sudden turns plunged the Party into an internal crisis. A section of anti-British elements left the Party. Some of these joined the ranks of German fascism; some of these formed their own "patriotic front" and adopted a "wait and see" policy. They had their social basis in the petit bourgeoisie: the merchants and among a small section of bourgeoisie. None of them had anything like a Leninist class position.

In this period the workers in many factories, oil refineries and railways went on strike in protest against hard labour and excessive overtime in wartime conditions. At the same time, the Tudeh Party was carrying on propaganda, calling on the workers not to take part in strikes, and denouncing those who were backing the strikes as "fascists". They argued that, since workers were producing goods for the allied forces, any strike was harmful for the allied cause and gave strength to the fascist forces internationally. In fact, they acted as the worst strike-breakers.

During the war private industry expanded to some extent and the Iranian capitalists made some profit. But after the war the failure of the Imperialist powers to deliver the promised aid for development had a negative effect. The end of the War signalled a new period of upheavals in Iran. On 22 January 1946, Azerbaijan and Kurdistan declared for home rule and set up an autonomous government. The number of strikes rose to over one hundred, compared to sixty in 1944. The key industrial centres joined in the movement. In Tabriz, for example, workers in sixteen of the city's eighteen major plants joined the strikes.

Many militant disputes took place at this time, mainly in oil, textiles and on construction sites. In 1946 there were two big mass strikes of the Khuzistan oil workers. The period after the First World War had seen the rapid development of the unions, and the period following the Second World War now saw a similar re-emergence but on a far greater scale. But Stalinist Russia did not want any revolutionary change in Iran. The degenerate Comintern had been dissolved by Stalin as early as 1943 to please the imperialist powers. Instead of supporting the revolutionary overthrow of the King, the Stalin bureaucracy preferred to cultivate good relations with Reza Shah. Despite its false policies, the Tudeh was again gaining ground as the only mass workers' party in Iran. In the elections for the 14th majilis (parliament) in the winter of 1943. The Tudeh Party used the opportunity to contest thirty seats, of which it won ten. After the election, the Tudeh Party called its first congress in August 1944. However, at the congress differences surfaced on the question of participation in the election, on the tactic of the anti-fascist front after the Second World War and once again the Iranian regime. Divided over these issues, the Party went into acute crisis.

After the Second World War the sweep of the strike movement was so great that it cut across all barriers, showing the tremendous class solidarity of the workers. A new union federation controlled by the Tudeh party claimed a membership of 275,000 and by 1946 when there was 186 affiliated unions with 335,000 members. A three-day strike was held in 1946 in which 65,000 oil workers took part. The workers won their basic demands, such as increased salaries and better hygienic conditions. In that strike the oil workers in Khuzistan and the textile workers, even in the most remote sectors of the economy, were involved. The government was weak and there was continuous pressure from below from the workers, so the Tudeh Party in parliament put forward a number

of reformist demands for workers. These included union rights, the abolition of overtime, a 48-hour working week and a minimum wage. All these demands were conceded.

The British imperialists, as always, used their old tactic of divide and rule and started to support tribal forces near Khuzistan, financing the mullahs and landlords against workers, unions and the Communist Party of Iran. The Soviet Union initially backed both autonomous republics in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, but the Russian army left Iran on the ninth of May 1946 and the latter were crushed by the central government army. In this bloodbath, thousands of Tudeh members and supporters were butchered.

The withdrawal of the allied armed forces affected many sectors of industry which depended on production for the war. The resulting unemployment affected the morale of the workers and reduced trade union activities. The growth of trade union membership was halted and began to decline. After the defeats in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, the Party workers were demoralised and Tudeh membership was reduced drastically. The regime launched an offensive against workers. From 1947 to 1949, working class, activities fell to their lowest ebb.

On 4 February 1947, the Shah went to attend the foundation anniversary of Teheran university, when a news photographer fired five bullets at him. The Shah's body was slightly scratched, but when he addressed the nation by radio from hospital, the Shah accused the Tudeh of being behind the attack. This was entirely false but provided the regime with an excuse to launch a state of emergency which was announced at 7.30 pm on the same day. The next day the Tudeh leadership was arrested, the Party was made illegal, and supporters were expelled from government services. Special military courts were set up for the trial of leaders of the Communist Party, which became known in Iran as the Trial of the Fourteen. On 15 December 1950, with the help of the Tudeh army section, ten leaders of the Party escaped from prison and once again started underground activities. Thus, the policy of collaborating with the so-called progressive bourgeoisie had led to catastrophe.

The Mossadeq affair

In this period nationalist and fundamentalist tendencies filled the vacuum to some extent. After the war a strong anti-British mood had developed. The nationalist Mossadeq established a National Front of parties representing professional people, *bazaaris* and some religious elements. Mossadeq was appointed as a new prime minister on 28 April 1951. After closing the British owned oil refineries in April, in a deliberate act of sabotage, British imperialism took the case to the United Nations. In the meantime, Mossadeq broke off diplomatic relations with Britain. This process reached its highest point when Mossadeq implemented his nationalisation policy, when the majilis passed a resolution in favour of the nationalisation of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company.

Naively, Mossadeq thought that America would help Iran in this crisis. He even went to the United States to get economic aid, but came back with empty hands. After the Second World War the balance of power between the capitalist countries changed in favour of American imperialism. Trotsky had explained this even before the war, when he predicted that the United States would emerge victorious from the forthcoming war,

but as a result would have dynamite built into its foundation. During this crisis President Truman sent his foreign policy advisor Harriman to Teheran on 16 July 1951 to exploit the situation in favour of American interests. When Harriman arrived in Teheran the Tudeh party organised a big demonstration opposing American imperialism. Fighting between demonstrators and police led to 20 people being killed and injured in front of the majilis building.

Unlike the national bourgeoisie, the workers showed that they were prepared to fight. Big strikes erupted in the oil fields. In response to cuts in wages, trade union mobilisations grew steadily. By April, 45,000 workers were on strike. The government declared martial law but the strikes spread like a torrent. The oil company promised to restore the wage levels, and the strikes were postponed for a while, but the company was only using delaying tactics. Once again the strikes burst forth with the support of thousands of non-oil workers in other industrial centres. Pressure was building up from below to force Mossadeq to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian oil company. Of course, Tudeh Party members played a pivotal role in the workers' movement from 1951 to 1953. The number of major strikes again increased, as did the numbers of trade unions membership.

Trade union demands included higher wages and trade union rights. But the movement was coming up against the state itself. A series of confrontations with police occurred with every new turn of the workers' movement. Class solidarity was spreading among the workers from different layers, areas and professions. The movement was rapidly increasing in strength and acquiring a political character. Intense pressure was building up from below on the government, which was forced to offer more concessions than even in 1946. As a result, the workers' self confidence grew by leaps and bounds. The question of power was being posed point blank.

The main beneficiary was naturally the Tudeh Party. They now came out openly with a strong position in the working class. The momentum of the movement was becoming irresistible, and inevitably was directed radically against the monarchical institutions. The bourgeois and the petty bourgeois politicians were terrified by the pressure of the working class. Under extreme pressure, the National Front ruptured and they withdraw their support from the Front.

On 2 May 1953 Mossadeq wrote a letter to President Eisenhower in which he expressed the hope that the Iranian nation, with the help and assistance of the American government, would overcome the obstacles placed in the way of the sale of Iranian oil, and that if the American government was not able to effect the removal of such obstacles, it would render effective economic assistance to enable Iran to utilise her other resources. In conclusion he invited His Excellency's sympathetic and responsive attention to the present dangerous situation of Iran and trusted that he would ascribe to all the points contained in this message: "Please accept, Mr. President, the assurances of my highest consideration," the message ended pathetically.[16] These lines accurately reveal the cowardly nature of the so-called Iranian national bourgeoisie. However, notwithstanding their rivalry with Britain, the US imperialists could not tolerate the nationalisation of oil in Iran because of the dangerous precedent it set. In his reply to Mossadeq, the Americans wrote that no US aid would be given to Iran until the Anglo Iranian oil conflict was resolved. In addition, Washington expressed serious concern over the degree of freedom given by the Iranian government to the Tudeh party.[17]

The American Secretary of State John Foster Dulles expressed his concerns in a press statement about the growing activities of the illegal Communist Party (the Tudeh Party) and accused the Iranian government of being simply a spectator to those activities. This situation was causing "serious concern" in Washington and made it more difficult for the United States to grant assistance to Iran.[18] Even prior to this statement Dulles had already threatened (on 13 July 1953) that he would tolerate Mossadeq no longer. The CIA ordered Kermit Roosevelt the grandson of ex-President Roosevelt to engineer a coup against Mossadeq. General Zahedi and colonel Nasire were instructed by the Shah to co-operate with the CIA. However, an attempted coup on the 16 August 1953 failed and general Nasire was arrested. The brutal attitude of the imperialists provoked a crisis in Iran with a sharp polarisation to the right and left. A sharp battle started at the top in Teheran. Mossadeq told the Shah to surrender and the imperial guard was disbanded. Regarding this situation the Shah wrote in his autobiography that Mossadeq had reduced the number of tanks guarding his Sadabad palace. Only four tanks were then left which were even insufficient to face a sudden attack by the Tudeh Party.

Iran was in the grip of a pre-revolutionary situation. The masses were aroused. Pictures of the Shah were torn down in Teheran shops, cinemas and government offices. The possibility existed of defeating the coup if Mossadeq had been prepared to appeal to the masses, but this bourgeois politician was a thousand times more afraid of the masses than of the reaction. In the moment of truth, Mossadeq failed to act and allowed the plotters to rally and seize power. Noorudin Kianouri wrote: "We got information that army units were openly supporting the coup efforts. We contacted Mossadeq for the second time. He replied: 'Oh sir everybody has betrayed me, now you are free to carry out your responsibility in any manner you wish.' I asked him again to broadcast the message, but unfortunately instead of getting any answer I heard the voice of someone disconnecting the telephone." [19]

In spite of everything, Mossadeq was still desperately looking towards American imperialism for salvation. For its part, the Moscow Bureaucracy was not interested in revolutionary developments in Iran. As a result, the entire movement was aborted. The Shah was soon restored. After that a process of arrests and killings started. The Tudeh party was again divided. Some of its members argued that the National Front was a progressive alliance which represented the struggle of the national bourgeoisie against British imperialism. Other sections argued that Mossadeq represented a section of the bourgeoisie which was itself attached to western interests. Iraj Eskandri a top party leader wrote: "We have made not a few mistakes, just because we have not had a sufficiently clear concept of the role and character of the national bourgeoisie." He further said that during the struggle for the nationalisation of Iranian oil industry, the Tudeh leaders did not support Mossadeq, who undoubtedly represented the interests of the national bourgeoisie. The Party's thinking was approximately this: Mossadeq is fighting for the nationalisation of Iranian oil. At the same time, the American imperialists are backing this movement. This means they are guiding it. Thus, the Party drew the incorrect conclusion that the Communists should not support the nationalisation movement. The Party thus cut itself off the masses who followed the bourgeoisie on this issue, and not the Party.[20]

E. A. Bayne says that about four year after coup the Party's top leadership could not adopt any policy, because there were serious unresolved problems, including the question of the national bourgeoisie before the Party. For the first time, this question

was brought under discussion in the Fourth Plenum of the Central Committee, held in underground conditions (possibly in the German Democratic Republic) on 17 July 1957. The Third Plenum had taken place long ago, back in 1948.[21] Kianouri wrote: "During my stay in Iran we tried to contact the National Front and other groups, including some tribals in the South who claimed to be the supporters of Mossadeq, but none could pay any attention to the struggle against the Shah regime. We even sent some of our comrades like Roozbeh and Col Chalipa as military experts to train the tribes who were ready for armed struggle against the Shah. We wanted to stage a big demonstration in Teheran, but at the last moment the National Front of Mossadeq (then led by Dr. Moazami) refused to co-operate with us and thus we failed to organise it on our own. It was really political suicide for us. After the coup we also tried to set up an armed base in the North of Iran, but this attempt was betrayed by those who were in gaol. They disclosed this plan to the police. After this failure we tried once again to launch an armed struggle in 1961, but failed due to non co-operation of the National Front and supporters of Mossadeq." [22]

Noorudin Kianouri was the Secretary of the Party during the 1979 revolution. The Fifth Plenum in February 1958 also analysed the coup d'état of 1953. The Party declared that the success of the reaction in the August 1953 coup was due to the absence of close co-operation between the forces opposing the Tudeh Party and the national bourgeoisie. The natural distrust with which the national bourgeoisie looked at the working class party had been aggravated by the Party's failure to understand the nature of the national bourgeoisie and its anti-imperialist potential. It resulted in the Party's adopting wrong tactics in relation to the Mossadeq government." [23]

The only conclusion one can draw from this is that the Tudeh Party hoped for a national democratic revolution before moving towards the socialist revolution in Iran. Basing themselves on that false perspective, they always subordinated the worker's movement to the national bourgeoisie. Again and again, they ran after one or another section of bourgeoisie to form an "alliance for the democratic revolution", always with disastrous consequences. The leaders of the Tudeh Party drew all the wrong conclusions from the 1953 revolutionary movement, which not only showed the potential of working class but also exposed the cowardly and limited nature of the bourgeoisie and its counter-revolutionary role.

Trotsky explained long ago that the weak colonial bourgeoisie was incapable of leading society out of the impasse. The belated development of the so-called national bourgeoisie meant that it was tied hand and foot to the interest of imperialism. The conduct of Mossadeq in 1953 clearly demonstrates this fact. The potential of the working class to overthrow the Iranian regime was vividly expressed by their magnificent mass movement and solidarity actions. But due to the lack of the subjective factor—the revolutionary Party and leadership—the movement was doomed to defeat. The Tudeh Party, with its false policy of "two stages" threw away the revolutionary opportunity and paid a heavy price for its failure.

During the whole period of the Shah's reign, the Tudeh "played dead". In 1963, it played no role in the movement against the shah's White Revolution Programme. That is why that movement was led by Khomeini to some extent. But it compromised again with the monarchy. During the Shah period the Tudeh Party put forward no independent policies whatsoever. This can only be explained by the foreign policy of the Russian

Bureaucracy. Moscow wanted no conflicts with American imperialism in Iran because of Iran's enormous importance as an oil producer. In truth, the Stalinist Bureaucracy of the Soviet Union had long since given up any thought of revolutionary policy, which would have threatened the vital interests of imperialism, especially of the major powers of American imperialism. The policy of so-called peaceful co-existence was merely the expression of the division of the world into two antagonistic blocs, in which both sides tacitly accepted the spheres of influence of the other.

Moscow had no interest in worsening relations between Russia and America which would inevitably flow from a socialist revolution in Iran. On the contrary, the Russian Bureaucracy was interested in propping up the Shah, with whom they enjoyed excellent relations. They engaged in trade with Iran, arranged for enormous quantities of natural gas to be exported from Iran to the Soviet Union and generally endeavoured to maintain friendly relations with the Shah. That was one of the main reasons why the Tudeh Party was very passive in relation to the Shah. Only when the Shah was shaken by the movement of the masses did the Tudeh Party perform a new somersault of 180 degrees and call for an armed struggle during the peak of the movement in 1979. But the party's policy went from bad to worse when the Tudeh leaders declared their support for ayatollah Khomeini on 1 January 1979.[24]

How did this come about? After the February 1979 revolution, the leadership of the Tudeh Party argued as follows: As the character of Iran revolution is anti-imperialist, we must accept the fact that the regime which came to power after the February 1979 Revolution is progressive in nature. It has constantly been waging war against US imperialism, which is actively conspiring against the Iranian people to drag them back to the hell of CIA-Savak era. Therefore, the primary task of the Iranian people in such situation is not to "build socialism at once", but to "consolidate the anti-imperialist gains", so that the shadow of NATO may not eclipse Iran once again. "In this regard," they explained, "*it is quite obvious that anti-imperialist forces are active under the leadership of Khomeini. That is why the most important left forces Tudeh of Iran and the organisation of Iranian peoples Fedaeen (Majority) are behind Khomeini.*" (Our emphasis.)[25]

The attitude of the Tudeh Party towards the Iranian revolution is here very well expressed: a total lack of confidence in the working class and socialism and *the complete subordination of the workers' movement to the bourgeoisie and so-called anti-imperialist forces—including Khomeini!* This is the complete opposite of the position of Lenin, who always stood for a policy of complete class independence and sharply criticised and exposed the counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeois liberals in Russia even in the period of the bourgeois democratic revolution. The position of the Tudeh Party was not that of Lenin but of the Russian Mensheviks who also advocated the subordination of the workers' movement to the bourgeois liberals, alleging the need to unite all "progressive forces".

The Tudeh's Sixth Plenum which took place in February-March 1980 in Iran set the seal on the Party's support for Khomeini, and put forward the following points:

"The foremost duty of the Party in the political field is to co-operate with genuine revolutionary forces, *the Party clearly supports those who are behind ayatollah*

Khomeini. The Party also decided to take part in the coming election for the majilis and the referendum.

"The plenum also decided to hold the long awaited Third Party Congress in near future." (The Second Party Congress had been held in 1948.)

Earlier, when Iran was declared an Islamic Republic on April 1 1979 through a country-wide referendum, the Tudeh Party supported it, saying in a statement: "the policy of the Tudeh Party is to establish unity against imperialism. Therefore, the referendum means for us the burial of the regime of the Shah...because we want unity with the people, *we wholeheartedly support the referendum*. (Our emphasis.)[26]

After the declaration of an Islamic Republic, Islamic Courts, which had already been in action, punishing hundreds of Savak agents, using the same pretext, started to carry out executions of worker militants. Workers were faced with naked reaction in the form of repression and executions. *Yet the Tudeh, to its eternal shame, pilloried those who criticised Khomeini's counter-revolutionary "Islamic Courts" and even accused them of being agents of the Savak and the CIA.*

For their part, the Fedayeen and Mujahedin organisations had an ultra-left position. They played a very negative role, as did those organisations who were backed by so-called Trotskyist sects who were somehow connected with groups of revolutionary students in Iran. Unfortunately, the revolutionary students in Iran were not oriented towards the working class and did not formulate a programme for working class action. On the contrary, they were advised by the sects to turn to the methods of individual terrorism. As always, the sects regarded the working class as impotent, ignorant, and utterly powerless to change the relationship of forces which existed in Iran. Their conceptions were reinforced by the fact that the working class was completely unorganised.

The ultra-lefts' entire perspectives were wrong from start to finish. They began by a pessimistic assessment of the situation prior to 1979. *In effect, they wrote off the working class and denied the possibility of revolution in Iran.* The argument of the sects and those who later turned towards individual terrorism was that the Shah was industrialising and all the cards were therefore in his hands. The Shah had raised the standard of living of the working class, they argued, the Shah had made enormous concessions to the working class and also to the peasantry. This, they concluded, would lead to stability for the regime. They declared that the Shah could maintain himself for decades as a consequence of the "white revolution" and the development of industry. Incidentally, this idea was also swallowed by the imperialists. For example, the CIA issued a report as late as September 1978, saying that the Shah had a stable regime and would continue to hold power for at least the next ten to fifteen years.

The tactic of individual terrorism, as always proved to be disastrous. According to the facts available so far, after six years of the armed struggle against the government forces, 600 guerrillas were killed and 2000 arrested, as against a mere 200 deaths among the government forces.[27] As a result of the infantile activities of the guerrillas during that period the Savak was able to make a comeback and the state strengthened itself with all manner of repressive policies and laws. The contemptuous attitude of the terrorists towards the working class was clearly conveyed by Amir Parviz Pouyan, who,

in his booklet *Zaroorat-e-Mobarzeh Mosalhaneh* ("The need for armed struggle"), could write: "Through our experience we can say that the working class people are simply lumpens. They are not a politically aware class and often indulge in studying reactionary literature." [28] Such are the pessimistic and thoroughly reactionary conclusions these people have drawn. Not being prepared to make an honest self-criticism of their own failure, they blame everything on the working class—the only genuinely revolutionary class in society, and the only class, as Marx explained long ago, that could carry out the socialist transformation of society.

Notes:

1. Tulsiram, *The History of Communist Movement in Iran*, p. 2.
2. Abdus Samad Kambakash, *The brief survey of workers and Communist Movement of Iran 1972*, p. 14.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
4. V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, volume 34, p. 72. Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1969.
5. Ehsan Tabari, *Impact of 1905 Revolution on Constitutional Movement of Iran*, p. 53.
6. B.G. Gafurov and G.F. Kim, *Lenin and the National Liberation in the East*, p. 307-8. Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1978.
7. Alan Woods, *Bolshevism, the Road to Revolution*, p. 38.
8. Abdus Samad Kambakash, *A Brief Survey of Workers and Communist Movement of Iran*, p. 3.
9. *Memoirs of Reza Rusta Literary Association*, Farhang No 3, 1965, p. 82.
10. E. Abra Hamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 15.
11. Tulsi Ram, *The History of Communist Movement in Iran*, p. 42.
12. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Mission for my Country*, pp. 36-8, Hutchinson, London, 1961.
13. Ted Grant, *Russia, from Revolution to Counter-revolution*, p. 153.
14. Trotsky, *In Defence of Marxism*, pp. 4-5, New York, 1970.
15. Ted Grant, *Russia, from Revolution to Counter-revolution*, p. 231.
16. The Department of State Bulletin USA, July 20 1953. p. 76.

17. S. Yinam, *The Middle East in 1953*, Annual Political Survey Middle East Affairs, p. 11, New York January, 1954.
18. The Department of State Bulletin USA, August 10 1953, p. 178.
19. F.M. Jawan Shir, *Experience of 28 mordad* (19 August) Entesharat Hezbe-Tudeh Iran 1980, pp. 312-3.
20. Iraj Eskandari, *What Do We Mean by the National Bourgeoisie*, World Marxist Review, London, September 1959, p. 72.
21. E.A. Bee Bayne, *Persian Kingship in Transition*, p. 92, New York, 1968.
22. Nurredin Kianuri, *Some Points Related to the History of Tudeh Party publication Teheran 1980*, pp. 40-1.
23. Abdus Samad Kambakash, *Iran at Cross Road*, p. 40.
24. Mardom Tudeh Organ Teheran, p. 4, 22 June 1979.
25. *History of Communist Movement in Iran*, pp. 157-8.
26. Murdom, *Once Again We and Referendum*, March 28, 1974, p. 24.
27. Donya, *About Six Years of Armed Struggle in Iran*, November-December, 1976, p. 22.
28. *O Jawan Cheri Kha Khalaq Chee Megoyadan* ("What the Guerrilla says"), September 1972, p. 2.

Chapter 4

The February Revolution of 1979

During the period of struggle against the Shah the mass movement steadily increased and the working class became increasingly radicalised. The culmination of this process was the revolutionary events of 1979. Revolution is an open measurement of strength between contending social forces in the struggle for power. In the revolution of 1979, the colossal power of the proletariat was immediately revealed. Three million people came onto the streets in the biggest mass mobilisation in Iranian history. Faced with a movement of the masses on such a scale, the Shah's seemingly mighty regime collapsed like a pack of cards. Overnight, the whole situation took a sharp turn. The so-called strong state fell to pieces at the first serious test. In such a situation the role of the worker's vanguard party assumed a crucial importance. When the class struggle reaches a critical juncture, fighting for the capture of state power, the question of leadership ultimately decides everything.

The Iranian revolution actually started in early 1977, when civil rights protests by writers and lawyers began to demand more freedom. As always, the intelligentsia is a highly sensitive barometer, reflecting the moods of discontent that are silently accumulating in the deep recesses of society. Sensing danger, American imperialism put pressure on the Shah to carry out reforms and liberalisation. Situations like this are well known to students of history. The pressure from below at a certain stage produces a split in the ruling class. Fearing that they will be overthrown the latter introduces reforms from the top in order to prevent revolution from below. However, as Alexis de Tocqueville explained, the most dangerous movement for a bad government is generally that in which it sets about reform. The Shah announced reforms, including the convening of the majlis (parliament). However, these reforms, far from resolving the problems, opened the way for the overthrow of the Shah's rule. They prepared the way for direct intervention on the stage of history of the working class, together with the downtrodden masses and the middle class.

The leading role of the working class had been ensured by the whole previous development. The very successes of the Iranian economy led to a colossal strengthening of the proletariat. The growth of oil revenues led to a tremendous development of Iranian industry which accelerated after the 1973 jump in oil prices. Iran's Gross National Product (GNP) grew by 33.9 percent in 1973-74, and in 1974-75 by a further 41.6 percent. Industry also grew rapidly, and with it the size and strength of the working class. Thus, in developing the productive forces, the regime prepared its own gravediggers in the form of the mighty Iranian proletariat. Not only had the working class enormously expanded, but it also was very young and fresh. But while there was a tremendous growth in industry, all the social contradictions were continually sharpening. Inflation rocketed and provided the background to the development of colossal unrest in 1977. On top of the appalling living conditions of the masses, the government announced in 1976 a programme of retrenchment. When the Shah decided

to halt the development programme, projects of industrial expansion were cut down by nearly to 40 percent. That policy alone meant that more than 40 percent of unskilled and 20 percent of skilled workers were affected by unemployment. As joblessness rose, so wages fell sharply and the government took back the benefits which it had previously given to the workers. The reaction of the working class was expressed in a growing strike movement in Abadan and Behshahr. The textile workers demanded increased wages and bonuses.

On 8 September 1978 (Black Friday) troops killed thousands of demonstrators in Teheran. In reply, the workers went on strike. That strike was the spark which ignited the dynamite which had been building up all over the country. On 9 September 1978, the Teheran oil refinery workers issued the call to strike to express solidarity with the massacre on the previous day and against martial law. On the very next day the strike had spread like wildfire to Shiraz, Tahriz, Abadan and Isfahan. Refinery workers went on strike everywhere. The economic demands of the workers were rapidly transformed into political one: "Down with the Shah!", "Down with Savak!", "*Marg Ber*, American imperialism!" Then the Ahwaz oil workers went on strike, followed by non-oil workers in Khuzistan who joined the strike at the end of September. *It was above all the movement of the oil workers—the so-called privileged section of the working class in Iran—that decisively undermined the regime.* As the rhythm of the strike movement was intensified and prolonged its character also changed. Ever newer sections were being drawn into the struggle: workers from the public sector—teachers, doctors, hospital workers, clerks, postal workers, telephone and television, and employees from transport, railways, domestic airports and banks all joined the mainstream. White-collar workers with little or no experience of struggle were also drawn into the general movement. The strike of the Central Bank of Iran was particularly effective. This followed the burning of hundreds of banks by the enraged masses. When the bank clerks went on strike, they revealed that in the last three months \$1,000 million had been spirited abroad by 178 members of the ruling elite, including the Shah's relatives. Now busy making preparations for a comfortable exile, having sent his family abroad, the Shah had transferred \$1,000 million to America (this was in addition to the \$1,000 million or so which was held in banks in Bonn, Switzerland and other parts of the world). The Iranian treasury had been plundered by the autocracy and its watchdog, the hated Savak. The tidal wave of strikes paralysed the state machinery; the civil servants were on strike. But it was the magnificent 33 days oil workers' strike that crippled almost everything. This fact alone showed the colossal power of the Iranian proletariat: a single strike of the oil workers caused the government losses of no less than \$74 million a day in lost revenue. Oil workers cut the main artery of state revenues.

Trotsky wrote in the *History of the Russian Revolution*:

"The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business—kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial movements when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime. Whether this is good or bad we leave to the judgement of moralists. We ourselves will take the facts as they are given by the objective course of development.

The history of a revolution is for us first of all a history of the forcible entrance of the masses into realm of rulership of their own destiny." [1]

This is exactly what happened in Iran in 1979. The material basis of the February Revolution lies in the development of the productive forces and the changes that had taken place in Iranian capitalism in the whole of the previous period. The Shah lost the support of all sections of the masses, the peasantry, intelligentsia, different layers of middle class and most ominously of all the army. The state itself was crumbling under the hammer blows of the masses. Day to day there were continuous demonstrations and mass mobilisation which went far beyond the limits of ordinary life. The masses attacked the embassies of Britain and America and burned thousands of American flags. Effigies of US President Jimmy Carter and the Shah were hanged a thousand times over on every street corner of every Iranian city. The Shah came to symbolise both the hated existing order and the Savak's bloody repression.

The state in the last analysis, as explained by Marx and Lenin, consists of armed bodies of men and their appendages. [2] In every class society, the army's composition is drawn from different layers of society, and reflects it more or less faithfully. In ordinary periods the armed forces seem unbreakable, impervious and compact. However, during revolutionary periods, when the armed forces are subjected to enormous stresses and strains, they soon display cracks and fissures, and are inclined to split on class lines in crucial revolutionary moments. The cohesion of the army is not absolute, but depends upon the intensity of the pressure from the mass movement.

As we have seen in every revolution in history, the armed forces can be won over to the side of the masses. The tendency within the armed forces to split on class lines is proportional to the polarisation of class society, as the masses struggle for state power. An article in the American magazine *Newsweek* commented on an angry mob which had gathered on Jaleh Square reacting against the imposition of martial law by shouting slogans against regime: "When they came close, the armed forces ordered the demonstrators to disperse but instead of retreating, the demonstrators disobeyed the order and went on to cross the warning line, slowly choking from teargas fumes, but unwilling to go back. Finally the troops raised their guns, firing bursts into the air, but even then the mob edged closer to the ranks of the troops. And the troops lowered their sight and, when the crowd kept coming, sprayed the demonstrators with round after round."

Splits in the army on class lines do not arise as a simple process but, on the contrary, pass through a series of processes, leading to inner differentiation. The lower ranks of the armed forces tries to gauge the attitude of the masses, observing their commitment, their utter decision to go to the very end to change the old order, their heroic scarifies. At this juncture, once the soldiers realise that the masses are in earnest, they refuse to obey the orders of their officers and join the ranks of the masses, taking weapons with them. And this was exactly what happened in Iran. When thousands of mourners marched to the gate of Teheran's Besheste Zahra cemetery shouting slogans against the Shah attacked an armoured car, a major came out and shouted: "We have no intention of killing you! You are our brothers!" and offered his weapon to the mob: "Here, take my gun and kill me if you wish!" The mourners cheered and shouted slogans of unity against regime. [3] There were other such incidents. Several conscripts shot their

officers or committed suicide on being ordered to open fire on demonstrations. On other side, many deserters and mutineers were executed by the Savak.

A US Army Officer interviewed in *Newsweek* said of the Iranian army: "I would not put a lot of faith in their reliability, we do not know where their breaking point would be." An Iranian official was also quoted as saying: "The longer the Shah keeps his army on the streets, the greater the danger of contamination." [4] This general rule applies in all the countries where this sort of situation develops. The question is always the same: *where is the breaking point?* That is, at what point does quantity become transformed into quality? At what point is the soldier's fear of the officer with his revolver and stick overcome by his sense of the overwhelming power of the masses? Such a question, of course, cannot be answered in advance, but can only be settled by the dialectic of the struggle of living forces.

In Iran the tanks were stationed outside the palace for the first time in 25 years. The Shah himself told *Newsweek*: "We were I think in a very grave situation last Thursday, and it was very close. The people were not abiding by the law. They were not paying the slightest attention to the government's warnings. As a matter of fact, they could have occupied everything they wanted." So in this way, the army when confronted by the masses at boiling point, a decisive polarisation of society can find its reflection in a split in the army. At the decisive moment, the Iranian soldiers refused to open fire on their own workers and peasants, and turned their rifles against the ruling class. This happened in 1979 on many occasions when soldiers and junior officers refused to open fire on the demonstrators. But due to the absence of a clear revolutionary class policy—the opportunity was lost. The army was split in Iran but lacked a clear sense of class direction.

After the split in the army, the Shah lost all control over it. In a panic move, after some initial hesitation, he made one last attempt to stay in power, appointing Shahpur Bakhtiar of the National Front as prime minister. But that manoeuvre failed and the crisis became more acute. On 16 January 1979, the country was in a state of revolutionary ferment. There was no hope left for the Shah, who in the end had to board a plane for Egypt. Thus, the illusion of invincible military might crumbled to dust overnight. The Iranian revolution smashed the fifth biggest army in the world, backed by the might of American imperialism whose vital interests were involved in this key part of the Middle East. Yet in the moment of truth, the pressure of the masses was so intensive that this great army was broken down in pieces like a glass of wine that has fallen from the table of a drunken party.

American imperialism indeed had been so drunk with its illusions concerning the invincibility of the Iranian army whose loyalty to the Shah and the US interests in the Middle East was supposed to be unshakeable, that it looked at the events in Teheran with blank disbelief. Suddenly shocked by the unexpected turn of events and paralysed with fear of a revolution which had swept aside supposedly unbreakable institutions like a man sweeping aside a gnat, it took some time for Washington to decide how to react. The Iranian army which was trained by the Pentagon was now utterly destroyed by a revolution which burned the American flag and chanted: "Death to American imperialism." This was an extraordinary turnabout that affected the entire world situation. The sound of these chants immediately reverberated throughout the whole Middle East, piercing the eardrums of the Saudi ruling class, like a stream of boiling

lead. It interrupted the heart-beat of the American ruling class and provoked a shiver up the spine of the US general staff.

By the time Khomeini returned from his Parisian exile on the first of February 1979, the battle against the Shah was effectively over. The old state had already completely disintegrated and power lay in the streets, waiting for somebody to pick it up. Although the old cleric had played no real part in the Shah's overthrow, there were people who were anxious to give him a leading role. Consequently, he was met by officers who promised him the support of the key units of the armed forces. The army elite was anxious to reassert control and "order". All over the country desertions were occurring daily, and when Shah Pur Bakhtiar used the army police and the Imperial Guard against a mutiny of air force cadets, fighting erupted. Insurgency spread all over military units. One section of the National Front led by Mehdi Bazargan, Khomeini's Militant Wing and some ultra-left groups (the Fedayeen and Mujahidin), joined with the insurgents. Within a short space of time they smashed much of the Shah's war machine capturing weapons factories, military bases, television stations, prisons and the parliament. The top officer corps was paralysed. Shah Pur Bakhtiar went underground and Bazargan, whom Khomeini had declared prime minister, took over.

In the process of the revolutionary mass strikes, the working class organised the *shuras* (soviets) and other embryonic independent organs of power. These were similar to the workers' soviets which first appeared during the mass strikes of the Russian Revolution of 1905. These were eventually destroyed by the tsarist state after the defeat of the 1905 revolution. But in 1917 the soviets once again emerged and played the key role in the October Revolution. Moreover, the system of soviets was not, as the reformists claim, an exclusively Russian phenomenon. The November 1918 Revolution in Germany spontaneously threw up similar bodies. They were the embodiment of workers' self organisation. In every German port, town and barracks, the German workers', soldiers' and sailor's councils were established and held effective political power. Soviets were later established in Bavaria and during the Hungarian revolution of 1919. In Britain also councils of action were established in 1920, which were described by Lenin as "soviets in all but name", and again during the 1926 general strike (committees of action and trades councils). Although the Stalinists and reformists tried to prevent the reappearance of the soviets they re-emerged at every decisive turn in different countries, notably in the Hungarian revolution of 1956 with the creation of the Budapest workers' council.[5]

In Iran the *shura* (soviets) emerged in 1979 but unfortunately were not developed to the level of the October 1917 Revolution. Nevertheless, the potential for workers' power was present. Assef Bayat wrote that the revolutionary crisis had furnished the material basis for such organisation and the organisational and functional forms of workers' power already existed in embryo. (Lenin made a similar point about the soviets in Russia in 1905, when he characterised them as *embryonic forms of workers' government*.) At their inception, however, all that the soviets are is *extended strike committees*. There were already elements of dual power in the situation. Management could not pursue its "normal" functions without the permission of the workers, and neither could the administration. Thus, representatives of the Isfahan Steel Mill had to negotiate with the railway workers requesting the latter to carry the coal they required from Kirman to keep the plant's boilers heated. A similar agreement was reached between oil workers and the railway workers to carry the fuel necessary for domestic

consumption when all other production was at a standstill. These were already the elements of a rudimentary form of working class social administration.[6]

In December and February, the people took control of a number of cities and towns, particularly in the Northern Azeri and Caspian Sea provinces, including Zanjan, Orumich, Salmas, Ardabil Maraghel and Ajabshahr. The very idea of the *shuras* came from the direct and immediate experience of the workers themselves. The working class learns through its direct action and experience to advance its struggle beyond the elementary limits of economic demands, and begins to question the fundamental principles of capitalist domination and legality. Three days after the insurrection, on the 14 February 1979, Khomeini ordered all workers to return to work. But the resistance of the oil workers forced Khomeini to resort to threats: "Any disobedience from, and sabotage of, the provisional government will be regarded as opposition to the genuine Islamic revolution." [7] Despite these threats, the movement continued unabated. In the very first month after the provisional government came to power in February at least some 50,000 workers went on strike. This industrial unrest was fuelled by the radical transformation in the workers' consciousness that had occurred in the course of revolution and particularly after the insurrection. The workers demanded the payment of delayed wages and resisted lockouts and layoffs.

In a number of northern areas the people formed *shuras* in order to run their day-to-day affairs. For the same sort of administration, *shuras* were also formed after the insurrection in the air force—the *shuras-e-home faram* (councils of air force servicemen). These workers' organisations and factory *shuras* which had sprung up after the revolution persisted for some time, fighting stubbornly for survival under difficult conditions. But in the absence of a genuine working class revolutionary party, they were fighting a losing battle. As soon as the new state had consolidated itself, a national campaign of intimidation, harassment and terrorism began against the workers' *shuras*. After the invasion of Kurdistan and the gradual restoration of the government's policy of management from above, the elements of workers' power in the factories were brutally suppressed. After this setback, there was a general downturn in the workers' movement. In all this, the Tudeh Party was solidly behind the government and backed Khomeini.

It is necessary to analyse the real class content of the revolution and the tendencies involved in it. Khomeini and the fundamentalists could never have come to power had it not been for the movement of the workers. In particular it was the heavy battalions of the working class in the key economic sectors which played the decisive role in breaking the back of the state. However, the industrial proletariat is not alone, but surrounded by other layers and social classes. The complex class composition of Iranian society, with its numerous layers of urban poor, semi-proletarian and petit-bourgeois elements, means that the proletarian advanced guard was hemmed in on all sides by more backward and less class-conscious layers. This fact enormously complicated the revolutionary equation and left the door open for the penetration of the mullahs and clerical demagogues like Khomeini.

From June 1977 up to February 1979, the intervention of the proletariat played a key role in the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime. However, in the initial stages (up until mid 1978), one could say that the movement was dominated by backward layers of the working class: the unskilled workers, accompanied by the petty bourgeois (the

bazaaris) and the urban poor (lumpen-proletariat). Since many of these had come relatively recently from the villages and lacked a firm class consciousness, they were easily influenced by the mullahs. This partly explains why the leadership of the movement fell into the hands of the mullahs and to some extent the National Front; it reflected the heterogeneous and amorphous class character of the movement of masses who were only beginning to be awakened to consciousness. Trotsky wrote that the most exploited the least skilled or the most political backwards layers of the proletariat are frequently the first to enter the arena of struggle and in case of defeat are often the first to leave it.[8]

It was the entry of the heavy battalions of the proletariat that played the decisive role in the anti-Shah revolution. When after mid-1978 the skilled workers issued the call for strike action, the strikes spread like a colossal tidal wave, causing the collapse of the state machinery. This it was that provided the revolution with the necessary sweep and depth. Without the participation of the advanced layer of the working class, the Shah would probably not have been overthrown at that time. Without the leadership of the of the proletariat, the undisciplined masses would not have been able to sustain the struggle against the state. The mullahs would have betrayed them, as they had done on previous occasions. Let us remember that already in 1963 the fundamentalists had won the political support from these backward sections of society, yet they failed to overthrow the regime. Soon after their defeat, they had compromised with the ruling class. This exposes the myth of the "revolutionary" Khomeini.

However, in order to understand what happened in 1979-80, it is not sufficient merely to refer to the class balance of forces. In Russia in 1917 the proletariat was infinitely weaker than the Iranian working class in 1979. Yet under the leadership of the Bolshevik Party (which, let us not forget, only had 8,000 members out of a population of 150 million in February 1917), the workers and peasants were won over to the programme of socialist revolution. The reason why this did not take place in Iran was not the objective situation but the false policies and the cowardly conduct of the leaders of the Tudeh Party. Due to the absence of the vanguard party of the working class, the movement was hijacked by the mullahs. All the so-called lefts were either behind the mullahs or else supported the National Front. Not one of them followed an independent class policy, explaining to the workers the need to take power into their own hands, as Lenin and Trotsky did in 1917.

This was the tragedy of the Iranian revolution of 1979. In reality, only the active participation of the proletariat led to victory in 1979. The supposedly invincible Shah was defeated and forced into exile. *Power was really in the hands of the Iranian working class, but, in the absence of a real revolutionary party and leadership, they did not know it, and nobody explained this to them.* Thus, power slipped through their fingers and was immediately seized by Khomeini and the mullahs. They did not lead the revolution, but merely exploited it for their own ends. They did everything in their power to stifle and crush the independent movement of the working class, leaning on the most backward and ignorant layers of society to install themselves in power. And as soon as the lava of revolution had cooled, they set about ruthlessly to crush the movement of the masses.

The October revolution was only victorious because the Russian proletariat was led by a party and a leadership which gave the correct programme and timely slogans which led

the workers towards the conquest of power ("all power to the Soviets"). In this way they brought the revolution to a successful conclusion. The working class in Iran was—and still is—a far bigger proportion of the population than the Russian working class was before the October Revolution of 1917. But in the February 1979 revolution in Iran the revolutionary party was lacking. The *shuras* (soviets) sprang out during the strike movement, but it required a farsighted leadership to place the question of workers' power clearly on the order of the day. Without a perspective of taking power, the *shuras* inevitably withered and perished.

Long ago Karl Marx explained that, without organisation, the working class is only raw material for exploitation. Ted Grant writes: "True, the proletariat possesses enormous power. Not a wheel turns, not a light bulb shines, without its permission. But without organisation, this power remains as just potential. In the same way, steam is a colossal force, but without a piston box, it will be harmlessly dissipated in the air. In order that the strength of the working class should cease to be a mere potential and become a reality, it must be organised and concentrated in a single point. This can be only be done through a political party with a courageous and far-sighted leadership and a correct programme." [9]

Notes:

1. Leon Trotsky from Trotsky's preface to *The History of the Russian Revolution*, translated by Max Eastman.
2. Lenin, *The State and Revolution, The Essential Left*, p. 154, Unwin Books.
3. *Newsweek*, October 1978.
4. *Newsweek*, 25 September 1978.
5. Ted Grant, *Russia from revolution to counter-revolution*, p. 59.
6. Assef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, p. 96.
7. Ettelat (daily evening paper), 15 March 1979.
8. Trotsky, *Rhythm of Struggle*, p. 25.
9. Ted Grant, *Russia from revolution to counter-revolution*, pp. 55-6.

Chapter 5

The Basis of Islamic Fundamentalism

Karl Marx wrote that "Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet found himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being encamped outside the world. Man is the world of man—the state and society. This state and this society produce religion: an inverted world-consciousness, because we live in an inverted world, a world in which natural human relationships are stood on their head." [1]

The Marxist analysis of religions and their social roots aids us in the understanding of past society and, through the understanding of past society, of present-day society which has evolved from it. Once we have grasped this scientific method (historical materialism) then we can easily understand the phenomenon of fundamentalism, which is so widespread in contemporary society—not just Islamic fundamentalism, but also the Jewish, Hindu and Christian varieties. The spread of fundamentalism and other kinds of irrational thought, is a reflection of the impasse of capitalism. Alan Woods writes: "Beneath the thin veneer of civilisation lurk primitive irrational tendencies and ideas which have their roots in a remote past which has been half-forgotten, but is not yet overcome. Nor will they be finally rooted out of human consciousness until men and women establish firm control over their conditions of existence." [2]

Religious ideas still play a powerful role in human society but, in the last analysis, this is based on material realities. Religious thoughts which arise at a certain period of human social development, despite all the peculiar formations and characteristics, ultimately arise out of changes which take place in the productive relations and are themselves reflections of these changes. Every religious institution, and also the organisations based upon it, also at bottom represent certain class interests within society. The tenacious survival of religion is only possible insofar as it maintains its own social base in the support of one class or social grouping or another.

For example, the Roman Catholic Church, which arose in the late ancient world, has survived by adapting itself first to feudal society and then to capitalist society that replaced feudalism. In this process much of its content has changed. In the 16th and 17th centuries, when the crisis of feudalism cracked the social fabric of the old society, a convulsive movement swept all over Europe. Social and class interests were clothed in a religious garb. In this context Luther, Calvin and other religious leaders reinterpreted the Bible, unconsciously reflecting the changing class relations. Although they themselves were not aware of the relations between religious dogma and the underlying interests of social classes, they nevertheless played a fundamental role in determining the course of the bourgeois revolution in Europe (the "Reformation" and the English Revolution). Thus, from a Marxist point of view, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between the ideological outer forms of religion and the class

interests that are expressed in them in a twisted and mystical form. In other words, it is necessary to distinguish between form and content.

Islam is not fundamentally different to any other religion. It was born in the cities of Arabia in the 7th century and reflected definite economic trends and the resulting changes in property relations, class interests and social tendencies. The lengthy wars between Persia and Byzantium had, in addition to weakening their economies, made the trade routes in the Gulf and the Red Sea unsafe. The result was that the trade route through Mecca and Yathrib (Medina) became increasingly important. The influx of wealth into Mecca brought about fundamental changes in its social, political and cultural life.[3] The emergence of private property strengthened the newly-formed Arab merchant class. While the rich merchants were engaged in increasing their personal wealth, they increasingly disregarding their traditional tribal obligation to take care of the poorer members of the clan. The important business of personal enrichment came before clan solidarity. In effect, the old clan society was rapidly disintegrating under the pressure of money relations and trade, leading to growing impoverishment of the masses. The result was increasing hostility towards the leading merchants among a population that still expected respect for the old values.

Among those most alienated were members of the most powerful Mecca tribe, the Quraysh, who did not share in the wealth of the new class of merchants. Muhammad was born into this tribe. His main concern was to remedy the injustices of Meccan society. Agriculture was not possible in Mecca and there had been no development of class relation based on land, as later occurred in feudal Europe.[4] The empires of Persia and Byzantium had played off the different tribes against each other for their own advantage and used the Bedouin warriors as mercenaries.

The religion of the Bedouins, like that of the ancient nomadic ancestors of the Hebrews, consisted of belief in local deities, spirits inhabiting sacred places and fetishist objects of various kinds. Muhammad urged Mecca to accept one God, whose prophet, Muhammad, had been sent to convey the divine law, and who would weigh man's conduct on the Day of Judgement. His message to his followers was: abandon all forms of idolatrous worship and surrender yourself completely to the omniscient and omnipotent, yet compassionate, Allah. He warned the wealthy that considering the accumulation of riches as an end in itself and being niggardly in the use of money would lead them to catastrophe. This message was revolutionary in more than one way. The attacks on worldly wealth struck a responsive note with the poor, but were not well received by the merchants. On the other hand, by demanding the unequivocal acceptance of one God, Muhammad was also creating a loyalty which went beyond traditional allegiance to the clan. This upset powerful clan leaders who also resented Muhammad's strictures against their unshared riches. By 619 hostility towards Muhammad and his small band of followers reached a point where they were often harassed and attacked.

In June 622, at a meeting of 75 Medinese with Muslims of Mecca, the latter decided to migrate to Medina. The Muslims of Mecca headed for Medina, 300 miles to the north, with Muhammad and his companion Abu Bakr the last to leave. Muhammad set out to build a group based upon his followers, the Ummahh. The Ummahh organised a series of attack on Meccan caravans, calumniating in a major victory after which Muhammad divided the booty among the members of Ummahh. Within eight years of his move

from Mecca, the Meccans surrendered themselves to Muhammad. Mecca was already the centre of the regional economy and now became the centre of a rapidly growing Islamic empire. Western Arabia was now unified under a strong central authority ruled by Muhammad. This represented a profound social revolution which united the scattered Arab tribes under one rule and religion. Islam became a powerful force that transformed the world. It acted as a cohesive force which initially served to protect from tribal raids the commerce that had grown up and turned the restless Bedouin energy outwards.

The Muslim empire, spread rapidly within a few years. It covered much of North Africa, Syria, Iraq and Iran. In the context of oppressive Byzantine and Persian rule, the Islamic forces were regarded as liberators. Initially the Islamic empire imposed a relatively modest tax burden on conquered territories. It did not occupy or take away peasants' land and it did not compel them to change their religion. Religious zeal contributed to the victories. But beyond this there was the inner decay of existing empires that caused them to fall like overripe fruit.[5] There was every reason why the Arabs should be hailed as deliverers by the older populations of the Semitic world of Syria and Mesopotamia and by the Egyptians. They had long been in subjection to Rome, then to Byzantium in the West and to the Persian Sassanid Empire in the East. They were in a state of permanent revolt and this revolt had both a religious tinge and a social basis.[6]

The spread of the Islamic religion over a vast region from the Atlantic Coast of North-West Africa to the Bay of Bengal, involved the incorporation into Islamic society of all those people who had adopted Islam. Many of these retained significant elements of their old religious practices and culture, which had a big effect on Islam. This was quite natural since, contrary to the belief of theologians and fanatics, religious ideas do not have a life of their own independent of society. After the death of Muhammad, within two decades, Islam was itself being shaped by the character of the societies it had conquered.

Just two years after Muhammad's death, dissension broke out between the followers of Abu Bakr, who became the first Caliph, and Ali, the husband of the prophet's daughter Fatima. Ali claimed that some of Abu Bakr's rulings were oppressive. Dissension grew to the point that partisan armies fought each other. It was out of this dissension that the separation of the Sunni and Shia sects of Islam arose. Shiism began as a political grouping of the followers of Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad.

Under the Abbasid dynasty the main divisions of the Shiites crystallised as the "fivers", the "seveners" and the "twelvers". The "fivers" hold in special reverence the fifth imam (Ali). The "seveners" and "twelvers" differ on the line of succession after the sixth imam. This imam increasingly came to be regarded as divinely protected against all error and sin, and as the mediator between Allah and the masses. The Sunnis on the other hand stressed that the Koran, and not divinely inspired men, was a guide for all areas of life. The most radical of the Shiite sects in the 9th and 10th centuries were the "seveners" or Ismailis who constituted a serious threat to the Abbasid Empire. Ismailism was movement of the oppressed in its early period, its main followers being the peasants and then the artisans in the towns,

There is a striking similarity between the early movements of Islam and the early movement of Christianity which was also based on the poor and oppressed. Not for nothing did the Roman enemies of the early Christians stigmatise their faith as a religion of "women and slaves". In Persia the militant Safavid warriors came to power in 1501 following a popular "twelver" Shiism. Under the Shiites the old Persian tradition of hereditary monarchy was transformed from a messianic ideology into a means of solidifying Safavid rule and into a weapon against the rival Sunni Ottoman empire. This was a pattern that reproduced itself again and again: the poor masses, rallying under the flag of religion, revolted against the wealthy elite, but then the resulting dynasty, having established itself in power, becomes rich and oppressive, and is directed against the downtrodden masses.

One idea taken from the Ismaili Shiite sect by the Shias and Sunnis alike is that of the Mehdi. The Mehdi—the divinely guided one—will appear just before the end of time, when the world will have gone to wrack and ruin, full of injustice and oppression, to save humankind. This idea is similar to that of the Christian Messianic schools who have been waiting for the coming of Christ for the last two thousand years. It is also rooted in the yearning of the suffering and oppressed for a better world and a divine Saviour who will rid the world of injustice, punish the evil and give succour to the weak and downtrodden.

Later, against the background of imperialist colonial expansion, Islamic revivalist movements emerged as a focal point of resistance to the foreign oppressor. The struggle against European imperialism was a source of renewed vigour for Islam. Islamic revivalist movements came onto the political arena at a time when the socio-economic relations in colonial and semi-colonial societies had already had gone through a process of transformation under the rule of imperialism. What Lenin and Trotsky described as combined and uneven development acted as a powerful agency for social and economic change.

The corruption of the regimes and the servile and cowardly conduct of the ulama (clergy) in relation to the foreign masters produced a series of movements which set out to return to an original and "pure" version of Islam as a means of fighting against the establishment. After the First World War, European imperialism divided the Ottoman empire into spheres of influence and brutally exploited the region. Against this colonisation, there were different sorts of responses from the local elites—some organised armed resistance, some used political pressure, some attempted to fight western imperialist influence by copying the west, modernising the economy and reforming the state. But all these strategies ended with failure. Traditional manufacturing was replaced by capitalist methods imported from the West which transformed the internal social relations of the East. Colonisation also brought profound changes in both political and social structure.

The first Islamic revivalist current was expressed by Jamal-al-Din Al-Afghani, who argued that: "The divisions which have occurred in Muslim States originate only from the failure of rulers who deviate from the solid principles upon which the Islamic faith is built and leave the road which was followed by their early ancestors. When those who rule Islam return to the rules of their law and model their conduct upon that practised by the early generations of Muslims it will not be long before God gives them extensive power and bestows strength upon them comparable to that wielded by the

orthodox caliphs, who were leaders of the faith." He argued strongly against the idea of Muslim national states, and called for a pan-Islamic state, the unification of all countries with an Islamic tradition. Afghani's approach was a break with the traditional line and called for the restoration of purified Islamic values. Jamaluddin Afghani laid the basis for radical Islam or Islamic fundamentalism. From this background arose *Ikhwan al Muslimin* as established by Hassan al-Banna in 1929. In fact, this was an absolutely utopian approach towards the problem facing the colonial countries.

After the Second World War, the colonial revolution mobilised the colonial masses in their millions in the struggle against imperialism. But after the so-called liberation, the colonial bourgeois stands revealed as completely impotent to solve the tasks posed by history. The experience of the Algerian revolution shows that, on the basis of capitalism, there is no way out for the masses. Despite the heroic struggle against the French oppressors, Algeria today is more dependent on imperialism than ever. And the same thing can be said of all the Muslim countries after so-called independence from imperialism. On the basis of capitalism nothing can be solved. The widespread poverty, the alienation of the masses, particularly the youth and middle class layers, has pushed them into the blind alley of religious fundamentalism. The same phenomenon can be observed in Egypt, Palestine, Sudan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Iran.

Radical Islamic movements do not find support equally in all sections of society. Islamic fundamentalism gets nourishment from different social groupings, each of which utilises this current in their own class interests. The ruthless over-exploitation of the colonial countries, and the crisis of the world economy over the last 30 years, has aggravated all these contradictions. Modern industry has developed to the point where the narrow economic limits of the nation-state are too narrow for it to operate efficiently. But the world economy is too competitive for them to survive without state protection. And the opening up of the colonial countries for imperialism has intensified the crisis. The majority of these countries spend more than 30 percent of their export earning on debt servicing and the payment of interest. The impact of the privatisation of state-owned industries and utilities has created growing resentment among workers and the middle class youth deprived of jobs and career prospects.

After the collapse of Stalinist Russia and counter-revolution in Afghanistan, the black economy, particularly the drug sector, was the major source of funding for the Islamic fundamentalists. The producers and dealers of illegal drugs are therefore backing these organisations to protect themselves against pro-IMF policies. Sections of the Saudi ruling class are playing a leading role in this black economy. A good example is Osama Bin Laden. US imperialism and Saudi Arabia are both responsible for the Taliban reaction in Afghanistan. They armed and financed the Taliban in their struggle against the former Stalinist regime in Kabul. This mafia earns \$80 billion per year from drug trafficking. World imperialism now wrings its hands over this illegal trade in human misery, but it was imperialism—especially US imperialism—which handed Afghanistan bound and gagged to the forces of reaction and turned it into the largest poppy-cultivating area in the world.

However, the phenomenon of fundamentalism is complex. For example, in Iran the Shah's land reforms of the 1960s benefited a minority of the peasants whilst leaving the rest no better off and sometimes worse off. These land reforms enriched the nobility and absentee landowners who dominated Iran. The real motive behind the land reforms was

to push the peasants off the land to provide cheap labour for the factories. So in this context peasants suffered, and were detached from traditional rural society. That section of the rural poor that suffered from the Shah's reforms flooded into the cities, desperately looking for work and bread, but the cities of Iran were not adjusted to properly meet the new situation, with a chronic lack of housing, poor infrastructure, scarce health facilities and widespread unemployment.

These conditions increased the alienation of the poorest layers of urban society. In Iran (and also in Afghanistan) the majority of them, suffering from bad housing and low wages, preferred to live in the mosques which offered them some crumbs of consolation and help in their affliction. Large numbers of Muslim volunteers, largely drawn from the poorest sections of the population, impoverished from their childhood, left their homes and joined the mullahs' networks in the mosques. They worked as a reserve army and they played an essential part in mobilising the forces for pro- or anti-regime demonstrations.

Although the main forces for the mullahs were drawn from the poor, a section of traditional traders also financed them. The Islamic fundamentalists got vital political support from among the new middle class that had arisen as a result of the limited capitalist development. The children of the new middle class gained access to the universities, where they met with new and severe frustrations arising from the lack of job and career prospects. This pushed a layer of educated or half-educated youths towards terrorist activities. Organisations such as Hizbollah, Hamas, FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), etc., came mainly from this layer. The desperation of these youths is such that they are prepared to throw away their lives in suicide bomb attacks. They are seeking a road to emancipation from the agony of their lives, but have found only a dead-end. The widespread social and family crisis, alienation and above all the lack of a clear Marxist alternative has pushed them towards the blind alley of religious fundamentalism. Suffering from a hopeless present, and with no hope in the future, they turn to the past for consolation, and the past for them becomes glorious. Mass poverty, misery, oppression all combine in aggravating the fundamentalist phenomenon. And continuous splits among these organisations create a favourable environment for the most bitter, violent conflicts, approaching a situation close to civil war.

Thus, wherever one looks, it is hard to find a single stable Muslim bourgeois regime. A terrible crisis is looming over these countries. A turning-point was February 1979, when the Shah's regime fell. However, from the very beginning there has been a widespread misconception about the nature and content of the Iranian revolution. The Islamic fundamentalists proclaimed it as the victory of Islamic ideology and intellectuals over imperialism. They systematically distorted the real facts of the Iranian revolution. In this way, they did their best to conceal and deny the role of the working class in the revolution. This lie has been repeated by the imperialists who have their own reasons for misrepresenting the nature of the Iranian revolution, particularly to confuse and disillusion the workers of the West. Some bourgeois intellectuals went so far as to proclaim Shiism as a "revolutionary" phenomenon. They all presented a completely false picture of the revolution.

Partly as a result of years of propaganda from the bourgeois camp, the facts about the Iranian revolution are now a book sealed with seven seals for most people. It is very important to expose the real role played by the fundamentalists in Iran: how they hi-

jackpot the revolution, crushed the working class, restored capitalist relations and the bourgeois state. The Iranian mullahs had enjoyed good relations with the Qajar Dynasty, they occupied key official posts under the Shah, especially in the judiciary. They also raised a lot of money from the traders, as well as the income they drew from the *voaf* (endowed) lands.

A section of the mullahs had participated in the movement against the Shah in 1892 when the Shah gave further concessions to the British imperialists in the sale and export of tobacco. That concession affected the merchant class, and the pressure from the merchants inclined the mullahs to protest against the Shah. But prior to this, the mullahs had been closely integrated with Qajar dynasty. In 1927 some mullahs protested against the Shah's reform policy, which included the reforms of the legal and educational institutions. In 1936 the Shah legislated in favour of the unveiling of women, and to bring the legal and educational system under state control.

After the 1953 coup of the CIA against Mossadeq, which restored the Shah, they had realigned with the regime. In that period they were openly allied to the Reza Khan dictatorship. The rest of the opposition forces were in disarray at this time. After 1953 the Tudeh party subjected itself to self-criticism for pursuing a left-sectarian policy and not fully supporting Mossadeq's government. But as a result they only went deeper into the marsh. In 1963 during the Shah's White Revolution, the party was silent and remained a passive onlooker of events. The National Front after the 1953 coup went through many splits. However, as we have seen, the mullahs only emerged as an opposition force in 1963, when they came out against land reforms. Land reform was viewed as a threat to *voaf* (endowed) property which served as an important source of income for the mullahs. They combined with sections of the feudal landowners to organise a campaign against the reforms—not from a revolutionary, but from a purely reactionary standpoint. Only at this point did Khomeini emerge as an anti-Shah leader. The majority of the mullahs were actually in support of the Shah's regime. Khomeini's first criticisms came to the surface when he accused the Shah of abandoning Islamic precepts in favour of imperialism. But his criticism remained within the confines of the establishment. He merely protested against the Shah's excesses.

However, the conflicting interests between the Shah and the mosque grew and produced new conflicts. When the Shah announced a referendum on his "White Revolution", Khomeini and the religious establishment opposed it, and the regime attacked the protesters. Khomeini was arrested. After that Khomeini went into exile for 15 years. In exile he wrote the book *Velayet-e-faqih* (Rule of the Jurist) in which he explained how to reach a pure form of Islam, and how it applied to the state. He spent a lot of time in the Najaf to deliver lectures on Islam, and called on the whole religious establishment to move with him against the Shah.

In September 1978 mass strikes gripped the country. Beginning at first as a protest against killings, they soon became converted into strikes on economic and political demands. It is true that the majority of the demonstrations, especially in the first six months of 1978, were connected with the religious establishment. In December 1977, Khomeini again called for the overthrow of the Shah and the re-establishment of the 1905 constitution. Mullahs through the mosques appealed to the anti-Shah forces and attracted the traders, lumpen-proletariat, and even the Tudeh Party and some sections of the National Front.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the key event that brought the Shah down, was neither the petty bourgeoisie nor the urban poor classes, but the strikes of the advanced workers, particularly the oil workers. The state collapsed, mutiny spread inside the armed forces. This was the result of the massive movement of the working class. Unfortunately, due to absence of the subjective factor, i.e. the revolutionary party, much of the rising movement became identified with Khomeini. On his return to Teheran in January 1979 he became the symbolic "leader of the opposition". After the overthrow of the Shah, as we have pointed out, the *shuras* (soviets) emerged in the factories; universities were under the control of the left students; in the cities, *shura*-style administrations were formed.

Khomeini moved very tactfully at first. He appointed Bazargan (the representative of the National Front) as the prime minister. But there was another centre of authority—a so-called revolutionary council nominated by Khomeini. Through the alliance with Bazargan they started a campaign against the *shuras* and the Kurdish national movement. They formed the Hizbollah, a terrorist organisation to use against left forces and women activists.

Khomeini utilised these Bonapartist tactics to concentrate power at the top and to isolate Bazargan. He sent his supporters to capture the American Embassy and then utilised the popular anti-American feelings to mobilise mass forces behind the IRP (Islamic Republican Party). In all this, the Tudeh Party was behind Khomeini. When he had subdued the revolutionary currents to some extent, he formed an alliance with Bani Sadir to attack the universities which were not under fundamentalist control. They sent militant gangs of Hizbollah supporters to invade the universities, brutally killing students and burning all left literature and then closed all colleges and universities for three years. He also made use of all external events to consolidate more power in his hands. The Iraqi invasion, the adventurist tactics of ultra-left organisations, like the bombing of the IRP headquarters—all these factors helped Khomeini to consolidate his grip on power and balance between the different factions within the IRP.

The first aim of Khomeini was to destroy the independent movement of the Iranian working class which had carried out the revolution. After consolidating the power at the top he brutally crushed the *shuras*, using the Islamic Hizbollah movement on the phoney pretext that they were "backed by the CIA". Fundamentalism represents a terrible blind alley for the masses. In a negative way, this phenomenon represents a striking confirmation of the theory of permanent revolution. On a capitalist basis there was no way forward for Iran. The failure of the proletariat to take power when that was possible led, not to progress, but to a monstrous regression. For twenty years Iran has been in the grip of religious reaction. However, in a broader historical sense, the rise of fundamentalism will be seen as a temporary aberration. Paradoxically, the setting up of an "Islamic republic" will prove to be the undoing of the fundamentalists. The fact that the fundamentalists have come to power, and have had two decades to reveal themselves in their true colours has given the masses ample opportunity to understand the reactionary and corrupt nature of fundamentalism.

At the present time, the dictatorship of the mullahs is nearing its limits. The clerics are clinging to power and have so far succeeded, mainly through the temporary inertia of the masses. This will not last forever. The Shah's powerful army and police did not save him once the workers began to move. Already after 20 years of rule by the mullahs, the

masses are fed up with their hypocrisy and corruption. The youth are in open revolt. The split within the mullahs camp and their recent defeat in election indicates the beginning of a new process. At a certain stage there can be a revolutionary explosion of the Iranian proletariat which will take the world by surprise, as it did in 1979. But this time the message must be clear: *The alternative to imperialism and capitalism is not fundamentalism, but socialist revolution.*

Notes:

1. Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law*, Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, Progress Publishers, Moscow.
2. Alan Woods and Ted Grant, *Reason in Revolt*, p. 35.
3. Bryan S. Turner, *Weber and Islam, a critical study*, p. 29.
4. Asghar Ali, *The Origin and Development of Islam*, p. 45.
5. R. Ashtor, *A Social and Economical History of Near East in the Middle Ages*, p. 11.
6. Maurice Lambard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, pp. 3, 113.
7. Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollah*, p. 23.

Chapter 6

The Economics of Counter-revolution

After the revolution, the mullahs promised the masses an end of exploitation. They asserted that justice was only possible if Iran went back to the pure Islamic heritage, the Umma model of 7th century Arabia. The Islamic Republic Party (IRP) proclaimed as its aim the Islamisation of Society, the re-introduction of the values of Islamic culture, a lowering of Iran's dependence on oil revenues, a raising of the living standards of the general population, and a reduction of the inequalities which were the defining characteristic of the previous regime. In the twenty years since the mullahs (fundamentalists) formed the government, Iran has had only limited success in achieving its economic goals and this has resulted in widespread dissatisfaction in Iran.

In the years following the establishment of Islamic Republic in 1979, the Iranian economy experienced a relatively sharp decline in real output, a decline in GDP, a drastic reduction in average living standards of the Iranian masses; per capita GDP declined by 47 percent between 1979 and 1987 at an average rate of 5.2 percent per year.[1] The economic crisis of 1984 was followed by a decline in oil revenues and capacity utilisation, intensification of the war with Iraq and an increase in unemployment and inflation. The per capita GDP also continued to decline to 50 percent of the 1979 figure. The economic crisis was aggravated by the corruption and inefficiency of the mullahs who were placed in charge of newly nationalised large business enterprises.

In short, economic conditions in Iran deteriorated rapidly after the revolution due to a number of external and internal factors. Prominent among the internal factors were counter-revolution, repression against the workers particularly the skilled and advanced workers, hundreds of whom were murdered by the *Pasdaran* (Islamic death squads), and others fled abroad. The Shah's Savak and members of his family plundered at least one billion dollars which were sent abroad. Unemployment, inflation, and the flight of capital increased and a large number of projects undertaken by foreigners were suspended.

External factors included a prolonged and costly war with Iraq, turbulence in world oil markets, resulting in reduced oil income, the freezing of Iranian foreign exchange assets (\$11 billion) following the hostage crisis and the embargo imposed by American imperialism. Despite the propaganda of the mullahs about economic growth and prosperity, Iran has increasingly become polarised into a two-class society of rich and poor. In 1987 the Keyhan Daily reported that absolute poverty had increased among Iranians and the real purchasing power of salaried people had fallen by 60 percent since the revolution. People on low wages and salaries were forced to pay for exorbitantly priced commodities by selling their homes, appliances and furniture, reducing their consumption level or changing their diet to include more staple foods offered in

rationed markets at official prices; and finally by borrowing money or dipping into savings.[2]

During the 1990s Iran's economy continued to be characterised by sluggish growth and high inflation, averaging 31.3 percent between 1994 to 1997 and reaching a peak of nearly 50 percent in 1995.[3] At the close of the decade Iran's reliance on its oil revenue remains unabated, the standard of living of the population has declined both in absolute (as measured by GDP per capita) and relative terms. The government had promised people free housing, water, electricity, public transport and education, plus a direct share of the oil revenues. Such promises proved impossible to keep. But the regime spent relatively large sums on education, health, electricity and water in the rural areas. During the first 16 years after the counter-revolution, growth was almost nil, with GDP declining by 7 percent. Unemployment was estimated at 30 percent for 1993. As a result, more than 60 percent of Iranians were living under the poverty line.[4]

At the top, split among the mullahs first emerged clearly when Rafsanjani tried to liberalise the economy, i.e. started the process of privatisation and reduced government intervention. This intensified the conflict within the clergy, because the government owns the petroleum, banking, insurance, power and most large-scale manufacturing industries, and controls access to foreign exchange. Large charitable foundations called *Bonyads* most with strong connections to the government, control properties and businesses that were expropriated from the former Shah and his family. The *Bonyads* exercise considerable influence in the economy, but do not account publicly for revenue and pay no taxes. Basic foodstuffs and energy costs are subsidised heavily by the government. Oil exports account for more than 80 percent of foreign exchange earnings. Economic performance is affected adversely by the mullahs' mismanagement and extreme corruption, and was made worse during the years of falling oil prices.

Soon after Khatami's election he announced a new economic programme aiming at the privatisation of state-owned industries, an improvement in tax collection and a general reduction of government inefficiency. Nevertheless, Iran still faces severe economic problems. In 1998 falling oil prices caused a reduction of \$5 billion in oil revenues. According to Iran's Central Bank, the Iranian economy grew 1.7-2 percent in 1998, compared with 2.5 percent in 1987 and 5.2 percent in 1986. However, according to the *Economist*, Iran's economy was characterised by a negative growth rate of 2.3 percent in 1998. According to Iran's central bank, Iran's economic growth was two percent last year (1999).[7]

To some extent, the government generally increased the living standard of rural areas in the fields of education, electricity, health, water and telephones between 1988 and 1992. But there is colossal inequality and corruption. In 1987 the bottom ten percent of the population received no more than 1.3 percent of the national income, whereas the top ten percent received 33 percent of the national income.[8] According to the *Keyhan Daily* in 1986 some 5,000 *bazaaris* made 50 billion rials in after tax profits. These were merchants and traders who control the country's distribution channels and construction contractors who have contacts with the regime.[9]

A significant number of large industries and all the banks, insurance companies, the nationalised. Foundation of the *Jahad-e-Sazandegi* (Construction Crusade) and the *Bonyads* foundation for the oppressed helped expand welfare services in the rural areas

and among the urban poor. Subsidies were provided for basic commodities and taxes on the rich were increased, labour laws were enacted and also laws providing for unemployment benefit, social security and a minimum wage were enacted. Social security and welfare as a percentage of total government expenditures increased from 6.1 in 1972 to 18.4 percent in 1990.[10] The regime also attempted to control inflation, but due to high inflation has now abolished most subsidies. In order to find a way out of the mess Iran developed a Five Year Plan (1989-94) concentrating on infrastructure improvement, communication power and education. From 1989 to 1993, the foreign debt reached \$30 billion, of which \$8 billion was in arrears. By late 1992, Iran was becoming unable to service the debt and creditors had rescheduled a total of about \$7 billion of Iranian loans. This provided a breathing space through 1995.

The second five-year plan continued the work of the first plan, aiming to expand non-oil production and exports but continuing to be driven by Iran's oil. Since the early 1990s, based on the advice of the IMF, priorities have been placed on privatisation, deregulation, the "open market", the cutting of subsidies and downsizing. Last year the government faced a revenue shortfall of \$6 billion, or one third of the state budget, and was forced to suspend most development projects. Iran's worst drought in 30 year has also taken its toll, despite the recent rains. The damage to farming, which employs about a quarter of the workforce, is estimated at \$1 billion.[11] According to the latest survey, the area of cotton farms fell 26,705 hectares or 10 percent in 1997 from 233,014 hectares a year later.[12]

Teheran faces a serious water crisis as existing water reserves in the country's dams were 5.3 billion cubic meters, which showed a 15 percent decline compared with the same period last year. Ten million cubic meters of water is consumed annually in Iran which mainly comes from wells and springs. The water shortage crisis in the Teheran is even greater. Dams which provide Teheran tap water have reached the lowest level in the last 33 years. Teheran, which has the capacity to accommodate two to three million people, now has over seven million permanent residents as well as three million daily commuters.[13]

The hopes that Khatami has pinned on economic reform will soon evaporate, because the non-oil sector of the economy is on the brink of collapse. The only way to revert this would be hefty reinvestment. Iranian industry needs money, and there are two big sources of money. One is the black economy which is controlled and run by conservatives or hard-line mullahs, who are dead-set against investing in the economy which is outside state control. The second source of money is oil, on which more than 80 percent of the Iranian economy is dependent. Its exports provide 80 percent of the country's foreign reserves. Tumbling prices of oil will soon snuff out the reformists' hopes.

Any fall in oil prices will bring Iran's economy to the point of collapse. Iran is the second biggest oil producer within the OPEC cartel, and it is very possible that in a short space of time OPEC will decide to increase in the production of oil, a move that could cause a sharp fall in the price of a barrel of crude. This will have a very harmful effect on the Iranian economy. There is split in OPEC on this issue. Iran is trying to convince the other OPEC members to keep any increase in production to a bare minimum, arguing that an increase in springtime cannot be justified when demand in consumer countries tends to fall.

What makes life more difficult for Iran is that it is very close to oil production capacity. According to the International Energy Agency's January 2000 figures, Iran is producing 3.4 million barrels of crude a day, or not far off it, whereas full capacity is 3.7 million.[14] So it will be unable to take advantage of an increase in oil production if this is decided by OPEC, while suffering from the ensuing fall in revenue. Iran has only just come out of a budget deficit caused by two years of falling oil prices that cost the country about 5 billion dollars a year. The five year plan which has just begun assumes revenues of \$112 billion, of which \$58 billion is meant to come from oil export revenue.

The third source of money is the IMF, which will impose conditions like privatisation, cutting more subsidies, devaluation and downsizing. If Khatami started an economic reform on these lines, that could mean the possibility of civil war. Already the process was shown in outline with the attempted assassination of a leading reformist, shortly after the election. It will not be so easy for Khatami and his reformist parliament to introduce economic reforms. So the president and the new reformist parliament face not only resistance from the hardliner mullahs but differences are also growing amongst its own supporters. Even Khatami has to be very careful on this issue. The *Economist* writes that the reformists pay lip service to economic liberalisation, but have neither the courage nor the authority to free themselves from the commitment to pay billions of dollars in direct and indirect subsidies. The price of basic goods such as fuel, bread and medicine are ridiculously low, from the bourgeois point of view. The *Economist* further writes: "There is endless talk of encouraging non-oil exports. Many factories are operating at a fraction of their capacity because they are unable to import spare parts or raw material." [15]

If Khatami introduces economic reforms and its first attack will be on the workers, there are already signs of what he can expect. Discontent amongst workers was expressed in demonstrations in February against a new law that exempts small workplaces from labour laws, so giving employers more power to sack workers and cut wages. And one of the biggest demonstration for the first of May shows the changing mood in the Iranian working class. On the other hand, if he fails to introduce economic reforms, capitalist analysts are warning that he will be unable to create an economic recovery. Great masses of the population will be unemployed and disenchanted with the clerical regime's repressive policies. Demands for jobs, reforms and westernisation will develop into criticism and rebellion against the government. This will be a much more intense version of the current "culture wars" as the elite attempts to hold on to power and justify the regime at the same time as the potential intensities for conflict, ranging from street protests and repression to near civil war.[16]

The Iranian economy is now in a state of crisis. The black economy's share of the total steadily increased after the counter-revolution. The majority of the Mafia is backing the hardliners. Some sections are backing ex-mayor Ghulam Hussain Krbasni, one of the Khatami's close associates. The currency, the rial, is near collapse. The official rate is still 3,000 to the dollar but the black market rate—the one generally used—has fallen in the past weeks from 6,000 to the dollar to 8,600. Inflation is 30-40 percent, unemployment more than 30 percent, the foreign debt has reached more than \$30 billion. As the economy plunges ever deeper into recession, there will be no hope left for the masses. The reformists will soon lose their support. Their promises will soon be proved impossible to keep, particularly in the midst of an emerging economic slump.

Notes:

1. Hooshang Amirahmed, *Revolution and Economic Transition, the Iranian Experience*, State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 194.
2. The Kayhan Daily, 27 October 1987.
3. Hassan Hakimian, *Institutional Change and Macro Economic Performances in Iran, Two Decades After the Revolution (1979-99)*, The Economic Research Forum Working Paper Series, University of London (1999).
4. Hoosang Amirahmad, *Revolution and Economic Transition, the Iranian Experience*, State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 198.
5. The Irani Time, 28 June 1994, p. 4.
6. The Ettalaat-e-Siasi-eqteesadi. No. 8 (29 April 1988), p. 3.
7. The Kayhan Daily, (13 August 1988).
8. The World Bank, World Development Report 1992. Oxford University.
9. *The Economist*, 14 August 1999, p. 37.
10. The Kayhan Daily, 17 January 2000.
11. The Kayhan Daily, 6 January 2000.
12. The Kayhan Daily, 15 February 2000.
13. *The Economist*, 14 August 1999.
15. Stratfor's Iran's Strategic focus, 7 March 2000.

Chapter 7

Iranian Perspectives

The counter-revolutionary Khomeini regime found its social basis in the petty bourgeoisie and the lumpen-proletariat. These layers had a material interest in supporting the regime. They occupied the properties of those who had fled, no longer paying rents and mortgages to the banks etc. Khomeini also got the support of millions of the poorest sections of the working class who came from the countryside to the town in search of jobs. The majority of them work on construction sites in miserable conditions. Through the *Komitehs* (revolutionary committees) which spring up after insurrection, the regime started to distribute medicine and clothes to these workers, and provided them with shelter through the mosques.

The Shah's police, court and prisons had been abolished by the insurrection, while much of the civil administration remained intact. These institutions soon came down on the mullahs' side. In March 1979 the fundamentalists established an official body of armed people, the "revolutionary guards"—though they should actually have been called the counter-revolutionary guard. They were in fact the shock-troops of Khomeini's counter-revolution. The recruits for this Praetorian Guard of reaction were drawn from the fundamentalists' most loyal supporters—the lumpen-proletarian layers who had existed on the fringes of the urban economy, together with the lower petty bourgeois elements who had been the most enthusiastic pro-Khomeini activists in the *Komitehs*.

The purpose of the creation of this armed body was to control the *Komitehs* self-movement and limit their scope of action, while on the other hand to take control of the *Komitehs* nationally. The most politically class-conscious elements in the provisional government understood that a serious mass movement in industry was the biggest threat to the new regime. So the *Pasdaran* was prepared for the job of liquidating the workers' *shuras* and other rank-and-file committees. The *Pasdaran* were also used for attacks on the peasants and women's movements and they also brutally suppressed the Kurdish national movement. These counter-revolutionary death squads then became Khomeini's most important agency of repression, and was used every where the government found resistance. They mercilessly struck down every movement that was not under the control of the mullahs. None could stand against them. The destiny of movements like the national (Kurdish) movement, the women's movement, the student's movements in the universities, and so on was inextricably linked to that of the working class. Once the *shuras* went under, the most advanced sections of the working class were defeated and all sections of the mass movement found themselves at the mercy of the regime.

Looking back it seems to many that the rise of Khomeini was irresistible. As a matter of fact, his victory was not preordained. The regime was not as united or invincible as it appeared. There was a spilt from very beginning between the mullahs on the issue of land confiscation and on the question of the war with Iraq, which divided Rafasanjani,

and Khomeini. The invasion of Iran by the Iraqi army allowed Khomeini to use the war as the excuse for a new offensive against the remnants of the revolutionary currents within society.

The Iraqi invasion

The Iranian revolution had stimulated hopes for a change all over the Middle East. Oppressed nationalities derived inspiration from the revolutionary movement of the Iranian working class against the Shah. That gave a powerful impulse to the national movement of the Kurds in the North of Iran, detonating a revolutionary upsurge which spread across the Kurdish areas in neighbouring Iraq and Turkey. The impact of the Iranian working class's revolutionary movement to overthrow the Shah shook the reactionary Arab regimes of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain and even Egypt. A wave of unrest swept through the Arab working class and middle classes throughout the Middle East.

After the Second World War, the importance of the Middle East for imperialism was enhanced by its oil resources. Three-quarters of the world's known oil reserves are concentrated in this region. American imperialism and the Middle East ruling classes were very anxiously watching the unfolded process of the revolution in Iran. The events in Iran had serious repercussions throughout the Middle East. Multinationals such as Exxon and Mobil which had made billions of dollars in the Gulf oil fields were extremely anxious about the situation. They put pressure on the government of the USA and gathered together all the sheikhs, kings and emirs to exorcise the revolutionary spectre from the Middle East.

The outbreak of demonstrations in the oilfields in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia alarmed the Pentagon. They decided to play the "Iraqi card" in a desperate attempt to destroy the Iranian revolution, which, even in a distorted form, was having an unsettling effect on a strategically vital part of the world. The American imperialists imagined that if they backed and supported Iraq against Iran in the war, this would restore the Iranian pro-American elements to power on Iraqi bayonets. They therefore incited Saddam Hussein to attack Iran, and equipped the Iraqi army with latest weapons—they even supplied the chemical weapons about which they now so loudly complain.

Saddam Hussein was very glad to receive the American imperialists' offer to attack Iran. Saddam thought that after the fall of the Shah, the watchdog of American imperialism, he would shift the regional balance of power in the Middle East in Iraq's favour. He used the war against the Kurdish liberation struggle and diverted the Iraqi masses from the path of opposition to his regime. He also managed to isolate the opposition inside the Baath Party. But when Iraqi forces launched an attack on the Iran's Khuzistan region in September 1980, Khomeini was even more pleased than Saddam. The USA's backing for Iraq's attack presented him with a golden opportunity to consolidate his position even more and to mobilise the masses behind him. The war initially aroused mass enthusiasm. Iran conscripted millions of poor people and formed the *baseej* militia to fight back against Iraq. Khomeini utilised the war as an instrument of repression against the *shuras*, to which he countered the idea of "Islamic Councils". On a tide of patriotic feeling, the last remnants of workers' control were abolished and replaced by these Islamic Councils which faithfully carried out the commands of the

"Leader". In this way, Khomeini successfully completed the process of turning the revolution into counter-revolution, restoring the state and capitalism.

The Tudeh Party did not play any independent role in relation to the war. It is true that, in the beginning, the situation was difficult. Iran was under attack from the reactionary Saddam Hussein, who, with the active backing of US imperialism, was intent upon dismembering Iran and crushing the revolution in blood. Naturally, the masses were prepared to fight against the twin enemies of Saddam Hussein and US imperialism, "the Great Satan". But, on the one hand, the healthy anti-imperialist instincts of the workers and peasants were being abused by Khomeini as a screen to carry through the counter-revolution. On the other hand, the only way to defeat Saddam Hussein and imperialism was by the working class taking power into its hands and waging a revolutionary war against Iraq, appealing to the Iraqi workers to rise against Saddam.

It was the elementary duty of the Communist Party to maintain a principled class position. They should have said to the masses: "Yes, Saddam Hussein is our enemy. We must fight to defend our revolution. But we have no trust in Khomeini to do this. Let us fight to take over the land, the factories and the banks under the control of our own *shuras*. Then we can have the confidence and the strength to fight against the Iraqi invaders and wage a revolutionary war the imperialists and their Arab lackeys by spreading the revolution throughout the Middle East." But, to their eternal shame, throughout all this process Stalinists of the Tudeh Party supported Khomeini.

The Iranian masses are still paying a ghastly price for the betrayal of the war that dragged on for eight brutal years costing one million Iranian lives. In short space of time, the fumes of chauvinism wore off and the masses grasped the reality of fundamentalist demagoguery in all its nakedness. They compared the speeches of the mullahs encouraging Iranian mothers to sacrifice their sons at the front and the workers and peasants to go hungry in the interests of the war effort with the reality of corruption, voracious greed and all-pervasive hypocrisy of the ruling caste. Khomeini had promised a "pure" Islamic Republic, free from corruption. Now the masses had seen the real face of the mullahs and understood the inner essence of their creed.

In an article dated 9 February 1979, Ted Grant wrote: "But once having come to power, the futility of the reactionary and medieval ideas of abolishing interest, while not altering the economic basis of society will be shown to result in chaos. Support for Khomeini will melt away after he forms a government." [1] Two decades later, the Iranian masses are undoubtedly tired of the monstrous regime of the mullahs. Lord Acton once said: "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely." We have seen in Iran that the combination of absolute power and enormous wealth brought the Shah's regime to a precipitous end. Now the same fate awaits the regime of the Ayatollahs. Every bureaucracy is prone to corruption, and that of the mullahs is no exception. Long ago Frederick Engels explained that, in any society where art, science and government is the monopoly of a minority, that minority will always abuse its position in its own interests.

The basis of Iran, Islamic state system is *velayat-e-faqih* or the Rule of the Religious Jurist, Khomeini himself, of course, in his lifetime had absolute authority over all vital matters of state. As Supreme Leader, he was head of the army, the security services and the judiciary. He had the final say on both internal and international affairs. No

important decision could be taken without his consent. It is thus the duty and prerogative of the Supreme Leader to oversee all political actions and ensure that they are in agreement with Islam. He holds such enormous power on the assumption that he is the executor of God's will on earth.

On paper, of course, everything is most democratic. The Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is now the Supreme Leader of the Islamic State and also functions as the Chief of State and Commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The "reformer" Khatami is president and the 270 member majilis develops and passes legislation. But then all legislation passed by the majilis is reviewed for adherence to "Islamic and constitutional principles" by the Council of Guardians which consists of six clerical members appointed by the Supreme Leader and six jurists who are appointed by the head of the judiciary and approved by the Majilis.

The partyless election which was held in June 1988 resulted in a clear-cut factional regrouping, which was actually the result of the permanent pressure of the masses against war and economic slowdown. The split in the ranks of the mullahs became more apparent in the February 1997 elections to the fifth majles. An unexceptional conservative candidate had been expected to win easily, but Iranians, particularly the young and frustrated, decided otherwise. The broad masses of workers, youth, women and intellectuals cast their votes in favour of the "reformist" Khatami. The landslide victory of Khatami was a clear indicator that the majority of the population was tired of the mullahs' oppressive regime.

They voted for Khatami and the hope he had awakened of a political, social and economic change. But Khatami's promises of political liberty, economic prosperity and the ending of unemployment was just so much demagogy. However, as a result of Khatami's demagogy, the mullah's regime was more divided than ever before. There was a growing split between the two wings of reformists and conservatives. Each wing swears loyalty to the "fundamental principles of Islam" and each claim to be the rightful heir to Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy. But, in an effort to defend their political and economic interests, each offers a contradictory interpretation of this heritage and fight each other with sticks and stones while all the while swearing absolute loyalty to the same principles!

How is one to make sense of this apparent contradiction? Only the scientific method of historical materialism can provide us with the answer. Religious ideas, as Marx frequently pointed, out do not drop from the clouds. They do not possess a life independent of society. To put it another way: whenever an idea is put forward (even an incorrect and unscientific idea) and gets mass support, then we can be sure that this idea reflects the material interests of a definite class or group in society. It was the growing pressure of the masses which split the religious establishment at the top. As De Tocqueville explained, the most dangerous movement for a bad government is indeed when it sets about reforms. The press, relatively free under the new government, has become the main battle ground for war between the two factions. Most of the dozens of newspapers that have emerged in the past year are on the side of the reformers' wing. The war between the two wings reached a climax when pro-reformist journalists slammed into everything and everybody from the intelligence service to former president to senior Imam Ayatollah. They scored a big hit when they forced the secretive intelligence ministry to admit its involvement in an order to murder political

dissidents and intellectuals. But this was the signal for an all-out attack on the press by the conservative mullahs.

The weapon of provocation is being freely used by the reactionaries in their campaign against the reformers. Periodic bomb attacks apparently aimed at the intelligence ministry are used to lend support to the hardliners' charge that Khatami's policies are leading the country to chaos. On April 20, 2000, Ayatollah Ali Khamanei, Iran's Supreme Leader, gave the hardliners the green light. Some reformist newspapers, he declared, had become bases of the enemy. On the following day, hardline mullahs ordered the *Pasdarans* to raid the houses and offices of critical journalists. They were arrested and tortured. By the end of that week sixteen newspapers and journals had been shut down by the hardline judiciary. Newspapers like *Soh-I Emrouz*, *Fath*, *Khordad*, *Arya*, *Neshat*, *Asri-I-A Zadegan* all fell victim to the purge. Several prominent journalists like Akbar Gangi and Shamsolvaezin are in jail. They were accused of disparaging Islam and the religious elements of the Islamic revolution.

The fight among the mullahs intensified still further after the 18 February election in which pro-reform candidates captured a majority of seats in the 290-member majilis. While this battle is going on, Khatami, the leader of the reformist wing, remained hidden behind the scenes. He delivered a tough speech in which he vowed the reforms would continue. But in effect he did a vanishing act. The cowardly conduct of the reformist leaders merely encouraged the reactionaries. Weakness always invites aggression. The hardliners recently had a meeting to map out a strategy for pushing him out of office.[2]

Six reformists were put on trial, charged with anti state acts. Among the six, four were arrested on charges of attending a seminar in Berlin. Hardliner mullahs claimed that seminar was organised by the CIA to harm the Islamic system. On other hand, hardliners at the university of Teheran protested against the reforms initiated by President Khatami, They demanded that: "The advocates of American-style reforms be brought to justice." A deputy of the outgoing parliament accused Khatami of helping the enemies of the regime by his "vague rhetoric". The attack on the president is, in itself, a serious warning to all reformers. The reformists are not a coherent entity. They stood in the elections as part of an eclectic coalition of 18 different political parties and groups with different strategies and tactics. The difference between them soon came out after the attack of the hardliners on the pro-reformist journalists. They started criticising each other. Ganji was criticised by his allies for "going too far", crossing what Iranians call the "red line", that is to say, the limits to free expression that both sides tacitly understand but never define.[3]

Thus, the "war" between the two factions at the top is reduced to mere shadow-boxing. But on the streets it is another matter altogether. The split at the top has opened the flood-gates of pent-up popular discontent. It has encouraged the movement from below. Once again it has drawn the students onto the streets. Thousands of students rallied outside Teheran University and gathered outside the campus, protesting and chanting slogans against the government. The students of Teheran Technical College staged a demonstration against the banning of newspapers, holding placards, in which they wrote the ominous words: "The people's silence is not a sign of their consent."

Afterwards, thousands of students packed an auditorium on the main campus of Teheran University in solidarity with the protest movement. Thousands of students in other cities—Yazd, Hamadan, Arak, Mashad and Ilam—boycotted their classes. The old fear of the regime had declined to the point where the students felt able to defy the forces of the state. It is the starting-point for great events, like the anti-government demonstrations of the summer of 1999, that spilled over into the biggest revolutionary uprising since the 1979 February revolution.

Both wings of the mullahs live in mortal fear of revolution. Their only difference consists on the best way to prevent it: by repression or concession. But the stirrings of the masses is drawing them together, They will try to settle the conflict by compromising on limited reforms. But now the genie is out of the bottle. The masses will not be easily satisfied with partial reforms that change nothing essential. Any compromise that leaves the regime untouched will not be durable. If they do reform or if they do not, there will be revolutionary movements. The events in Iran are like the situation in 1977. The eruption of the students—that most sensitive barometer of the tension building up in society—are a warning of the explosion to come. It was the promise of press freedom and other democratic reforms that persuaded the students, and other people tired of the rule of the Mullahs, to back Khatami and help to get him elected president in 1997.

However, Khatami's aim was not to overthrow the regime, he just wanted to pressurise the hardliners to move over and make room for him and his faction. Khatami is very anxious about the growing resentment in masses particularly the youth, he has learned the lesson from the July uprising. His constantly appeals to the hard line mullahs about the danger of new uprisings is an attempt to lean on the mass movement to get concessions. But in the moment of truth, both wings will close ranks to try to strangle the revolution at birth.

The 8th July movement was a marvellous heroic uprising which showed once again the energy of the masses particularly the youth and the rottenness of the fundamentalist system. the process was analysed at the time in *The First Shots of the Iranian Revolution* by Alan Woods which clearly explains that the collapse of the authority of the mullahs and the reawakening of the masses was preparing the ground for a revolutionary situation. He wrote at the time:

"The events in Iran are like the situation in tsarist Russia in the Spring of 1905. The unrest erupted on July 8, 1999, after students protested against the passage of a law curbing press freedom and the closing of a popular left-leaning newspaper. The security forces stormed a dormitory of Teheran University that evening, beating students and pushing them out of windows. It seems likely that the intention of the reactionary wing of the regime, headed by the ayatollah Ali Khamenei, wanted to provoke the students into reacting, and then crush them. In this way they hoped to eliminate the "moderate" President Muhammad Khatami.

"However, events did not work out according to plan. The savagery of the attack provoked a massive reaction which caught the mullahs entirely by surprise. Tens of thousands of student demonstrators fought with riot police in Teheran for five days the first mass demonstrations since the 1979 Revolution. 'The demonstrations,' Stratfor explains, 'began as small, peaceful student protests calling for press freedom after the

closure of several liberal newspapers on July 8. They later transformed into widespread riots after riot police, sent in to break-up these demonstrations, injured dozens of students and arrested several dozen others. By noon the number of demonstrators in this area exceeded 50,000. Shopkeepers along the route of the demonstration shut down their businesses and joined the demonstrators. Demonstrators attacked the patrol cars of the State Security Forces, whose agents first fired into the air and then shot at the crowd. The SSF agents were forced to flee. Government vehicles in the area and along the route of the march were set on fire by the people. Furious demonstrators attacked the Sepah and Saderat banks at Vali-Asr intersection. Mullahs who ran into the demonstration threw away their turbans and robes and fled. Crowds of anything up to 100,000 staged demonstrations and sit-downs in the capital.'

"Initially, the students confined themselves to the limited demands for press freedom in line with the limited aims of the liberal wing of the clergy. But once on the streets, the movement rapidly acquired a momentum and a life of its own. The students began to feel their own strength and their demands grew bolder and more sweeping. In demanding full democracy, they were demanding the radical abolition of the present regime. But this can only be achieved by revolutionary means. This was not at all the intention of Khatami and the so-called reformers, who immediately took fright and turned against the students. This is entirely logical. Whatever differences may separate the rival cliques fighting for power at the top of society, their fear of the masses unites them more.

"The movement of the students immediately got an echo among the general population. Ordinary Iranians joined the ranks of the students, and the protests have spread to Tabriz where one student was killed by security forces over the weekend and to Yazd, Khorramabad, Hamadan and Sharud. The potential for an all-Iranian revolutionary movement was rapidly looming.

"In an attempt to stop the movement, the Governor of Teheran had announced an official ban on all demonstrations. Bravely defying the ban, the students took to the streets facing several thousand Islamic militia, (estimated by some sources at more than 50,000) many of them brought overnight to Teheran from other towns. That day Teheran resembled an armed camp with large numbers of LEF and Intelligence Ministry's forces occupying the city centre, while helicopters hovered above, issuing appeals from loudspeakers 'for calm and order' a call that was drowned out by a burst of police machine guns firing in the air and explosives used to frighten and disperse the demonstrators.

"'By mid-day,' writes Safa Haeri, 'the Iranian Capital looked like a war-torn, occupied city, as Ansarshock troops and security forces would check passers-by, private cars and taxis. Demonstrations were scattered and fighting sporadic, yet everywhere protesters attacked a bank, set fire to two buses and several official buildings, tried to occupy the offices of the hated dailies *Keyhan* and *Jomhourī Eslami*, the former the mouthpiece of the Intelligence Ministry and the second speaking for Ayatollah Khamenei, the dailies' first founder, owner and editor.'

"The next sentence is extremely important. The writer continues: 'Curiously, shopkeepers at the sprawling central bazaar, traditionally a conservative stronghold,

shut their business and joined the young demonstrators, whose ranks had swelled into thousands thanks to the ordinary population of both sexes.'

"Traditionally, the bazaar was a stronghold of the mullahs. If even this most conservative layer of Iranian society joined in the students demonstration, then the conclusion is inescapable: the days of the regime are numbered." [4]

The revolution by its very nature is not only single event. The revolution will extent over a number of years like in Spain in the 1930s, when the revolution started in 1931, with the declaration of the Republic, and only ended in 1937 with the defeat of the May Day movement of the Barcelona proletariat. In between these two dates there were periods of great upheavals and revolutionary advance, but also periods of tiredness, defeat and even reaction. But the general tendency was in the direction of revolution. It will be the same in Iran. Despite all setbacks, the general line is now in the ascendant. Every blow of the counter-revolution will only serve to stimulate a new revolutionary upsurge. The masses will learn in the school of hard experience.

They will also begin to understand the real nature of the "reformers". Khatami's treacherous role in the July uprising was shown when he spoke on the national television, saying that the government would put down the riots with an iron hand as it threatened Iran's national security and reformist policies. [5] The next day Khatami accused the student leaders of "attacking the foundation of the regime and of wanting to foment tension, and disorder" in a message issued after his meeting with a top security chief. [6]

Iran's Supreme leader on Friday blamed the "hidden hands" of the US Central Intelligence Agency for July's anti-regime demonstration, saying Washington had tried to repeat the 1953 coup that restored the pro-western monarchy. [7] Out of fear of the mass revolutionary movement, Khatami the "reformist" united with Khomeinei the hardliner, and very soon he was exposed before the conscious layer of the masses. But "nature abhors a vacuum". Again on the 18 February 1999 elections the masses voted for the reformists. This was intended as a blow against the mullahs and their totalitarian establishment. The reformists, with their customary demagogy, put forward the demands for liberty, press freedom and reforms. The politically untutored masses were still hoping that Khatami will do as he promises. But this temporary mood of hope will soon be dissipated as the masses contrast words with deeds. The election of the reformers is an unavoidable stage in the process of the revolutionary maturing of the masses who learn not from books but only from experience. And the experience will not be a pleasant one.

The present reformist government's room for manoeuvre is very limited. The recent \$2.1 trillion market crash is a warning of the extreme instability of the world economy. At a certain stage the present boom in the USA will end in a deep recession in world capitalism. This will mean a sharp deflation in demand and a consequent collapse in the price of oil and other raw materials, which will seriously aggravate the crisis of the Iranian economy. Haid Sevati, a professor of politics at Teheran University, described the situation thus: "The economy is in pretty bad shape people are going to expect this parliament to organise itself and deal with the economic issues. So far it is been all politics. The reformists are going to be in a majority. People are going to start asking them to do a serious job. President Khatami will be in a difficult position in the sense of

having to actually deliver on some of the main promises that have been made. The honeymoon period is going to start eroding." [8]

Alan Woods comments: "After 20 years the masses are tired of the rule of the mullahs. Originally, Ayatollah Khomeini promised a pure and incorruptible Islamic regime, free from all exploitation and the pernicious influences of the West. But corruption is an inseparable companion to any bureaucratic regime. The bureaucracy of the mullahs was no exception. Indeed Iran is now one of the most corrupt countries on earth. The mullahs, particularly the middle layers, have cheerfully given themselves over to theft, swindling and bribery on a massive scale. The enrichment of the regime's supporters (who evidently cannot wait for the blessings of a future life in paradise) are in stark contrast to the growing impoverishment of the workers and peasants. The contrast between rich and poor is all the more galling because of the propaganda of the regime with its constant appeals to solidarity. The contrast between words and deeds, between theory and practice, repels and disgusts all honest people and creates a general mood of frustration and suppressed anger.

"In the past, Iran's great oil wealth guaranteed a certain stability. The regime made concessions to the masses in the form of health, education and other services. Infant mortality fell from 104 per thousand in the mid-seventies to 25 per thousand in the mid-nineties. Life expectancy in the same period rose from 55 to 68. There are one million students in higher education, of whom 40 percent are women. But a disproportionate amount of the country's wealth went to enriching the mullahs and their hangers-on. The *Economist* (18 February 1997) described the attitude of educated Iranians:

"All very well, say discontented Iranians. So now we have roads and telecommunications, mechanised farms and primary schools, health centres and birth control, not to mention village women who are asserting themselves. But this is no more than our due as an oil-rich country with an ancient history, a glorious culture and a well-educated elite, geographically placed at the centre of one of the world's most strategic regions. We are not a third-world out-of-the way dump, to be patronised by western newcomers. We want more than that...

"Fine they say, that the regime appropriated most of the wealth of the Shah's old cronies, a new-rich class just as greedy and corrupt as the old aristocrats. Real incomes have shrunk savagely, particularly for the disappearing middle classes. With a teacher's pay barely covering the rent of a room, day-to-day living relies on dodgy improvisation.

"The average take-home pay is not enough to cover the average family's food bill, and most people are forced to work in more than one job to make ends meet. Often a man has to take two or three extra jobs to survive. A university lecturer earns 500,000 rials (\$110 at the official rate) but would need to do some additional tuition or research. A retired army general gets 170,000 rials a month. A primary schoolteacher starts at a miserable 120,000 rials (about \$25). How can anyone live on these wages? And annual inflation is about 27 percent.

"The world crisis of capitalism reflected itself in the collapse of oil and other commodity prices last year. Although the price of oil has since risen by 80 percent (for how long is another matter) it caused serious problems for all oil producing countries. The Iranian economy is now in crisis, with high inflation and unemployment, low

investor confidence. The hated foreign debt stood at around \$25 billion in 1997. Eighty-six percent of Iran's GDP comes from the state sector and a large part of the rest is controlled by the mafia. The stench of corruption hangs over the whole economic life of the country.

"In addition, there is a steep rise in crime, the absence of personal security and many freedoms. The oppressive nature of the regime is manifested in a thousand different ways. Those who want to be students or teachers are interrogated to see if they and their families respect Islamic values. The system is heavily weighted against women. A female student may be expelled if she is caught laughing with an unrelated man. This is supposed to represent a sensuous invitation to sin! The suffocating regime of the Mullahs which interferes in all aspects of life, big and small, would be bad enough in itself. But when everyone is aware that the clergy is corrupt and rotten to the marrow, it becomes utterly intolerable.

"This is not what the people fought and died for in 1979. The disillusionment of the students was commented on two years ago in a special report in the *Economist* (18 February 1997).

"When a first year arrives in a college, says a lecturer, half the students are ready to lay down their lives for the revolution. By the second year, they have doubts, by the third, they are mildly critical, by the fourth, they are in outright opposition.

"Sixty-five percent of the people of Iran are under 25, and they know little of the revolution and Iran's eight year's war with Iraq. In vain does the regime try to appeal to the spirit of the war and martyrdom. The time for such speeches is long past. The youth of Iran will no longer tolerate empty rhetoric and speeches. They want jobs and freedom. The youthfulness of these new layers, coming fresh into the struggle, unencumbered with the dead weight of routine and tradition, is what gives the movement its extraordinary sweep and élan. Above all, these students feel that they are not along, but speak in the name of the people July. The people live in misery! The clerics are acting like gods was one of the slogans chanted by the students on the July demonstrations." [9]

The role of the working class

In the 1979 revolution the working class was the backbone of the revolutionary movement against the Shah's regime. The workers' nation-wide strikes dealt the most decisive blows against the shah's regime. The workers' *shuras* sprang up out of the continuous strike waves after mid-1978. The 1979 revolutionary period provided the richest experience for the workers. Their direct intervention in the arena of politics was the decisive element in the whole equation. The heritage of 1979 revolution is still a milestone for workers of Iran today, a real beacon and a point of reference in the struggle against world capitalism.

The Iranian workers' struggle is not only decisive against the rotten fundamentalist regime in Teheran. It has a general significance for the revolutionary movement all over the Middle East. The oil workers particularly, with their colossal potential power, will be the grave digger of imperialism and the domination of multinationals such as Exxon, Mobil and Conoco. These multinationals chalk up their profits in trillions, while the

mass of people in Iran and the other countries of the Middle East live in grinding poverty. Such a glaring contradiction must sooner or later be resolved by revolutionary means. And only the proletariat can do it.

The working class has never been more powerful. According to the Iranian official statistics, in 1989, the total number of workers in industries was 2.5 million, 65 percent of these workers were employed in large scale industries about 70,000 in oil and gas 45,000 in electricity, 155,000 in metal industries 133,000 in textiles, 82,000 in construction, 70,000 in the food industries, nearly 40,000 in auto industries, 40,000 in chemicals and 25,000 in the paper industry. Approximately 35,000 to 40,000 work in military industries.[10] Around about one million women are also employed in industry. Under the fundamentalists women have suffered more than any other section of society, particularly working class women. They have no maternity rights and are obliged to work until the last days of pregnancy. Women workers played a very important role in the struggle to overthrow the shah's regime.

During the counter-revolution, the lumpen-proletarian terrorist thugs of Khomeini's *Pasdaran* crushed the *shuras* in the factories. After such a severe defeat the working class was naturally shocked and demoralised for a time. But within two years the class again rose up once more, demanding union rights, increases in wages, shorter working hours and opposition to the new labour laws. Already in 1983 eight big strikes occurred in different months, with the participation of more than 15,000 workers. From 1984 to January 1990, 62 big strikes took place in which more than 142,800 workers participated. In May 1990, Isfahan oil refinery workers demanded double pay for overtime. Despite 30 arrests and heavy pressure, the workers continued the strike for two weeks and secured the release of the detained strikers and a promise from the government that they would increase wages. A government delegation visited the refinery to rectify the situation. The workers made it clear to the delegation that: "It is no use telling you our demands, while we have no right to organise on the shop floor."

On 27 January 1991 the oil workers struck just as they did the year before, for wage rises and a number of other welfare demands. The strike began at the Isfahan Abadan refineries with a hunger strike and within days it spread to the refineries in Teheran and Shiraz. Their demands included:

1. Wage increase in line with inflation.
2. Clarification and rectification of the position of thousands of employees who are not covered by the labour law.
3. Implementation of job classification scheme.
4. Provision of housing and increase in housing subsidy/benefit.

In the second week of the strike on 8 February 1991 a representative of the Ministry of Labour visited the Teheran oil refinery and asked the strikers to end their strike and elect representatives to allow the government and the authorities to deal with their demands. The workers refused and demanded to see the Minister of Oil. Two days later the representative of the Ministry of Information (Security) in Teheran, referring to the crisis in the Gulf region, threatened the strikers, saying "unless they end their strike, the

security forces would move in". Yet again the workers, fighting for their interests, were confronted by the state. Despite this, the strikers won most of their demands. This strike—the first all-out strike in the oil industry since the great strike of 1978-79—involved tens of thousands of oil workers.

The government was careful not to encourage other workers to follow the oil workers' example. But it was unable to brush aside the wage issue which is the pressing demand of the whole working class in Iran. The strike forced the Iranian government (indirectly through its Supreme Council of Labour) to concede a wage rise of 36 percent across the board. The effect of the strike and the importance of the oil workers was such that the Minister of Oil would not even allow Islamic Societies—set up by the government in some of the work places—to be established in the oil industry: "The President himself was aware of this fact and on his advice, in view of the sensitivity of having political organisations in the oil industry, this issue would be considered in due course and appropriate measures, with a view to the interests of the system, would be taken."

On the 19 and 20 of August 1996, 600 Teheran oil refinery workers, mainly from the oil storage unit and central gas depot, stopped work and without prior notice, marched to the Labour House (the central body for Islamic Societies and Councils) where they protested about the non-implementation of collective agreements and the enforcement of the labour law. Oil refinery workers in Teheran, Tabriz, Shiraz and Isfahan went on a two day warning strike on 18 and 19 December 1996, demanding government recognition of collective bargaining and agreements. The two-day strike was called as a result of the government's refusal to act on an earlier ultimatum issued in August by the oil workers. The striking workers declared that failure of the responsible Minister to act and agree to their demands would result in an all out indefinite strike within a month. In Tabriz oil refinery the two-day strike was followed by a go-slow for three weeks. This is a most impressive record of struggle, particularly if we bear in mind that the right to strike and organisation is not recognised in Iran. Striking workers face dismissal, arbitrary arrest, execution and military occupation of the workplace. It shows that the workers, like the students, are losing their fear and are prepared to fight against all the odds. This fact constitutes the principal motor-force of the revolution in Iran.[11] The same year on 28 February hundreds of workers rallied outside the majilis protesting against the new law passed by the Khatami government enabling employers with fewer than five staff to strip them of social security for a period of six years up to the end of the third development plan.[12] Again on 8 March workers gathered in front of majilis in their thousands to protest against the labour law.

The biggest demonstration was on the first of May. This was the clearest indication that working class was starting to mobilise. Since 1997 the workers' mood has been changing. They had seen the limitations of the reformists' promises and campaigning for political and cultural freedom, free speech and social justice. The reformists only wished to use democratic reforms as a way to break the hold of the hardliners on the state and economy. However, events did not work according to plan. Trotsky argued that the democratic revolution must go over immediately to the Socialist revolution, or end in defeat and disaster. Events in Iran show the complete correctness of this view. The only way to secure a genuinely democratic regime in Iran is to sweep aside all the vacillating, cowardly and half-hearted elements and for the working class to take power into its own hands. Only the proletariat has the will and the power to make a clean sweep of the forces of reaction. But once the proletariat has power, it will not stop at the

democratic tasks, but will go on to expropriate the capitalists and landlords and proceed in the direction of socialism.

The masses of the people aspire not only to democratic rights but to a higher standards of living. For the "democratic" lawyers and professional politicians, democracy is a beautiful phrase and a paper constitution. For the workers and peasants, however, formal democracy has little meaning if it does not mean a radical improvement in the material conditions of life of the great majority. This requires not merely the conquest of political democracy but also the conquest of economic democracy—a *regime of workers' democracy*. Bourgeois democracy in Iran under modern conditions, with the crisis of capitalism on world scale, cannot establish itself for any length of time. It would be a regime of crisis that would inevitably end in a new and even more monstrous dictatorship and enslavement of the working people.

The workers have already learned much, and will learn even more in the course of the developing struggle. All the elements for socialist revolution are steadily maturing in Iran. The reformists can never satisfy the aspirations and needs of the working class and the peasants. In the last analysis they are the representatives of the capitalist class and finance capital—and also of imperialism, which is searching for allies in Iran who can prevent revolution and give them back their power and influence. The capitalist reformers would deliver Iran to the clutches of foreign imperialism. But in present-day conditions that would spell disaster.

In Iran we are clearly at the beginning of a new era and are seeing the rise of new social movements against the capitalist system. The atmosphere in Teheran is tense. The reactionaries have launched a harsh counter-attack on the reformists, accusing them of rigging in the elections. It is quite possible that the hardliners might dismiss the majilis. It is similar to the situation in 1977, when civil rights protests by the writers, lawyers and other defenders of freedom of speech and the press were launched against the Shah. Within two years that movement became transformed into a revolution. Business Week, commenting on Iran, stated that the second term victory aroused much hope, but has delivered nothing in the way of specifics.

Already the young are getting frustrated. In Khalkhal, a north-western city, angry demonstrators attacked government offices, a theological school and the homes of conservative clerics, after the election of a reformist Parliamentary candidate was thrown out. In Rasht, a north central city, protesters clashed with the police, who had confronted a young unmarried couple: "We told them that their days of tyranny are over." [13]

Iran and the world revolution

Khatami represents that wing of the regime which looks to the West and capitalism for a solution. It is being quietly encouraged by the West which would prefer to install a weak and subservient (bourgeois) democratic regime in Teheran which would be more pliable than the old regime. The recent disturbances took them by surprise. The American are horrified at the prospect of revolutionary developments in Iran, which can have enormous repercussions throughout the Middle East, in Russia and even further afield. Iran occupies a strategic position in the world, not only from the standpoint of US imperialism, but also from that of world revolution.

Western countries like the United States, France, Italy, Sweden, Germany and other western countries hastily voiced their support and "sympathy" for the "reformist" Khatami, recognising in him their best bet to install a more congenial regime in Teheran. But the Student movement has upset all their plans and calculations. Understanding the revolutionary potential of the movement—which represents a mortal danger to them in one of the most important areas in the world—they hastened to call on him to make concessions and "satisfy" the students demands. But the leverage of imperialism in Teheran is extremely limited and their pleas went unheard. Horrified, the imperialists had to watch as the situation spiralled out of control. They undoubtedly breathed a sigh of relief when the reaction reasserted control. But they are under no illusions that this situation can not last.

The magnificent revolution of 1979 showed the world the heroism of the Iranian working class. The Shah's regime was equipped with the most awesome means of repression. At his back stood a huge army and a ruthless and efficient secret police, the Savak. Some people drew the conclusion that the state was too powerful to overthrow by direct revolutionary action of the proletariat. Instead they played with the discredited tactics of Maoism and guerrillaism. Life itself showed the falseness of these arguments. The supposedly invincible state machine of the Shah was shattered in pieces once the working class began to move. The Iranian revolution was a classical proletarian revolution which was aborted for lack of leadership and hijacked by the only group that was organised, determined and knew what it wanted—the mullahs. Thus, the greatest revolution of the second half of the 20th century ended up as a reactionary theocratic state. This was the greatest abortion in the history of revolutions. And it was entirely unnecessary.

The Iranian proletariat in 1979 was far stronger than the Russian working class in 1917. It could easily have taken power into its hands. But it lacked the necessary instrument in the form of a genuinely revolutionary party and leadership, like the Bolshevik party under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky. The Iranian workers set up the *shuras*, which were the equivalent of the Russian soviets in 1917—democratically elected committees composed of workers, students, shopkeepers, peasants and soldiers. All that was necessary was to have linked up these committees on a local, regional and national scale, and broaden them to include the representatives of the poor peasants, the soldiers, the women, the youth and the oppressed nationalities, and the problem would have been very quickly solved. The overthrow of the Shah could have led directly to the establishment of workers' power. But the so-called Communist Party, the Tudeh, had no perspective of taking power. The Moscow Bureaucracy dreaded the prospect of a workers' revolution in Iran. The Iranian Stalinist leaders blindly subordinated themselves to, first to the Liberals and so-called progressives, and ultimately to Khomeini. Thus in the movement of truth, the Iranian working class found itself paralysed and incapable of playing an independent role. The revolution was aborted and the people of Iran delivered into the hands of clerical reaction.

But now the wheel has turned a full circle. The regime of the Ayatollahs has exhausted itself and now faces revolution, just as the Shah did. This idea is already present in the minds of the students who at this moment are in the vanguard. The real revolutionary significance of the student movement has not been lost on the most serious commentators in the West. The movement has gone far beyond the limits prescribed by the "moderate" leaders. The Boston Globe Online (7 December 1999) commented:

"It has already become evident that students are not risking beatings and death merely to show support for the marginal reforms of Iran's elected president. Mohammad Khatami. He has issued a statement saying that the protesters have made their point and 'now students should co-operate with the government and allow law and order to be established in society'."

These are the first confused stirrings of revolutionary consciousness. The actions of the students are far more advanced than their political understanding. But under these conditions people learn fast. Consciousness lags behind, but it is the essence of a revolution that consciousness catches up with reality with a bang. A whole generation of youth have had little or no knowledge of Marxism. Their sole point of reference was the so-called Islamic revolution of 1979. It was natural that some of the students refer to Islam. But serious commentators are able to distinguish between form and content. The reference to religion are only "the outer shell of an immature Bolshevism". The students compare the theory of a pure and incorruptible Islamic republic with the reality of a corrupt dictatorship of mullahs who have robbed, deceived and cheated the Iranian people for two decades. The Boston Globe continues:

"The slogans of the protesters suggest they are passing beyond calls for limited reforms. When officials attempted to read to the demonstrators a statement from the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, students drowned out Khamenei's messengers, shouting: "Down with the dictator!" and "Either Islam and the law or another revolution".

This movement of the youth is an real inspiration. But the students alone can never triumph against the monstrous state of the mullahs. It is imperative that they link up with the oppressed masses—the workers, peasants and urban poor—who are growing restless under the heavy hand of clerical reaction. It is also necessary to fight for the complete social and legal emancipation of women—that section of society which has had to bear the heaviest burden under the tyranny of the mullahs. The women of Iran are destined to play a key role in the coming revolution. Already a very important development was the magnificent participation of the women who played a very active role in the demonstration in Teheran, and were everywhere at the forefront of demonstrations. It is also necessary to defend the democratic rights of the Kurds and other oppressed nationalities in Iran.

But with a programme that confines itself to demands for formal democracy, this is impossible. Of course, it is necessary to fight for every democratic demand—for freedom of assembly, the right to demonstrate and strike, the right to organise, for free and democratic elections and the convening of a constituent assembly etc. But this is not enough. It is necessary to put forward a programme of social and economic demands which reflect the needs of the workers and peasants. A job for all! A living wage and decent pensions! For the seven hour working day! For decent schools and hospitals for all! For a crash programme of house building! For a socialist plan of production, under the democratic control of the working people!

In order to put this programme into practice, it is necessary to set up democratically elected committees of workers. Committees of action must be formed to organise the struggle against the regime and give it a conscious expression. The students can play a vital role in this if they organise around the revolutionary programme of Marxism and

link their struggle with the working class. They must avoid the temptation to resort to the senseless tactics of individual terrorism and so-called guerrillaism which have led to disaster in the past. *Not terrorism but organised revolutionary work in the factories, in the schools, in the workers' districts-that is the only way to prepare for the inevitable battles that impend*

Above all it is necessary to form an organisation of cadres, educated in the ideas of Marxism-Leninism. And it is necessary to see that the Iranian revolution can only succeed if it inscribes on its banner an internationalist perspective. That was always the position of Lenin and the Bolshevik party. Iran occupies a key position. A revolution in Iran would send shock waves throughout the world. We already saw that in a distorted way after 1979, when the Iranian revolution-unfortunately hijacked and distorted by clerical reaction-gave a powerful impulse to so-called Islamic fundamentalism everywhere. This led to a dead end, as we see clearly, not only in Iran but in Afghanistan, Algeria and elsewhere.

The alternative to imperialism and capitalism is not fundamentalism but socialist revolution and proletarian internationalism. The second Iranian revolution will have an entirely different content and character to the first. The imperialists can see this and dread it. They understand that the whole of the Middle East is hanging by a thread. There is not one single stable bourgeois regime in that part of the globe. A revolution in Iran would cause these weak and corrupt regimes to fall like skittles. A successful socialist revolution in Iran would cause shock waves throughout the Middle East, in Russia, in the Indian Subcontinent. It would undermine the reactionary Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan. Its repercussions would be felt in Asia, Africa and Latin America. And not only there. The example of a healthy regime of workers' democracy in Iran would have an even greater effect on the workers of Europe, Japan and the United States than did the Russian revolution of 1917. It could change the course of world history. Everything depends on the ability of the advanced guard of the Iranian workers and students to create the necessary instrument for carrying out the revolution to the end.[14]

The outcome of the current political struggle in Iran is inextricably linked to the actions of the working class, which will determine the fate of society. The temporary phase of disorientation and disappointment which was the result of the Stalinist betrayal in 1979-80, is now coming to an end. Likewise, the fumes of fundamentalist intoxication have completely dissipated. We are now witnessing the beginning of the end of the monstrous regime established by Khomeini's counter-revolution. The submission to, and acceptance of, fundamentalism is ending. The masses are thinking for themselves, discussing and trying to find an alternative course. Neither fundamentalism nor bourgeois democracy can offer any way out. The only road only for the masses is the road of struggle for the emancipation of the working people. This is the only banner that can enthuse and galvanise the new generations, particularly of the youth, the oppressed nationalities and the women, to fight and conquer. The future lies in the victory of the workers, the Socialist revolution which will not stop at the borders of Iran, but will light a fire that will cause a conflagration throughout the Middle East and far beyond. That is what stands at the top of the agenda at the dawn of the 21st century.

Notes:

1. Ted Grant, *On the Iranian revolution*, February 1979, London.
2. *The Economist*, 29 April 2000.
3. Ibid.
4. Alan Woods, *The First Shots of Iranian Revolution*, 17 July 1999, London.
5. The Daily Dawn, 13 July 1999.
6. The Gulf News, 14 July 1999.
7. International Herald Tribune, 1 August 1999.
8. *Socialist Appeal*, April 2000 issue 78, London.
9. Alan Woods, *The First Shots of the Iranian Revolution*.
10. Iran Radio, November 1989.
11. Alan Woods, *The First Shots of the Iranian Revolution*.
12. Keyhan Daily, 28th February 2000.
13. Business Week, 8th May 2000.
14. Alan Woods, *The First Shots of the Iranian Revolution*.