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## International Socialist Forum

We come from various revolutionary socialist traditions, whose struggle for a communist leadership we see as the starting-point for future struggles. However, this does not mean we are satisfied with the theoretical framework within which that fight was conducted. The collapse of Stalinism as a dominant power in the world labour movement, opens the possibility of re-examining the whole of that framework, and that must be our most pressing task today.

The power of capital still oppresses and exploits the world. Its continued existence presents a still greater threat to the future of humanity. Its overthrow by the working class and its replacement with a communist, human way of living throughout the globe is more urgent than ever. Drawing on the history of revolutionary struggles, we must clarify its meaning in the light of the situation in the class struggle today.

Here are just a few of the questions whose answers are no longer as obvious we once imagined:

a) What was the significance of the Russian revolution? Was it the start of the world socialist revolution? How should we understand the Chinese revolution of 1949?

b) What is the relation between the revolt against imperialism in less-developed coun-

tries and the struggle for a socialist world?

c) What form of political power does the working class require in its fight for socialism? Are the formulae "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "workers' state" adequate? What do they mean?

d) In the light of the experience of the Third and Fourth Internationals, what kind of organisations are required by the working class? How are they related to the 'spontaneous' movement of the class?

e) What is the relation between communism and trades unionism today?

f) Is there something called "Marxist economics"? If it exists, what does it have to say today? If it does not, should it?

g) What should revolutionaries think and do about eco-logical and environmental issues?

h) What is the relation between communism and feminism?

i) Is there a "Marxist philosophy"? If not, should there be?

These are some of the issues which must be clarified in the process of developing revolutionary leadership for the inter-national working class.

# Revolutionary Socialism

## The Minimum Theoretical, Political and Organisational Platform

### *A Proposal for Discussion*

*The following is an English translation of a document in Farsi which was published almost three years ago in London by a group of Iranian socialists. They have come from differing (and sometimes even opposing) political backgrounds and are involved in a regroupment project. The document proposes a set of principles/ideas as a basis for launching a joint discussion bulletin of revolutionary socialists. Non-Iranian comrades should bear in mind that the points raised in this paper relate closely to the issues that have been debated within the broader Iranian left and do not necessarily reflect all the important concerns of the International left. We, hope, nevertheless, that it may be of interest to those who wish to keep informed about all the attempts at tackling the current crisis of the left and all the efforts at rethinking the basics.*

### Introduction

There can be no doubt that the Iranian left is facing a serious crisis similar to other groupings and tendencies of the left throughout the world. In our opinion the way out of the present crisis lies in a complete break with traditional organisations and the regroupment of the revolutionary socialist left. We believe that all socialist circles, currents or tendencies must review and clarify their position on essential theoretical and political issues and then set in motion decisions towards such a regroupment. First and foremost in these activities they must produce and publish a journal where various existing affiliations can discuss and debate the most important political and theoretical issues. The formation of such a journal, however, requires agreement on a number of general principles that will clarify the minimum positions of this spectrum at the outset.

In the present paper we will discuss the theoretical, political and organisational positions which in our opinion form the minimum platform for starting such a project. Such "minimums" are understandably not sufficient for the formation of a new political force, however, they do indicate a theoretical, political and practical direction for the initial alliance. The other two alternatives are that we either dispense with a minimum platform altogether and start such a journal with anyone who is willing to co-operate or we emphasise the inadequacy of a minimum platform and insist on agreement around a full programme before we can start.

We disagree with the first alternative because practice has shown us that one cannot work with everyone. We also believe that under the current political climate, the revolutionary socialist tendency must first attempt to distinguish itself from reformist, revisionist and opportunist currents, albeit on the basis of some basic or minimum positions. In addition, the individuals and groupings that form the various currents of this nascent tendency have gone through specific experiences and before they can willingly start any new project they must in their own mind accept and appreciate a set of principles that highlights the salient aspects of these experiences. The second option is simply not practical because precisely as a result of the absence of an organised revolutionary socialist tendency and the dispersion of its potential forces, there is no single program or platform which can define it or be acceptable to all its parts. Such a program cannot be formulated in the mind of this or that individual but must be the result of the joint efforts of all in this tendency in the process of reshaping itself.

These minimums will allow us to take the initial steps in distinguishing this tendency from others and will also help us to discover and assemble its likely members. We firmly believe that such an agreement is possible and that by co-operation and discussion we can collectively reconstruct this alternative and develop its programme. During this process, some of those who presently agree on these minimums will inevitably develop differences. Some of these differences may even lead to splits. Starting with some general points makes such a process inevitable. We cannot, however, postpone embarking on the difficult path of regroupment for ever, we must start from somewhere.

Frankly, we ourselves believe that those who do not accept even these minimum positions have not clearly broken with reformism and opportunism. However, this does not mean that we are not willing to discuss or question the minimums themselves. We have reached these positions simply on the basis of our own experience. Others will probably emphasise other issues or the same issues in different ways. These minimums do not represent all the political positions of all or some of us, nor do they express the common denominator in our political stances. As far as it was possible within a given time we have tried to formulate our own understanding of the most essential issues necessary for the initial unity of this tendency as a whole. If others do the same and specify the issues not only essential to them but also necessary for the unification of the whole spectrum of the revolutionary left, on

the one hand we can clarify the points that should be discussed by all of us, and on the other hand, similar tendencies recognising their closest allies can achieve higher forms of alliance and co-operation. It is only after such a discussion that we can decide on those essential issues on the basis of which we can unite and also decide on the range of issues which remain to be discussed in the journal. We on our part will reply to any contribution we receive on this subject and we will also make all such contributions available to others.

It is important to note that the present paper is indeed only a summary of a series of long discussions amongst its contributors. It is, therefore, rather brief and presented in a very schematic form, mainly because we intended to place it under public scrutiny as soon as possible. We can only judge the sufficiency or soundness of these minimum positions after an open debate. Recordings of most of the discussions are available and when possible could be passed to others or published later. On issues where we thought the revolutionary left had basic agreements, we have stopped at stating the bare minimum, and on issues where we know there was considerable disagreement, we have tried to provide a fuller explanation of our position.

We confess that this is not sufficient. However, let us agree that the publication of this summary conclusion is better than silence. In our experience, most of the comrades are familiar with the discussions and have better access to the original sources, we have therefore tried to avoid repeating the obvious. In addition, if any section is unclear or more explanation is required, if and when we are told about it we will provide more details.

We don't think any one will criticise us for requesting that all comrades should distribute this paper and let us know their opinions however brief this might be.

## The Meaning of Socialism

The socialist program is inevitably defined by its socialist goal. We cannot expect tendencies who disagree on the basic goals of socialism to unite and establish a new alliance of revolutionary left. As a major section of the left wrongly considered the Soviet Union and its satellites (including those that left the alliance earlier, e.g., China and Albania) to be socialist and insisted on calling it the "Socialist Camp", it is essential to clarify the extent of the differences on this issue prior to any other discussions.

Briefly, in our opinion those who called this block "socialist" and have not yet revised this position, have proved in practice that they have no place inside the revolutionary left. Today the discussion is not longer about whether or not these countries were socialist, the issue is which conditions and circumstances led so many groups of the left to become puppets in the hands of the foreign policy of these countries and to betray the proletariat and social-

ism under the pretence of defending this camp. Those groups that were swearing to the flags of this camp until yesterday, and are now claiming to have realised their mistakes, have to first clarify their position on this issue if they are to be taken seriously.

We must, of course, continue to discuss extensively the nature of these societies. However, the revolutionary left has no longer any interest in carrying such a discussion with those who still believe that this was indeed socialism. All that needs to be said is that such individuals had better travel to these countries to witness the effects of 70 years of their kind of socialism. No one can hide behind the lack of knowledge or information as an excuse. The most basic and commonly agreed goals of socialism contradict such a conclusion and during this entire period there have been currents who pointed all these out and wrote volumes about it.

So far, many different positions have been taken on the nature of the Soviet Union and the discussion on these analyses has not yet been resolved. In the light of the experience of the last few years and the complete disintegration of these societies it should be possible to launch a more serious discussion and reach a more conclusive position. Were these societies examples of a degenerated workers state or were they forms of state capitalism? Or did we witness the formation of a new mode of production unforeseen by Marxism? These three positions and their variations more or less summarise the more serious analyses of the last 70 years. We neither claim to have reached any particularly new conclusions nor do we agree with any of the above positions, although it is possible that some of us may be closer to one or the other.

Briefly, we believe that the October revolution was indeed a socialist revolution that transferred power to the proletariat and started an era of transition to socialism. For reasons beyond the scope of the present paper, this power was taken away from the proletariat in the early stages and during Stalin's era under the cover of a party enjoying the prestige of its role in the revolution was transferred to the hands of a congealed cast/collective of bureaucrats based on a program of state planned economy. Although this order arose from within the October revolution it was fundamentally different from it. Furthermore, although this order maintained a more or less uniform format from the time of its establishment in Stalin's era to the time of its disintegration, one cannot deny that it went through various stages of degeneration.

This order was neither a workers' state nor a form of state capitalism. Nor was it a new mode of production. The Russian revolution was more or less defeated by 1924; however, the victorious counter revolution could not roll back the events to such a point so as to revive capitalism. As a result it continued the collective exploitation of the proletariat under the name of socialism and planned economy. Thus, the period of transition rather than moving towards socialism got caught in a backward bureau-

cratic spiral which was, step by step, returning it to capitalism. Gradually material and financial incentives grew in production and eventually the conditions for the return of capitalism prevailed.

It would be a mistake if we were to consider a consensus about this descriptive definition as a pre-condition for cooperation. Such a discussion will undoubtedly continue in the journal. However, if we do not agree on the most general concepts and cannot even jointly define socialism such a discussion will not only fail to reach a conclusion, it will inevitably remain useless. We accept Marx's own positions on these issues and consider agreement about them as the necessary and sufficient condition for starting the discussion. It is precisely these fundamental principles that were forgotten by the Iranian left.

According to Marx, socialism does not represent the ideals of this or that philanthropist. Socialist society is the inevitable rational consequence of the development of capitalist society and takes shape on the basis of negating this society through revolutionary-critical activity. Therefore, one cannot talk about what socialism will be like prior to its formation, a formation which is itself influenced by class struggle and the particular praxis of specific social beings under specific conditions. One can however decide what it will not be like and on this basis express some general principles.

According to Marx, at a certain stage in the development of capitalism and the rise of class struggle between the two main camps of labour and capital, one section of society (labour) will realise in practice that private ownership of the means of production contradicts the social production of needs and that in order to win the battle for democracy (and in this Marx was not simply considering participation in election, but also the right to self-determination of the producers in the economic sphere), it must conquer political power, overthrow capitalist relations and establish social ownership. Socialist consciousness is the realisation of the above facts. This awareness arises from within the class struggle and exists today in more or less all societies.

The social movement formed on the basis of this awareness has been called the socialist (or communist) movement and the struggles stemming from this awareness will inevitably lead to the establishment of a workers' state and eventually a socialist society. In such a society ownership of the means of production will take a social form and the division of society into classes will end. In such a society social production is not based on the need to accumulate capital but in order to respond to social needs; human labour will not be due to economic compulsion will express free creative activity.

Maybe others do not disagree with this definition, which is just fine. However, from this very same general definition one must arrive at conclusions with some of which a lot of "socialists" do not necessarily agree.

## The Concept of the Transitional Society

The experience of the Paris Commune proved that in order to achieve such a society we cannot utilise the existing state apparatus. The present state must be removed and a state of a new kind established. In this way, according to Marx, there is a period of transition between capitalist and communist society identified by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat based on all the oppressed and toiling masses. This dictatorship does not imply a despotic form of government, but a necessary phase to allow the working class to establish its rule and start the transition period through the abolition of private property. This will be in reality the first truly democratic form of government based on the will of the majority of the population and is therefore a new form of state which from its onset is trying to pave the way for its own dissolution. This is not a state above society, this is in fact a "non-state". However, it must also be a revolutionary state as the socialist society will not appear gradually and by itself. This state must consciously follow a radical program capable of transforming one by one all of the capitalist relations. The only guarantee in achieving this transition and reaching communist society lies in the political nature of the state. Precisely for this reason one cannot talk of a transitional society when this power has been taken away from the proletariat. Such a society can only return to capitalism.

Marx also emphasises that the communist society has two stages. In the first stage although classes and the state have disappeared and social ownership is established, aspects of the bourgeois mode of distribution still persist. For example, at this early stage the social distribution of the results of labour are based on the amount of social labour rather than need. The producers will gradually put aside this form reminiscent of the bourgeois era and in practice reach the conclusion that anyone should only work according to capabilities and take according to needs.

In some Marxist books and socialist literature, this first stage has been called socialism. Although this name is confusing, as long as one distinguishes between socialism and the transition period we have no serious disagreement, however, we prefer to use communism and socialism as synonyms. And here we witness one major criticism of "traditionalist" organisations. When we refer to the writings of many of the defenders of the "socialist camp" we see a systematic attempt at confusing the period of transition with the first phase of communist society.

For example, many of these groups claim that during socialism or the first phase of communism, the dictatorship of the proletariat has not yet withered away, or they claim that although communism cannot be established in one country, achieving socialism in one country is a possibility. They also claim that social ownership based on the self-management of the producers is only achieved during the second phase and in the first phase one cannot go

beyond state ownership. These tendencies forget that when Marx referred to these two phases he considered them simply as different stages within a single mode of production. Therefore, the determining characteristics of this mode must be apparent in both phases, i.e., social classes must have disappeared in both periods and social forms of ownership should exist. In both phases, the state as the defender of the interests of one or more social classes against others does not exist any more.

Thus, socialism, as the first stage of communist society, can only be achieved after a period of transition, however short or long this may be. This transition, i.e. the beginning of the socialist construction, cannot end until major productive forces on an international scale have come under social control. Under the conditions of the international division of labour, the thesis of socialism in one country is as ridiculous as the theory of socialism in one factory or one town. In the final analysis, socialism will only win when it can achieve a higher productivity of labour than capitalist society. Under the present circumstances when major multinational monopolies control the majority of the productive and technological forces in the world, one cannot achieve such a higher productivity prior to the control of all such monopolies.

In the same way that a workers' state in its struggle against the old order must deepen the socialist revolution, it must never forget that in its efforts for the construction of socialism the only way to a conclusive victory is indeed the international extension of the socialist revolution. By its very nature if this revolution is not extended it will be destroyed. In the era of imperialism it is possible to put in place the first bricks of a socialist revolution in a single country, be it an underdeveloped one. However, its final victory necessitates the joint efforts of the world proletariat. The state that puts the theory of socialism in one country as part of its program, even if it starts off as a more or less genuine proletarian state will not only fail to reach this stage but will itself end up inside the camp of world counter revolution. Such a state, instead of strengthening and deepening the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat will attempt to suppress the vanguard and depoliticise the whole class; and instead of aiming for the external expansion of the revolution will use the international movement for the protection of its borders. For this reason one cannot analyse the likes of the Iranian Tudeh Party simply on the basis of local conditions. Before anything else, they were merely the conscious or unconscious tools of this counter revolution.

The other mistake is to define a society in transition on the basis of relations of production. Relations of production constantly change during the transition period; hence its name. To nationalise is not the same as to socialise. Social ownership only starts with state ownership of the essential means of production. However, its qualitative growth and the transformation of the first to the second continues only gradually. One cannot therefore determine the nature of such a society according to its constantly

changing relations of production. Those tendencies who have argued that according to the high percentage of growth of state ownership, due to the increasing role of the state plan in the economy or because of low inflation or low unemployment this or that country is closer to socialism, forget that in the period of transition to socialism, priority lies with politics. What guarantees this transition is not the percentage of state ownership but the rule of the organs for the self-government of the producers, i.e., the soviets.

## Democracy and Socialism

Democracy and socialism are not two separate phenomena where the first is merely a means of achieving the second (a means that can sometimes be put aside). For workers and toilers, democracy means securing the right to self determination in all areas of social life, including the economic arena. Therefore, the struggle for this form of democracy cannot be victorious before abolishing classes (in other words prior to socialism). For Marx, the struggle for socialism without fighting for democracy is meaningless. For us socialism means the democratic organisation of society.

During the period of transition, state ownership must gradually and consciously move towards social ownership. The level of this growth is directly related to the level of democracy in the councils. Without the widest democratic rights in the councils state ownership will not only fail to show any signs of transition to socialism but it will strengthen a collective bureaucracy. If the producing masses who form the vast majority of society are not allowed to democratically control and supervise the planned economy, no other authority in that society will have the willingness to produce for social needs.

Furthermore, if during the period of transition, the incentive for increasing production cannot be profit it can only be the reduction of the working day. It is only the producers themselves who because they are keen to get involved in social self determination benefit from shorter working hours. If power is taken away from them, this incentive will also disappear. The ruling bureaucracy will not only fail to reduce working hours; it will adopt a policy of fast growth, a policy which is not necessarily the optimum form of growth. Let us not forget that under Stalin during the first 5 year plan, the title of hero worker was given to those who worked over 12 hours a day.

It is for this reason that we must insist that the leading role of the party should not be confused with the political power of the state during this period of transition. Democracy within the councils is inversely proportional to party dictatorship. The one party system is no more than a denial of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Freedom of political parties must be the epigraph of the Soviet state. Having dispossessed the bourgeoisie of its means of production of subsistence and ideology, it is clear that the

workers' state has nothing to fear from bourgeois political thought. If during the era of its domination the bourgeoisie can impose its ideas on society, this is not due to their attractiveness but simply due to the fact that it is more or less the sole controller of all means of producing ideas. During the period of transition, one cannot ban any party under the excuse that it is still supporting the interests of the bourgeoisie. Such powers will allow the ruling party to also ban workers organisations and parties with the same excuse.

In addition, intervention in the destiny of society cannot be limited to the proletariat. The workers' state must be able to allow the participation of all social layers in this process. The socialist individuals will not come about by force. It is true that the main power is in the hands of the workers soviets, however this does not mean that the role of all others in politics is reduced to zero. The working class wants to disappear as a class, it wants to transform all individuals in society into socialist human beings. How can we expect the development of such individuals under the circumstances in which political democracy is even more limited than under capitalism?

We can discuss the exact forms of this participation; a discussion that can continue in the journal. We are certain about two essential points: firstly, one cannot negate the power of the soviets under the pretext of "democracy", secondly, one cannot deny the need for other democratic elected organs representing other sections and layers of the society beside the workers soviets. One solution might be the creation of an elected parliament, however this needs further discussion. There is no doubt that in order to get the majority of the society involved in the transition to socialism other organs elected by the entire population are needed.

### **The Revolutionary Party**

In order to achieve the transition to socialism there is need for a socialist revolution and in order to lead the working class in this revolution there is a need for a revolutionary party. Therefore, the strategy of revolutionary socialism is the strategy of forming the revolutionary party. During the period of domination of capitalism one cannot expect such a party to involve the majority of the working class. The dominant ideology is that of the ruling class, therefore up to the period of a revolutionary crisis, i.e., the eve of the overthrow of the bourgeois state, only a minority of workers will be attracted to a revolutionary socialist program. The experience of social democracy has shown that the mass workers party can only be a bourgeois workers party.

Hence, the revolutionary party of the working class is in fact the vanguard workers party. It is a party combining the revolutionary socialist program and the vanguard layers of the workers movement. Such a party is, of course, always trying to attract the mass of the workers to revolu-

tionary struggles, and will base its orientation on an action program that can emphasise at any particular stage in the development of consciousness those demands that can raise the level of the activities of the majority of this class towards a socialist revolution.

The necessity for a vanguard party arises from the fact that the process of self-consciousness of the masses is not a linear and steadily ascending process. Every day in the production process the working class does not just achieve consciousness but also accepts many bourgeois illusions. The awareness reached in one process becomes illusions during another. The vanguard party is in fact the accumulated consciousness of the class. Here the vanguard party combats bourgeois illusions and guards the collective consciousness gained.

Such a party cannot be built overnight and it must go through its own specific stages. First and foremost it requires a revolutionary program, a program not as a souvenir from this or that world experience, as those brought by many organisations of the left in Iran, but a programme arisen from inside the specific class struggles and already crystallised in the mind of the vanguard of these struggles. This is not a vanguard so-called because of its association with this or that organisation but a vanguard which has come out of specific struggles and in these has represented those demands and activities which at that stage have served the socialist goal rather than reform of the existing order.

For example, during the February uprising the proletarian vanguard was not necessarily those who had joined some organisation of the left and become known as "communists" but those who in practical struggles defended the democratic gains of the revolution against the savage attacks of the counter-revolutionary Islamic regime, even though they may have never joined any particular party of the left. Or, during the time of repression the vanguard worker was not the one following the seemingly fiery slogans of this or that organisation of the left but those who were quietly building the underground factory committees. As long as the socialist program is not closely tied up to the decisive sections of this vanguard, the proletarian party will not be built.

The most ridiculous form of sectarianism is displayed by those intellectuals who having read a few so-called Marxist books and having gathered a few supporters, call themselves the nucleus of the revolutionary party and then in philistine arrogance start telling the working class how to conduct itself. Tens of cliques and sects have been busy building such "Leninist" parties for decades, whilst the first stage in building this party, i.e., the process of developing a revolutionary socialist program and its integration with the real struggles of the working class and its vanguard has not even started. These are the same people who have only learnt one slogan from Lenin: consciousness comes from outside the workers movement. In reality, this has always been a cover for substituting the work-



ing class with a clique of a few power-hungry petty bourgeois individuals.

Without this or that party, the proletarian vanguard can exist but without the proletarian vanguard the party is irrelevant. Revolutionary socialist program is no more than a concentrated generalisation of the experiences of the vanguard (on the international scale) and its comprehension. Marx did not make the workers movement socialist, it was the working class that converted the liberal Marx to communism. Lenin and Trotsky did not put forward the idea of building workers Soviets, but with the establishment of such Soviets by the workers themselves they realised the significance of such structures. The proletarian vanguard soon grasps the revolutionary program, often faster and deeper than the “intellectual” from outside the class. If our understanding of the sentence “consciousness comes from outside the class” is that the working class cannot understand revolutionary theory we must remind everyone that in the latter part of the 20th century, the vanguard of the proletariat is well educated and can read the Communist Manifesto. Intellectuals are nothing special, they should demand no special privileges from the proletariat. On the contrary, if they have no science or knowledge to contribute, they might as well stay “outside” and not infect the movement with their inevitable prejudices. In fact the term “intellectual” itself has lost the significance it may have had in the eighteenth and nineteenth century and is today merely an excuse for power seeking petty bourgeois elements wishing to sound off inside the communist movement. It is from this layer that the most important sections of the bureaucracy arise.

### Democratic Centralism

Perhaps no issue has been as important a cause of engulfing the Iranian communist left in the dreadful internal spirals of organisational bureaucracy as the notion of “democratic centralism”. Most organisations’ interpretation of this concept is extremely administrative. All party members can, according to regulations in the constitution of the party, occasionally express some ideas, sometimes even differing ones, however they are duty bound to obey all decisions taken by the leadership with a strict iron discipline. Democratic centralism is thus taken to consist of a series of administrative regulations that one can copy from the Russian Communist party. For us, democratic centralism has a direct relationship with the notion of the vanguard revolutionary party and its specific shape at any stage is determined by the stage of the development of this party. For example, one cannot imagine that the principles of democratic centralism at the present stage in Iran when even the nucleus of the party has not yet taken shape will be the same as those governing the party, ten years after its formation.

During the process of establishing this party and in its attempts to intervene in the working class movement, the revolutionary program will be constantly tried and tested.

If the program is to improve by this experience and its understanding, it must initially be based on a common approach to this experience. Centralism means the voluntary efforts of every single communist for the creation of the conditions necessary for this common experience. And this does not take shape because of written regulations but is learnt in practice and in struggle. This experience, once understood, gradually becomes transformed into a series of general organisational principles. The reverse is not, however, true. The need for a common and centralised experience will not be felt because of a series of predetermined administrative regulations.

The second point is that this common experience, does not necessarily lead to a common understanding. Revolutionary vanguards can reach different conclusions from the same experience according to their own practice and awareness. If there is no place inside the party for the encounter of these ideas, these important experiences, often gained at the cost of the flesh and blood of the proletariat, are lost forever and fail to lead to any conclusive summaries. On the other hand, if the interpretations of this or that “leader” from the events is not to be questioned, the revolutionary party becomes a sterile sect deprived of any content and centralism becomes the justification for the cult of personality. Democracy inside the party facilitates the establishment of the conditions where this creative clash of opinions can take place freely and unconditionally. Such conditions can lead to the most realistic appraisal of the experience of the vanguard so that this experience can jointly be taken forward into the next struggle.

Of course, if these democratic principles are not understood by the party cadres and simply become a series of organisational rights, they can metamorphose into their opposite, becoming an excuse for justifying discussion for the sake of discussion. The fact that the majority of the debates within the so-called “democratic” Iranian left appears artificial is not due to the fact that their party constitution is wrong, but mainly because they are not vanguard organisations and their entire political structure is artificial. The right to form tendencies or factions, or indeed its absence in an organisation which has still not taken the first steps for becoming even a nucleus of a party is in reality irrelevant and has more to do with a thousand and one unrelated personal and historical factors than anything else.

The need for the right to form tendencies and factions (wrongly called “fraction” inside the Iranian left) is due to the fact that the process of intervention of the party in the struggles of the class through the vanguard inevitably and constantly leads to disagreements, the deepening of these disagreements, and even splits, and then again the resolution of differences and creation of new ones. If it was anything but this, one must question the health of that party. Without such rights, instead of organising a rational and natural process for the development of these discussions, necessary for the education of the entire party,

one would witness destructive sectarianism on all sides and the formations of unhealthy cliques.

In general, differences within the party usually have two different sources: they are either subjective or class related. Subjective differences are usually due to the fact that one or all sides of the argument remain inconclusive or reach subjective conclusions due to insufficient political experience or due to the lack of development of the struggle itself. The starting point for most differences in the party is subjective. For example, many tactical differences are of this nature (of course, it must be added that occasionally class differences are first presented as tactical differences). Such differences, although at first may appear to be serious or may last for a long time, given a proper and rational framework for discussion can in reality be eventually resolved. The formation of tendencies is the only rational method for regulating such discussions.

All individuals within the party must have the right to declare a tendency on the basis of a written platform and organise like minded individuals for advancing their arguments within the party. Tendencies usually dissolve themselves after the end of discussions in a congress and once decisions on various issues have been taken. Because, by forming a tendency the members accept that their differences are no more than tactical differences and therefore they accept that the party has to eventually take a definite tactical position in order to intervene in class struggles. However, this does not mean that discussions on the subject are finished. Firstly, written discussions must always continue in the party. Every party member must have the right to express his/her opinions about any subject in a written format (as a discussion bulletins) within the party. When we talk of the dissolution of the tendency, we refer to a situation when after the clarification of the opinion of the majority and the clear decision of the party, the continuation of verbal discussion in various branches of the party becomes futile. Although, representatives of various tendencies must participate in the party's leading organs proportional to their strength and will continue the verbal discussions in various meetings of these organs. If these arguments continue until the next congress, it is usual that these tendencies are recreated during the pre-congress discussions.

The formation of official tendencies in an organisation is not a negative point, on the contrary it is the pre-condition for the healthy evolution of the party. Differences cannot be resolved by suppression. Firstly, as the experience of many revolutionary organisations has shown, the correctness of a position is not necessarily reflected in the number of votes it attracts. By stopping the formation of a tendency, the party will gradually become a dead organisation incapable of correcting itself. Secondly, by blocking the expression of the differences within the party, these differences do not go away. On the contrary, instead of being presented as rational discussions, they continue in secret behind closed doors and may lead to disintegration and wholly unnecessary splits; organisational splits of the

type where the membership and the entire vanguard have absolutely no ideas about the reasons behind them or their content.

The second category of differences stems from the influence of non-proletarian layers inside the Party. In the course of class struggle, the vanguard constantly faces the threat of being influenced by non-proletarian ideas in the same way that the entire class faces this threat. At times, the acceptance of these ideological influences not only go unnoticed but are reflected in the party as factional political differences. This phenomenon can happen both to a minority or the majority of a party. With the formation of a faction, one section of the party is in reality declaring war on another. It is usually rare that without prior indications, the level of arguments reaches such a critical stage overnight. One has to doubt the seriousness of members who suddenly form factions without having previously declared a tendency. Of course, it is only after a period of discussion that one can recognise that the differences are indeed non-tactical and realise that the party is threatened with non-proletarian ideas. On the other hand, one should also doubt the sincerity of a majority which labels any discussion proposed by a minority as non-proletarian.

If the issues are not resolved, the faction remains after the congress and discussions continue in a written format. In the same manner as in the case of tendencies, representatives from factions should be elected to all committees and to the leadership proportional to their degree of support. If such differences are not resolved in practice there would be no alternative but to publicly announce the differences and this in turn will eventually lead to splits. However, at least everyone will know what the differences are about.

As we mentioned earlier details of the process for operating democratic centralism, including the precise shape of tendencies and factions, cannot be decided at this stage. What is obvious is that from the very beginning socialists must emphasise that they will defend these rights.

## Revolutionary Strategy

The revolutionary party is organised on the basis of the revolutionary program fighting for the realisation of a revolutionary strategy. In general, where the capitalist mode of production is dominant and the state is a bourgeois state, our strategy is nothing but a socialist revolution. Of course, this general thesis stemming from the most basic principles of theoretical Marxism is rarely disputed; at least not rationally. However, what is amazing is the fact that there are still many socialists who openly disagree with this obvious statement of facts; the reasons for which should be sought in the history of the workers' movement.

During the second International, this elementary principle was abandoned by the deterministic evolutionism of

the reformist tendencies and all forms of stagist theories of revolution were derived from it. During the proletarian revolution in Russia the *mensheviks* became the defenders of stagism and after the degeneration of this revolution during Stalin's rule, the Comintern and the communist parties following its line, not only revived this deviation but deepened it even further. The vast majority of the Iranian and International left were fed by these "theories". Some, abusing Lenin or Trotsky's name replaced revolutionary socialism with class collaboration whilst others proudly defended Stalin and the Comintern. Even if we assume that some such groupings really did have differences with the Stalinists, today such ideas are all outdated and must be reviewed and changed.

Lenin's theory of "uninterrupted revolution" and Trotsky's notion of "permanent revolution" were both attempts by Russian socialists to break with the reformist strategies of the Second International. The Second International (as well as Lenin, Trotsky and the *mensheviks*) all believed that the imminent revolution in Russia was a bourgeois democratic revolution simply because such a revolution had not yet taken place in Russia and thus the driving force for the revolution was said to be the contradiction between the new capitalist forces of production and Tsarist dictatorship. The *mensheviks* concluded from this that the Russian Proletariat must play the role of the left opposition in the coming revolution and stop short of tasks that will alienate the bourgeoisie from leading this revolution. Lenin believed that as the Russian bourgeoisie was more scared of the proletariat than Tsar and as the bourgeoisie had many common interests with feudalism, it will ultimately not be able to play a progressive role. He thought therefore that the Russian proletariat must seek an alliance with the peasantry to lead the democratic revolution and then if conditions in the industrial Europe allowed it, to ally itself with the European proletariat and move towards socialism. Trotsky too thought that the bourgeoisie cannot lead this revolution, however he argued on the other hand that although the proletariat must rely on the peasantry, it is the only class that is capable of holding a majority position in the future government and hence in the struggle against the bourgeoisie it cannot tie itself to the minimum program. In his opinion the victory of the democratic revolution with proletarian leadership meant nothing but its continuation to the socialist revolution.

Both these theories were revolutionary and the experience of the Russian Revolution itself proved the correctness of a combination of them. We believe, however, that these theories are on the one hand both outdated today and on the other hand even in their own era they did not express a complete break with the positions of the Second International.

The shortcoming of both theories is that they do not go beyond the evolutionary framework of the Second International. It is not true to say that because a bourgeois revolution has not happened in a country the impending revolution is inevitably a bourgeois democratic one. There is

no such compulsion in history that all countries must go through the bourgeois democratic revolution. Under specific conditions a country can become capitalist from above (without going through a bourgeois democratic revolution) and can pass through to the dictatorship of the proletariat without having first established a bourgeois state. This Marxist position must be dug out of decades of deviation.

In Marxist tradition the revolutionary strategy was determined by the analysis of three main factors: the class nature of the state, the social/historical tasks of the revolution, the character of the revolutionary class or classes. In all societies and at all stages, the above three factors do not simultaneously correspond with each other.

For example, one can envisage a society where political power is in the hands of a pre-capitalist class or classes whilst a powerful proletariat has already taken shape prior to the bourgeoisie conquering political power. Germany in 1948 and Russia in 1905 are clear examples. In such a society, there are inevitably unfinished democratic tasks of great significance, however these are not necessarily more important than directly anti-capitalist tasks. At its outset the social revolution may even concentrate on these democratic issues, however, it will soon have to put anti-capitalist tasks on its agenda. In addition, in many cases the resolution of the first depends on solving the second. For example, in such a society how can one solve the land issue without first dealing with the nationalisation of banks?

In such societies even if the bourgeoisie is against the existing state, it would prefer a gradual transfer of power rather than a revolution, so that it can effectively stop the progress of the socialist revolution. The extent of bourgeois class collaboration depends on the level of its fear of the proletariat and the depth of its common interests with pre-capitalist classes. In the case of the petty bourgeoisie, the situation can be very different for different layers. In many cases this class can maintain its radicalism until the overthrow of the old regime and this is the phenomenon that has convinced many forces to ally themselves to the whole of the petty bourgeoisie. However, as soon as the proletariat takes serious steps towards the resolution of its anti-capitalist tasks, the upper layers of this class join the counter revolution.

Therefore, in such societies there can be no revolutionary strategy but that of a socialist revolution led by the proletariat relying on the lower sections of the petty bourgeoisie with combined democratic and socialist tasks. This classical approach of Marx is in our opinion much clearer than the one adopted by the Russian revolution. Although Lenin and Trotsky's opinion during the October Revolution represented a revolutionary position as opposed to a reformist one, in reality it was still ideologically tied up with the evolutionism of the Second International and this paved the way for justifying future deviations.

In any case, such arguments were only necessary or valid in older societies. Perhaps during the first world war one could argue that in Iran or India permanent or uninterrupted revolution presented a valid solution for the question of revolutionary strategy, but today, where can we find such pre-capitalist states? Is there a country where capitalist relations have not become dominant? If the state is a bourgeois state it is clear that one cannot unite with sections of the bourgeoisie or the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie. The bourgeois state is, by definition, a state based on these two groups. If the capitalist mode of production dominates, how can one deny the predominance of anti-capitalist tasks over bourgeois democratic ones? Therefore, in the majority if not all present day societies there can be no revolutionary strategy but that of a socialist revolution; and one does not need to constantly refer to the discussions of Russian social democracy to prove this.

Furthermore, one cannot use the excuse of imperialism to justify the fall into class collaborationism. It is perfectly possible that sections of the bourgeoisie and the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie participate in some anti-imperialist tasks, however, never at the expense of the overthrow of the capitalist system and eventually not at the expense of complete separation from imperialism; as the experience of Iran proves once and for all.

As a result we can continue discussions on the various theories written so far about the Iranian Revolution, however, revolutionary socialists must be clear on one issue: capitalism is the dominant mode of production in Iran and the ruling state is a capitalist one. Although many democratic tasks await the revolution, this can only be a socialist revolution starting with the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat relying on all the toilers. All of the bourgeoisie and the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie are in the camp of reaction. The middle layers of the petty bourgeoisie are not allies of the proletariat. However, with the correct tactic the proletariat must neutralise this group. Without such an understanding of the strategy and such a conception of the socialist revolution any attempt to form the party of the working class is in essence futile. As we witnessed in the course of the Iranian Revolution, even if such a party could have hundreds of thousands of followers, without the correct strategy it would lose its head in the whirlwinds of class struggle.

### **The Revolutionary Programme**

The party establishes itself around a programme. Here we must distinguish ourselves from all those who assume party unity can be based on anything else. The party in its contemporary meaning refers to a political organisation formed under specific conditions under the geographic jurisdiction of a specific political state. What distinguishes this party from other similar organisations is not the ideas of its membership but the programme it offers for the entire society. This program stems from a realistic recogni-

tion of the present situation and then on the basis of a clear critique of this state highlights the prominent tasks facing society in order to change the status quo.

In the socialist movement, the partitioning of this programme into a minimum and a maximum section is a distinguishing characteristic of reformist tendencies. Marx never recognised such a distinction in the Communist Manifesto and in the programmes of the First International. In the Second International, this distinction represented its abandonment of the ideals of fundamental and revolutionary change and its contentment with the idea of reforming capitalist society. In the Third International, before the defeat of the Russian revolution and the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern, this division had been put aside. During Stalin's time and later this notion was revived by organisations who supported the "socialist camp". Revolutionary socialism distinguishes itself by rejecting this distinction.

The revolutionary program is a programme that at every stage of the class struggle can point towards the socialist aims of this struggle and indicates the tasks that have to be carried out in order to achieve these aims. In other words, at any stage of consciousness, the party programme must be able to show the practical and inseparable connection between current demands and the aims of the socialist revolution. Such a programme must analyse the specific local and international conditions to show the relationship between, for example, the struggle for an 8 hour day, and the struggle against long term unemployment, whilst demonstrating the historical significance of this struggle in the context of the task to socialise the means of production. As a result, the revolutionary party must simultaneously and at every stage of the struggle present a programme encompassing both the minimum and maximum demands as well as the connection between the first and the second (the so-called the transitional demands).

In our opinion this is the only acceptable notion of a programme for revolutionary socialists. Democratic demands (demands that do not necessarily question the political domination of the bourgeoisie but increase the rights of workers and other toilers), minimum demands (demands that do not question the capitalist mode of production but create reforms benefiting the proletariat), transitional demands (demands that are not directly socialist yet but logically question the capitalist system) and maximum demands (i.e., directly socialist demands) are presented side by side and the propaganda and political work of the party at any stage is based on a combination of the above.

For example, in Iran, in the conditions just after the revolution, one should have concentrated equally on the fight for the consolidation and extension of democratic rights, confiscation of the land of large landowners, establishment of a social security system, or the demands for an end to discrimination against women, national and religious minorities, as well as the fight for the development and unity of workers and peasants councils and the estab-

lishment of producers control over the means of production and distribution. Yet at the same time, the epigraph of all our propaganda should have remained the demands to nationalise all major capitalist concerns and the establishment of a Soviet Republic and workers self management. We all know what happened to those who divided this into minimum and maximum demands.

Following the discussions of the Comintern concerning transitional demands during the era of workers revolutions, and later, Trotsky's comments about transitional demands during the struggle against fascism and the formation of the Fourth International, some revolutionary communists came to the conclusion that the name of such a program is the "transitional" program. This too is in our opinion a narrow interpretation contradicting not only the meaning of the programme but also the understanding of Trotsky and the Comintern themselves. The "transitional programme" can only be that section of the programme that can be considered practical in a particular stage of the struggle. In fact Trotsky himself originally called this programme the programme of action. At any stage of the struggle, depending on the existing level of awareness and the depth and dimension of that struggle, the revolutionary party must present a collection of demands that although stemming from the current levels of consciousness and demands, in practice and in the course of struggle itself come into contradiction with the capitalist rule and demonstrates the need for a transition to socialism.

For example, in the period before the Second World War, when unemployment and inflation prevailed, it was not only practical to put forward the sliding scale of wages and working hours (practical in the sense that the working class could have accepted these demands, and if their reformist leaders allowed it, they were achievable) but it was also necessary from a revolutionary perspective (because the realisation of these demands questioned the very existence of the capitalist order). Or for example, in the 1920s when in many European countries the working class could have obtained electoral majority, the slogan "workers' government" was not only appropriate, because during those difficult conditions it showed the workers that if they put their minds to it they can take control of their own destiny, but it also put pressure on reformist parties to unite with other proletarian parties instead of forming coalitions with the bourgeoisie.

In this way the program of action is a concrete and short term programme. One cannot talk of the transitional programme as a single programme for a particular historic period from now until the socialist revolution. The same programme of action that was valid before the second world war could not be repeated immediately after the war. The programme of action that was correct for the period after the uprising in Iran, cannot be repeated today. However the programme of the party is not simply a programme of action, it is a historical programme and therefore must consist of more than a transitory programme of action.

## The Organisation of Socialist Revolutionaries

In our opinion, the formation of such a trend is not a difficult task at present. Either every one agrees with the above minimums as the starting point or they don't. If others present a different starting point we must then discuss this and if the aim is co-operation and agreement, we would arrive at such a common platform. Any one who agrees with this platform and accepts to work for the realisation of this project, can become a member of this alliance. In other words, a member is someone who accepts the aims of the project and in the effort to realise it is committed to a certain level of activity.

The form of membership is both individually and by groups. A group of people can maintain their own alliance whilst joining this project. The shape of the relationship between individuals or groups with others can only be determined by the consent of both sides. All members have equal rights and they can all express their opinions in the bulletin. If the decision was taken to have an editorial board or a co-ordinating committee for this bulletin, such a board/committee can be changed at all times and they must continuously inform everyone of all information concerning the journal. At present even if all the elements of the revolutionary socialist tendency accept all the above minimums or unite around another summary of these basic principles and accept to work within a single organisation, we must emphasise that this would still be a special alliance very different from a party alliance.

Elements who join such an alliance were inevitably members of other forms of organisations in the past representing varying experiences and traditions. It is very likely that on the basis of these experiences they are still involved in one form or other in the current political struggles. It is unreasonable to expect that all these people, prior to spending a period of common political activity and co-operation suddenly unite and express similar views on class struggle. Therefore, any form of organisational principles that attempts under the present circumstances to question this relative independence and dispersion which exist in reality, not only will embark on an impractical task, but insisting on it will question the initial alliance itself.

As long as revolutionary socialists intervene in present struggles they can discuss their positions in a joint bulletin. Others are not, however, obliged to follow this line and can organise their own independent activities. They can even organise their own independent journal if that was necessary, whilst continuing the debate with others in the common bulletin. As a result, and gradually through these discussions and possible common work, some will probably reach agreement on more than the above minimums. However, this is not directed from anywhere and depends on the individuals concerned. They can put forward any such agreement for public discussion and try to gain support from others.

## Political Struggles

The political interventions of revolutionary socialists in the current political scene must essentially be based on two central issues; the struggle to overthrow the clerical capitalist state and the organisation of the working class vanguard in independent (organisationally independent of political parties) and underground committees. By emphasising the first we distinguish ourselves from all reformist and opportunist tendencies who somehow or other are propagating the possibility of the transformation of the regime from within. By insisting on the second, we emphasise the need to organise the working class as the only force capable of overthrowing the regime distinguishing it from all bourgeois and petty bourgeois alternatives.

Within the framework of the fight for the overthrow of the regime, we must of course defend all democratic demands such as the need for the separation of the state from religion, the right to organisation for all political parties, abolition of all discrimination against women, nationalities, and religious minorities, freedom of all political prisoners, the abolition of the death penalty, etc. Beside these demands and beside our calls for all the minimum demands such as social benefits, unemployment benefit, etc., our struggle around the transitional demands such as workers and peasants control of production and distribution, or the fight for opening the books of all financial enterprises has a more crucial significance.

The creation of workers trade unions (mainly put forward by reformist tendencies) or the reincarnation of the workers councils and assemblies (put forward by the phrasemongers of the infantile left), although by themselves legitimate demands, are obviously not practical under the present circumstances. Even if they become possible during some next stage, they would first go through the link of factory committees. Such committees unite workers irrespective of political or ideological tendencies around a specific class struggle programme and pave the way for the creation of mass organisations of the class. In addition, the propaganda of socialist revolutionaries today must never lack governmental slogans. Our alternative to the Islamic Republic is a soviet republic. This slogan must dominate all our other slogans. Any political slogan that in one way or the other relates to the issue of political power (such as the constitutional assembly) must not only be linked to this general slogan but it cannot in any way contradict it.

In our opinion these general principles are sufficient to distinguish revolutionary socialists. The details of the programme will only become clear when this tendency can reach a common programme after a period of discussion and co-operation in action. Until then, as we have said above, if we cannot agree on a common approach, at no stage will anyone stop others from intervening. On the contrary on the basis of the discussions in the journal we can review these experiences in order to pave the way for future common practice.

## Revolutionary Theory

A revolutionary party will not be built without a revolutionary theory. This theory, we believe, is still the Marxist theory. No other theory has yet been presented to us which can guide us in resolving our current problems of revolutionary practice better than Marxism. However, this does not mean that Marxism itself has been free of the present crisis. The deviations of the Second International transformed this revolutionary theory into a dogmatic and deterministic system of belief that replaced the central role of revolutionary critical practice with a mechanical social evolutionism. The third International, influenced by the experience of Bolshevism and the First World War paved the way for a revival of this revolutionary theory. However, during the Stalinist degeneration of the Comintern not only was this process blocked but under the backward spiral of the ideology of the ruling bureaucracy of the degenerated Soviet state the very same social democratic deviations deepened considerably. The different organisations which came out of the Left Opposition, having played a major role in resisting this degeneration and in safeguarding the revolutionary tradition have proved eventually to be incapable of developing this theory in correspondence with the new changing situation. A thorough review of this experience, the fight to liberate revolutionary theory from decades of decline and a serious effort in developing it in accordance with present day conditions must be in the forefront of the tasks of all socialist revolutionaries. In this relation, emphasising a few points is important in distinguishing our current.

Revolutionary Marxism as a science has no affinity with ideology. One cannot solve this basic dichotomy by saying that it is a special form of ideology, for example, a proletarian ideology. Although ideology can gain some form of material existence due to persistent historical social structures, it reflects no more than a false consciousness of these. In order to hide their special interests under the cover of defending the general interest, the ruling classes have always had to resort to this false consciousness. The proletariat believes in abolishing itself as a class and abolishing the class system altogether. It therefore does not defend any particular interests for which it has to deceive society. The proletariat wants to attain and to propagate consciousness and not to replace bourgeois ideology with its own new forms of ideology.

By agreeing that Marxism is a science, the problem isn't resolved yet. What do we mean by science? It is true that recognising reality as it really is could be said to be the distinguishing feature of science. However how is this recognition obtained? In Marxism there are many debates on this issue and the discussion will inevitably continue. In our opinion the only way to start this debate is to return to Marx himself. What has been presented during the last hundred years under the title of dialectical materialism as a proletarian world outlook has nothing to do with Marx's views. If anything it became simply the ideology of a ruling bureaucracy inside the workers movement. If one

has to give a label to Marxist philosophical methodology (and we have no particular wish to do so), then the philosophy of praxis is far more descriptive than dialectical materialism.

Marx's materialism cannot be reduced to the statement that he improved bourgeois materialism by adding Hegelian dialectics. He went beyond the metaphysical philosophical arguments between materialists and idealists. Whether spirit is primary or matter was not a question that interested Marx. In fact he thought even asking such a question itself represented a lack of break with metaphysics. What was important for him, was the realistic understanding of the activities of specific human beings in their specific socio-historic conditions and not to create a new ideology. He saw human consciousness and his conception of his situation and the outside world not as a passive reflection of matter but as a direct result of his historic/social practice in changing that situation and the outside world and in his comprehension of that practice. There is no doubt that beyond the mind of this individual there is an independent material world. But a world that has not yet entered human experience has therefore no reflection in the human mind either, and the world that encompasses this practice is no longer a world independent of the mind. Marx' dialectics were in recognising the practical link between subjective and objective conditions as a central issue in the theory of consciousness. It is not a coincidence that all reformist tendencies try to underestimate this central role of praxis. By denying the importance of revolutionary-critical practice, this liberating science becomes a closed and backward system of semi-religious belief mainly used to justify the conservative and

counter revolutionary policies of non-proletarian layers.

Such an understanding of Marxism, changes considerably the role of theory in the revolutionary party from what it has so far been considered as the accepted wisdom. For example, to say that our party is a Marxist-Leninist one (or any other such combinations) can only be done if one throws away all of Marx's ideas. If the intention is to show respect to particular leaders of the working class there is no objection, however if that is the case why limit it to a few individuals? It is clear that by identifying one or two people we are specifying the essence of party unity on the basis of their opinions. Yet how can a party in its entirety reach such common positions? In our opinion the party must unite on the basis of its programme and not Marxism or Leninism.

Just because someone knows how to multiply he does not become a mathematician. So how can we claim that members of a party become Marxist on the basis of accepting its programme? This is the method that leads members of a party to vote for this or that theory in a congress by a show of hands. Of course all party members must have opinions on all issues; and if they have not they must try to form them. However, this cannot mean that voting is a way of settling theoretical issues or a way of closing discussions on theory. Marxism like all other sciences is continually changing and evolving and the knowledge gained from it is always relative (depending on experience). Therefore, for revolutionary socialists, theoretical discussion is always open.

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# Marx's Conception of Science

Cyril Smith

The task of regenerating revolutionary socialism is both daunting and exhilarating. This tradition has to find a way, not to 'bring socialist consciousness into the working class', but to reconstruct its own consciousness. Only then will that class be able to free itself from all those ideological shackles which tie it to the existing social order. That requires nothing less than a critical re-examination of every aspect of what used to be thought of as 'Marxist theory'. Not one scrap of that body of doctrine and not one episode of its history should be disregarded. But neither should any piece of it be accepted without careful scrutiny, for insights of Marx which are essential for our time lie buried under the dead weight of dogma.

That job is arduous and painful enough. But more is needed. We have to challenge the very idea that 'scientific socialism' held about itself. This contradicted Marx's own understanding of science, which contains the very heart of what must be recovered, and then developed, from his work. For this purpose, I have tried to tease the actual writings of Marx himself away from the many layers of interpretation and misinterpretation which have collected around them. [1]

Perhaps Marx's aim can be summed up as the effort to fuse the concept of socialism with the struggle of the working-class movement for its independence. Each of these existed long before his time, but they stood opposed to each other. As we lost sight of his fundamental notions, the two sides broke apart once more. We were left with the day-to-day work of the trades unions and parties of the class, under leaderships which continually adapted to the power of capital, while the notion of a new, 'truly human' social formation grew ever more remote. Our task is to re-unite these opposites.

Marx's chief work, *Capital*, when it was read at all, was assumed to be a theoretical account of the workings of 'capitalist economy', a machine which was doomed to malfunction. Its breakdown would inevitably drive forward the revolutionary struggle of the proletariat, leading to state ownership of industry. This picture was inscribed within a 'theory of history'. Consciousness was alleged to be 'determined' by socio-economic forces, and class struggle climaxed in a series of revolutions, in which state power, accounted for by a 'Marxist theory of the State', passed from one class to another. Around this set of theories was wrapped a philosophical outlook called 'dialectical materialism'.

This theoretical framework was thought to cover every-

thing in a complete, integral outlook. But it actually omitted the main problem: the theoretical status of the theory itself. How did the Marxists explain themselves? Did the theory guarantee its own truth? Although hidden, such questions kept finding sharp expression in the course of the history of Marxism.

I do not believe that what we summed up under the title 'scientific socialism' represented the actual conceptions held by Marx himself. Marx did sometimes refer to his work as 'scientific', but what did he mean by this term? During the nineteenth century, the idea grew up that society and history could be studied in a manner which mimicked the successful efforts of the natural sciences. The followers of Marx tried to assimilate this idea to those of Marx. Like the materialist philosophers of the eighteenth century, they thought the social world was a kind of complex mechanism, whose parts interacted according to discoverable laws.

The revolutionary party knew the secret of these laws. Thus it could predict the result of various ways of proceeding in the class struggle, and develop its so-called 'strategy and tactics'. This knowledge was not available to ordinary workers, who, without our special assistance, could at best reach the level of simple trades unionism in their thinking. The 'correct' answers could only be worked out from a 'body of knowledge' authorised by us. There is no need to recount the dire effects this outlook had on the international workers' movement.

To find out what Marx meant by science in relation to his own work, we need first to investigate his use of the word 'critique'. It has often been pointed out that the titles of nearly all his major writings contain this word: *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1843); *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*, (the last and most important section of the 1844 Paris Manuscripts); the *Holy Family: Critique of Critical Criticism* (1845); the various versions of the *Critique of Political Economy* (*Grundrisse*, 1857-8, 1859, and *Capital*, 1867); and the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875).

Marx begins the Introduction to his 1843 *Critique*, the only part he ever published, by asserting that 'the critique of religion is the premise of all critique'. Did 'critique' here mean refuting an incorrect theory, in order to provide a better one, for instance, replacing a false religion with a true one? Of course not. On the contrary, as he explains in a famous passage, religion is not simply



a mistaken idea about the world:

The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the struggle against the world of which religion is the spiritual aroma. Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress, and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people. ... The critique of religion is therefore in embryo the critique of the vale of tears, the halo of which is religion. [2]

Here is the key to Marx's understanding of critique. A theory subjected to criticism - for instance, Ricardo's theory of value - is regarded as the highest expression of an existing, defective way of life. This is precisely because of its scientific character. (Marx wastes little time on the vulgar economists, who merely give expression to the prejudices of capital.) The critique of Ricardo's work, which is the systematic theoretical reflection of the actual social relations, takes Marx to the heart of the inhumanity of bourgeois society. As he stresses in *Capital*,

the categories of political economy are forms of thought which are socially valid, and therefore objective, for the relations of production belonging to this historically determined mode of production.[3]

Similarly, in Hegel's *Idea of the State*, or in his *Logic*, Marx finds distilled the essence of the entire social order. 'Marxism' was very keen on 'Marx's method', as if this could be set out in a few simple rules, disconnected from any particular 'application'. This was a total misunderstanding of what Marx was doing. If we restrict the meaning of the word a bit, we can say that Marx did not have a theory at all. A theory sets out a formal explanation of something, so, before it begins, it must take this object as given. The categories that the theory will use in the explanation, and the logical method which is supposed to tie its propositions together, must also be accepted from the outset. But the aim of Marx's forty years of work was not at all to produce a set of ideas which would 'explain the world'. Indeed, he uncovered those very aspects of modern society, starting with the division between mental and physical labour, which underlay this conception of theory.

So there are two kinds of science: 1. Marx's science-as-criticism; 2. everybody else's theoretical science. The second kind constructs theories. Since these are necessarily based on presuppositions which take the object for granted, theoretical science could also be called dogmatic. It can never know that these assumptions secretly embody the character of the existing social forms.

How does the idea of 'critique' tie in with Marx's use of the word 'dialectics'? (This word is very rarely found in his writings, by the way.) Plato defined dialectic as

the way to get beyond 'opinions'.

It is the only activity whose method is to challenge its own assumptions so that it may rest firmly on first principles. [4]

Two thousand years later, Hegel's dialectic was an all-sided world outlook which enabled him to unify two things: the unfolding investigation of the world, and the historical development of the world. That is why, for Hegel as for Marx, there is no 'method', outside the actual investigation itself. His profound advance was to try to do this absolutely, without presuppositions drawn from 'mere opinion'. In this he partially transcended uncritical science, which can explain many things, but must presuppose itself.

But only partially. Trying to find a way to grasp the world in thought, Hegel's critique of what is given to us was limited by the boundaries of philosophy. His dialectic began with criticism, but ended up by trying to reconcile in thought the opposing aspects, 'transfiguring and glorifying what exists'. In direct opposition to Hegel's dialectic, Marx's critical science

includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary.[5]

Marx could break through the barrier of bourgeois 'opinion', because he had discerned within bourgeois society that revolutionary force which would overthrow it: the proletariat.

Proletarian revolutions ... criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacy, weakness and paltriness of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, recoil ever and anon from the infinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible.[6]

So, in *Capital*, Marx was not attempting to produce an economic theory, superior to previous theories. Economists, even the most rigorously objective of them, start from the acceptance of capital, wages, money, etc., as human ways of behaviour. They see their task as being to 'make sense' of these categories. But, as Marx explains,

to the individuals who exchange their products, the relation between their own private labour and the

collective labour of society appears to them in ... a crazy (verrückte) form. The categories of political economy consist precisely of forms of this kind.[7]

Economists spend their lives trying to make sense of something that is crazy.

But how does Marx know this? His knowledge of the madness of the most fundamental bourgeois social forms does not derive from his scientific work, but precedes it. Suppose that, when Marx investigates the use of child labour in coal-mines, say, someone were to object that there is no economic reason why children should not be employed in this way, would the appropriate response be 'scientific' discussion? Surely it would be the most violent abuse we could muster! That is why the sustained indignation of many passages in *Capital* are not at all 'out of place in a work of science' - in Marx's sense of science.

Now we can face the question: against what measuring-rod does Marx's critique measure its object? With what criterion does he test the old science and find it wanting? From what standpoint does he look at it? The germ of his answer is to be found in the last three of the Theses on Feuerbach:

9. The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, the materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.

10. The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society or social humanity.

11. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.[8]

Thus 'critique' brings Marx's science and his revolutionary practice into a single whole. Dogmatic science is incapable of this. Its theories can never grasp their own presuppositions, their own unity with the object they are trying to account for. When 'scientific socialism' attempted to explain the workings of the class struggle, and to deduce the proletarian revolution as its logical conclusion, the 'scientific' analysis of existing conditions was quite disconnected from the idea of communism.

But Marx's critical science, or science-as-critique, is firmly based upon his understanding of what is 'truly human', and its struggle against the inhuman shape taken by human life. He does not seek to impose a new socialist form, a 'socialist alternative', thought out in advance. Socialist revolution for Marx implies the removal of obstacles to a human way of life. Stripping off these forms of inhumanity will allow the humanity which already exists, imprisoned within those forms, to flourish. The pattern of

critique and the pattern of socialist revolution are identical.

The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life-process, ie, the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control.[9]

So Marx's concept of science is rooted in his understanding of the nature of humanity which, in producing its own material and spiritual conditions of life, makes itself what it is, and continually remakes itself. In our social history, we create and recreate our own forms of consciousness and our own social relations. Until now, this has taken place blindly, through class and other conflicts. To actualise the essential freedom of humanity, denied by its alienated way of life, the contradiction between its present conditions of life and true humanity must find self-conscious practical expression. That is the historic role of the proletariat. Marx's conception of science-as-critique aims to show how the revolutionary class must achieve the level of understanding necessary for the transition to a truly human life.

To sum up: Marx's science begins and ends in the world, not in thought. Beginning with the 'standpoint of social humanity', it criticises the highest forms of existing science, as they try in vain to rationalise the lunacy of an inhuman world. It ends in revolutionary practice, in which human creative power self-consciously liberates itself from social relations dominated by capital.

## Notes

[1] See Smith, C: *Marx at the Millennium*. (Pluto Press, 1996). Also 'Friedrich Engels and Marx's Critique of Political Economy', in *Capital and Class*, 62, June 1997.

[2] *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction*. See, for example, *Marx-Engels Collected Works*, (MECW), Volume 3, p 175.

[3] *Capital*, Volume 1, Chapter 1. Penguin Edition, p 169.

[4] Plato: *The Republic*. Penguin Classics Edition, p 302.

[5] *Capital*, Volume 1. Postface to the Second Edition. Loc cit, p 103.

[6] *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

[7] *Capital*, Volume 1, Chapter 1. Penguin Edition, p 169.

[8] See, for example, MECW, Volume 5, p 5.

[9] *Capital*. Loc cit, p 173.

# **International Committee for the Study of Leon Trotsky's Legacy**

## **International Scientific Conference** *Announcement and Call for Papers*

An International Scientific Conference on the subject of 'Leon Trotsky and the Russian Revolution: 1917-1997' will be held in Moscow on 10-12 October 1997.

The aim of the conference, timed to coincide with the 80th anniversary of the Russian revolution, will be to discuss a wide range of problems related to the Russian revolution of 1917, the role of L.D. Trotsky in it and his contribution to a scientific analysis of it.

Suggested problems on which to concentrate the discussion are as follows:

1. The character of the Russian revolution. The crises of world capitalism and the international upsurge. Were there perspectives for world revolution? The nature of Bolshevism.
2. The role of Trotsky in the Russian revolution. The theory of permanent revolution. Trotsky as a historian of the Russian revolution.
3. The social and economic system formed as a result of the Russian revolution. The dictatorship of the proletariat and the dictatorship of the party. The Bolshevik conception of socialism. 'War communism' and the NEP. Trotsky as one of the main leaders and ideologists of the new regime.
4. Transformations of the Soviet system. Trotsky in opposition. The nature of Stalinism. Bolshevism and Stalinism.
5. The lessons of the Russian revolution. Trotsky's legacy and the socialist perspective.

Applications to participate in the conference should be sent to the organising committee.

If you will require an invitation from Russia to obtain a visa, you must include your passport name, your address, date of birth, passport number, and place of work and address so we can send you an invitation in conformity with the requests of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation.

If you plan to make a presentation, please also include the theme of your report and the projected title.

To contact the organising committee in Russia:

Russian Federation, 117218 Moscow, Ul. Krasikova 27, Russian Academy of Sciences, Room 620, Professor M.I. Voeikov; Tel: 095 332-4525 (w) or 095 326 3497 (h).

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# A Note on Permanent Revolution

Cliff Slaughter

## 1. Some experiences

(additional background to a study of the situation of Trotskyists in Iran after the revolution and the accession of Khomeini).

1. In November 1920 Chicherin received a telegram containing the following words:

'On the day when the workers of the West on the one hand, and the enslaved peoples of Asia and Africa on the other, understand that at the present time international capital is using them to annihilate and enslave one another for the exclusive benefit of their masters ...the power of the bourgeoisie will end.'

The writer was Turkish 'national liberator' Kemal Pasha.

In January 1921 began Kemal's brutal suppression of the Turkish communists.

In 1923, the Soviet ambassador to Turkey declared:

'Mutual relations between the USSR and Turkey are defined at the present time by the struggle for national independence which is still being waged by Turkey, and cannot yet be regarded as completed.'

In 1925, pressure from British imperialism brought Kemal's Turkey and the Soviet Union closer together. Carr writes: 'This gave Kemal the assurance of a free hand with Turkish communists.' Mass arrests, trials, executions followed.

Stalin made a 'theoretical' conclusion in 1926:

'(The Turkish revolution) got stranded at the **first step**, the first stage of the bourgeois-democratic movement, without even attempting to make the transition to the second stage of its development, the agrarian revolution.'

2. In Persia, Reza Khan became Minister for War in February 1921 and was hailed in Moscow as progressive, a national-liberation leader, etc. He became Prime Minister in October 1923. One 'official' Soviet article of 1924 was entitled 'Through Military Dictatorship to a National State', and called Reza 'the leader of the Persian national-revolutionary movement, the man who succeeded in securing Persia's independence.'

In October Reza overthrew the Shah. The journal of the Communist International expressed the hope that Reza would now proclaim himself president at the head of a 'national revolutionary movement'.

On December 16, 1925 he was installed as Shah and founder of a new dynasty.

A Communist International report of early 1926 hoped that 'the national bourgeoisie in Persia would prove strong enough to give a democratic content to Reza's **Caesarist** rule.'

3. The story of the Third Chinese Revolution is familiar to everyone.

For the early period (in which the Communist International Second Congress of 1920 adopted Lenin's Theses on the national and colonial question), one should not lightly dismiss the point made by Carr:

'...the dangers inherent in this situation were not obvious. In the first place, cooperation with bourgeois-national movements, like the expedients recommended by Lenin in **Left-wing Communism**, was conceived in terms of the brief period before the now imminent European proletarian revolution, which would transform the Asiatic scene and sweep away any embarrassments resulting from these transitory alliances, etc.'

## 2. The Theory

Despite some sentences in Trotsky which could be taken to indicate the contrary, the theory of permanent revolution is **not** in its essentials a sort of alternative model to and refutation of 'two-stage' theories and strategies in backward countries. When used in relation to such countries, it does rely on the notion of 'uneven and combined development' to explain the peculiarities of national development, to demonstrate in the imperialist epoch the impossibility of a 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution except under the leadership of the proletariat **and** (often forgotten) through its dictatorship. But this by itself is not sufficient for an understanding of the insistence in the theory on the necessity for the proletariat in power to go forward to socialist measures and to go beyond the national framework.

Concentration on 'permanent revolution' as antidote to

the 'two-stage' theory and strategy has meant that little thought has been given to the two fundamental aspects of permanent revolution: (a) it is the insoluble nature of imperialism's contradictions at the international level (i.e., the level of the system as a whole) that gives the revolution its 'permanent' character; and (b) the 'permanence' (in the sense of its 'going over to socialist measures' and its uninterruptedness) of the revolution is for Marx not only a matter of the proletariat's interests impelling it onwards when the other classes need to halt it, but contains and expresses the very essence of the proletarian revolution, viz., that this revolution requires the self-emancipation of the working class, the continuous development of what Marx called 'mass communist consciousness' (a practical, revolutionary consciousness) through 'the alteration of men on a mass scale'.

Thus, it is the entry on to the scene of the proletariat itself (not its leaders or 'instruments' or representatives) that gives the revolution a mass character, the mass of men and women wresting from the rule of capital every aspect of life and transforming it as their conscious creation, at the same time appropriating the conquests of historical culture (labour). I am trying to say that the 'permanent' nature of the revolution cannot be separated from its mass nature (and see Meszaros, *Beyond Capital*). (Here all the passages on the nature of the proletariat as a class in Marx 1844 Manuscripts and Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right should be cited)

Trotskyists have (inevitably) over-concentrated on the refutation of Stalinism, and therefore on strictly historical-political questions, and this has narrowed our theoretical outlook. In the WRP/Workers International we began to get a glimmer of this when we had to argue, after 1990, that Trotskyism is not only anti-Stalinism (comrades said, 'yes, but why do you emphasise this?') and that the new situation demanded of us that we try to overcome a too narrowly political-historical 'Marxism'.

### 3. Texts

**Marx and Engels** '*Address of the Central Council to the Communist League*':

The Address ends:

'If the German workers are not able to attain power and achieve their own class interests without completely going through a lengthy revolutionary development, they at least know for a certainty that the first act of this approaching revolutionary drama will coincide with the direct victory of their own class in France and will be very much accelerated by it.

'But they themselves must do the utmost for their final victory by making it clear to themselves what their class interests are, by taking up their position as an

independent party as soon as possible and by not allowing themselves to be misled for a single moment by the hypocritical phrases of the democratic petty bourgeois into refraining from the independent organisation of the party of the proletariat. Their battle cry must be: The Revolution in Permanence.'

**Trotsky** '*Permanent Revolution*' and '*Results and Prospects*':

In his Introduction Trotsky says,

'In its essential features the theory of the permanent revolution was formulated by me even before the decisive events of 1905....The bourgeois character of the revolution, however, could not answer in advance the question of which classes would solve the tasks of the democratic revolution and what the mutual relations of these classes would be...

'I drew the conclusion that our bourgeois revolution could solve its tasks radically only in the event that the proletariat, with the aid of the multi-millioned peasantry, proved capable of concentrating the revolutionary dictatorship in its own hands.

'What would be the social content of this dictatorship? First of all it would have to carry through to the end the agrarian revolution and the democratic reconstruction of the state. In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat would become the instrument for solving the tasks of the historically-belated bourgeois revolution. But the matter could not rest there. Having reached power the proletariat would be compelled to encroach ever more deeply upon the relationships of private property in general, that is to take the road of socialist measures....

'Whether the dictatorship of the proletariat leads to socialism or not, and at what tempo and through what stages, will depend upon the fate of European and world capitalism.

'These were the essential features of the theory of the permanent revolution at its origin in the early months of 1905.'

Only one page later, before elaborating on this summary, Trotsky refers to Marx:

'The permanent revolution in the sense which Marx attached to this concept, means a revolution which makes no compromise with any single form of class rule, which does not stop at the democratic stage, which goes over to socialist measures and to war against reaction from without; that is, a revolution whose every successive stage is rooted in the preceding one and which can end only in the complete liquidation of class society....

'Marx regarded the bourgeois revolution of 1848 as the direct prelude to the proletarian revolution. Marx "erred". Yet his error has a factual and not a methodological character. The revolution of 1848 did not turn into the socialist revolution. But that is just why it did not achieve democracy.'

Three main elements then:

(a) '...the central idea of the theory. While the traditional view was that the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat led through a long period of democracy, the theory of the permanent revolution established the fact that for backward countries the road to democracy passed through the proletarian dictatorship.'

(b) It is important to note that in this introduction, giving an outline of the theory, Trotsky goes into the point made above about the **socialist** revolution as permanent (the continuous transformations of society by the working class in its own and humanity's interests):

'For an indefinitely long time and in constant internal struggle, all social relations undergo transformation. Society keeps on changing its skin. Each stage of transformation stems directly from the preceding. This process necessarily retains a political character, that is, it develops through collisions between various groups in the society which is in transformation. Outbreaks of civil war and foreign wars alternate with periods of "peaceful" reform. Revolutions in economy, technique, science, the family, morals and everyday life develop in complex reciprocal action and do not allow society to achieve equilibrium. Therein lies the permanent character of the socialist revolution as such.'

(This aspect of the theory needs developing with the essential emphasis on the development of 'mass communist consciousness' in the course of the '(self)-alteration of men on a mass scale' - above)

(c) The socialist revolution begins on national foundations - but it cannot be completed within these foundations... a national revolution is not a self-contained whole; it is only a link in the international chain. The international revolution constitutes a permanent process, despite temporary declines and ebbs.'

**Trotsky** *'The Third International After Lenin'*:

'The revolutionary party of the proletariat can base itself only upon an international programme corresponding to the character of the present epoch, the epoch of the highest development and collapse of capitalism. An international communist programme is in no case the sum total of national programmes or an amalgam of their common features. The international programme must proceed directly from an analysis of the conditions and tendencies of world economy and of the world political system taken as a whole in all its

connections and contradictions, that is, with the mutually antagonistic interdependence of its separate parts. In the present epoch, to a much larger extent than in the past, the national orientation of the proletariat must and can flow only from a world orientation and not **vice versa**. Herein lies the basic and primary difference between communist internationalism and all varieties of national socialism.'

'There were two fundamental propositions in the theory of permanent revolution (as formulated in 1905-6). First, that despite the historical backwardness of Russia, the revolution can transfer the power into the hands of the Russian proletariat before the proletariat of advanced countries is able to attain it. Secondly, that the way out of those contradictions which will befall the proletarian dictatorship in a backward country, surrounded by a world of capitalist enemies, will be found on the arena of world revolution. The first proposition is based upon a correct understanding of the law of uneven development. The second depends upon a correct understanding of the indissolubility of the economic and political ties between capitalist countries.'

'...in the present epoch for which the programme (draft programme of the Communist International, 1928) was created, capitalist development as a whole is faced with insurmountable obstacles and contradictions and beats in frenzy against them. **It is precisely this that invests our epoch with its revolutionary character and the revolution with its permanent character.**' (my emphasis, CS)

In this book is, 'Summary and Perspectives of the Chinese Revolution: its lessons for the countries of the Orient and for the whole of the Comintern'. The whole of this is essential for discussion of permanent revolution. In particular see section One, 'On the Nature of the Colonial Bourgeoisie'. On pp. 170-171 Trotsky deals with Bukharin's 'theoretical justification' of long-term political blocs with the colonial bourgeoisie. Bukharin had declared: 'The liberal bourgeoisie in China played an objectively revolutionary role over a period of years, and not months. Then it exhausted itself. This was not at all a "24-hour" holiday of the type of the Russian liberal revolution of 1905.'

Trotsky retorts:

'Everything here is wrong from beginning to end.'

'Lenin really taught us to differentiate rigidly between an oppressed and oppressor bourgeois nation. From this follow conclusions of exceptional importance. For instance, our attitude towards a war between an imperialist and a colonial country. For a pacifist, such a war is a war like any other. For a communist, a war of a colonial nation against an imperialist nation is a bourgeois revolutionary war. Lenin thus **raised the national**

liberation movements, the colonial insurrections, and wars of the oppressed nations, to the level of the bourgeois democratic revolutions, in particular, to that of the Russian revolution of 1905. But Lenin did not at all place the wars for national liberation **above** bourgeois democratic revolutions as is now done by Bukharin after his 180-degree turn. Lenin insisted on a distinction between an oppressed bourgeois nation and a bourgeois oppressor nation. But Lenin nowhere raised and never could have raised the question as if the bourgeoisie of a colonial or a semi-colonial country in an epoch of struggle for national liberation must be more progressive and more revolutionary than the bourgeoisie of a non-colonial country in the epoch of the democratic revolution....'

#### 4. Work to be done

Inevitably, this 'bookish' way of doing things looks like a boring insistence on orthodoxy, but I think it is a necessary and neglected part of what must be done. These notes are no more than a suggestion for further study. Other passages which should be added are to be found in the following pages in 'Permanent Revolution' (New Park edition):

p.57, last paragraph beginning 'Our liberal bourgeoisie...'

pp.62-3 The paragraph beginning 'In all these questions..'

p.106 (Lenin quote) 'In a country..'

pp.126-7 All

p.129-133 All, ending on 133 '..dragged back'

p.150 paragraph beginning 'Between the regime...'  
Chapter 10 Epilogue - all.

Then a mountain of work needs to be done:

1. On the 'national-liberation' movements and 'independent states' set up with the support of the Stalinist bureaucracy since World War II, from the Chinese Revolution up to ANC/South Africa.

2. On the position taken by Trotskyists on that question, and, in particular, their positions where there were sections: Ceylon, Bolivia, Vietnam, China, Iran. Positions on Algeria and Cuba are very important here, obviously.

What is the point of such work?

It is not solely for the purpose of understanding more clearly what 'permanent revolution' means. The theory of permanent revolution was central to the programme elaborated by Trotsky for the International Left Opposition and the Fourth International. Since then, in the many countries where national-independence struggles could be characterised as having a bourgeois-democratic content, the bourgeoisie, and not the proletariat, has established its dictatorship. Every 'national bourgeoisie' today has a relationship with world capital in its historical-structural crisis and with the major capitalist powers which cannot be understood only (and in most cases not at all) as one between oppressor and oppressed capitalist nations.

The 'hypothesis' which must urgently be proposed, in a renewed study of permanent revolution, is: there is no longer any such thing as a bourgeois-democratic revolution. In this case, the emphasis on the theory of permanent revolution as the essential programmatic answer to the Stalinist 'two-stage' revolution has to be dropped, and its essential socialist and international content as proposed by Marx has to be understood and elaborated in the theoretical and practical work of building revolutionary parties in today's conditions of capital's structural crisis and of the collapse of the Stalinist bureaucracy which is so absolutely central to the unfolding of that crisis. In this context, we surely must conclude that the work done by Iranian comrades (see this issue) is of the very first importance.

April 1997

## Polemic: So who are the 'sheep'?

Correspondence from Russia

*This is an edited translation of two letters published in issue no.2 of Politprosvet [Political Education], the journal of a group of socialists in Cheliabinsk, in the southern Urals, one of Russia's big industrial areas.*

*The first letter is from a member of the Russian Communist Workers Party, founded in 1992 and led by Viktor Anpilov and Viktor Tiul'kin. The RCWP's anti-parliamentarism distinguished it from the much larger Communist Party of the Russian Federation, which has a big parliamentary fraction and whose leader, Gennadii Ziuganov, stood against El'tsin in the 1996 presidential election. After the White House siege of October 1993 and the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, the RCWP boycotted the parliamentary elections and concentrated on building its alliance with right-wing nationalists through a campaign of street demonstrations - but it abandoned the boycott for the December 1995 elections.*

*The second letter is by one of the editors of Politprosvet, Viktor Avdevich.*

*We also publish a comment on the correspondence by Simon Pirani a participant in the International Socialist Forum.*

### **A letter from S.V. Miliakha of Chaikovskii city, in Perm region**

Greetings, Viktor Ivanovich!

It is a pleasure and an advantage to be in contact with you. [...] In many respects we are co-thinkers - although there are divergences, of which more below ...

I am a member of the RCWP. I understand that the CPRF and Ziuganov are in no way communists, but social democrats. I am strongly opposed to the split that has taken shape in the RCWP between Tiul'kin and Anpilov. [Anpilov, accused of compromise with Ziuganov, has been removed from key positions in the RCWP.] If the party splits I will take Anpilov's side.

However I also understand that today the 'working class' is, in essence, a philistine group, incapable of mass political struggle. That is why the most important thing today is propaganda: today we are 'populists': we must go to the people with counter-propaganda. [The populist move-

ment of the 1870s, formed from the urban middle class, resolved to 'go to the people', i.e. literally to travel to the countryside to propagandise the struggle against tsarism.] And therefore today is not the time to struggle for the purity of ideas, but a time to struggle for the overthrow of this anti-popular [El'tsin] regime. We must unite all national-patriotic forces. And in this respect I support Ziuganov.

We must go to the [Russian parliamentary] elections [in December 1997] and win deputies' positions, because - if they really want to, if they do not slide into the opportunist swamp - there is much practical work that communist deputies can do.

Now about Politprosvet.

1. I believe that your theoretical views and researches are timely and necessary - that is, for those who are able (by virtue of their education) and who want to involve themselves, i.e. for propagandists. For mass distribution in a working-class milieu, Politprosvet would not be understood. The journal's aim, understanding-propaganda-organisation, is correctly set out.

2. You write of the catastrophic inadequacy of our forces; that is correct. On the other hand: 'In this country the workers only potentially comprise a class.' Also correct. I would go further: the mass of workers today are obtuse philistines (this is the evaluation of the newspaper Argumenti i kontrargumenti, No.6, 1996, for example). That's how it is. The worker sits in the smoking room and heaps curses on everybody, starting with his managers. He does not believe in the communists. He speaks with a hint of pride - how clever he is. And really he is a sheep; he has no idea where he is going. Because he does not read anything (apart from detective novels), he watches TV and takes it in unthinkingly, and he does not search for truth.

'Sheep' like this are the majority. They are languishing in poverty, but many of them vote for El'tsin, so that things won't get any worse. The trouble is that, in socialist times, the majority of people became so used to the idea that the state would not leave them in poverty, that they can not believe that it will throw them out of their flats or refuse to help them resist hunger.

Today there is no 'working class'. That is the reality from which we must proceed. In fact today the peasantry is more conscious and more revolutionary than the worker-



philistines in the towns. But in your work you take no account either of the peasantry or of the working intelligentsia.

Therefore, your idea that 'the emancipation of the workers is the task of the working class itself' is admissible only as a slogan; it can not be regarded as a practical position. Unless they are united with the above-mentioned groups [peasantry and intelligentsia], then the 'sheep' of the 'working class' will go more quickly under the knife than into organised political struggle.

3. I do not doubt the importance of theoretical and ideological work. Yes, it is necessary! But I think that you underestimate practically attainable aims, i.e.:

- Participation in all elections, in order to bring our deputies to power and to propagandise our ideas (through the election campaigns, the parliament, etc);

- Unity of all opposition forces against the regime. I think that today this is the most important aim, because if the regime is not overthrown, then in a few years we simply will not be here; there will be nobody left to concern themselves with theoretical work and ideological research. Today even Anpilov has understood this, and changed his tactics. You describe the RCWP as 'an apology for a revolutionary organisation' - without proof. [The party's] idea of an all-Russian political strike is correct in principle. It is another matter that there is no realistic possibility of one. That is understood by both Anpilov and Tiul'kin; but they have both thrown the idea into discussion. And why not?! How can this be considered a 'provocation' (your italics)? According to your reasoning, we could blame Marx for throwing in the communist idea (without prior preparation for reality).

There is another problem. I believe that you underestimate the significance, at the present stage, of uniting all opposition forces. On the other hand, it is not good enough to make unsubstantiated criticisms of groups, parties and movements who call themselves communists. Either make a fundamental criticism or don't make one at all. [...]

4. Without practical work, even a group of the truest Marxists will be left on the margins of political struggle. Life will go on; they will be left to themselves. There will be no use for such a group and its ideas. That is why I [...] can not agree that 'proletarian activists will work successfully, if they take up ideological work rather than direct political struggle.' [...]

5. Concerning printed material. The opposition today has dozens of newspapers and journals, national and local, produced by enthusiasts under the most difficult conditions. And they should be thanked for this. [...] Uniting them all is both impossible and unnecessary. However the inadequacy of all these publications is that they have little or no contact between themselves. And so if Politprosvet can undertake the function of developing such contacts (views, criticisms, discussions, etc) this would

be a tremendous contribution to our common work. [...] 15.8.96.

### **Answer to comrade S.V. Miliakha from the editors of Politprosvet**

Greetings, Sergei Vladimirovich!

I am happy that some of Politprosvet's ideas are in keeping with yours. Ideally, it would be no bad thing to develop this harmony and clear away disagreements. Unfortunately, in practice, things often go the other way. [...] All the same one hopes, every time, that among one's 'co-thinkers on many issues', one will find, simply, co-thinkers. And I am hoping so this time, too.

Concerning your observations. You have noted quite correctly that our journal is not addressed to [...] a popular readership. From the start we thought of it as a publication for activists of the workers' movement, for propagandists. Today propaganda among workers - and here again we agree - is our fundamental task.

But the whole problem is this: with what do we go to the workers? What do we need to propagate? Is it really all the same, whether we go to workers with thinly-masked ideas of the necessity of co-operating with capitalists [...] - or with ideas of overthrowing not only the present regime, but the whole capitalist system? Advocates of both these ideas can be found in the opposition. Furthermore there are oppositions who stand solidly for the 'overthrow' of the regime - but they battle away for this with only one aim in mind: to get hold of power themselves. For them there is no question of changing the system as a whole. So - which ideas will we propagandise?

If we do not get to grips with this question, then willingly or unwillingly we will simply be working in the capitalists' interests. Why not fight for 'the purity of ideas'? This is not so much a theoretical question as a practical one. [...]

In my opinion, the fundamental substance of proletarian propaganda is a demonstration of the reality of the situation: the processes that are taking place in the world, the real interests of workers, their position, the abuses of the capitalists and their power, and so on. [...]

And from this point of view I can in no way agree with the ideas advanced by you and your party. You say the main aim is the overthrow of this anti-popular regime! But let us see, let us think, what will this really do for the working people? Suppose that El'tsin's place is taken by Ziuganov, or whoever. Will capitalism and exploitation disappear? Judging by your letter, you yourself do not believe this.

In reality, the substitution of one regime for another will change little for workers. In reality, even the present re-

gime changes its appearance in line with changes in the distribution of social forces (we can not fail to see that, to the extent that the national bourgeoisie becomes stronger, so the government's policy becomes more protectionist). [...]

The communist parties' strategy was always directed to changing the whole system; it was always orientated towards revolution. Today, to call directly for an immediate revolution is obviously senseless. But all the same, revolution remains the strategic aim, and all the proletarian party's activity must be directed to the preparation of it, including the preparation of workers for it. [...]

In my opinion, that is reality. It is also reality that today the workers are not organised, that they are not prepared even to undertake economic struggle. You recognise this fact. But it is also a fact that the working class will only achieve political change when the mass of workers participate in an organised way in the movement. No party of the proletariat can achieve anything significant without such participation by workers.

Therefore the hopes that we may immediately unite around Ziuganov or someone else, and in this way achieve something for the working class, are in vain. There will be concessions from the capitalists, of course. But these will come if the workers' movement, rather than separate individuals or groups, demands them.

We insist again and again: today, when there is no workers' movement, it is very easy for those who put demands in the name of the workers to end up in the camp of those against who they are 'fighting'. There is no need to speak of the [Ivan] Rybkins of this world. [Rybkin, at first considered part of the anti-El'tsin opposition, co-operated increasingly with the government as chairman of the Russian parliament 1994-6.] We have the absolutely up-to-date example of [Aman] Tuleev [leading member of the CPRF from Kuzbass; appointed minister for relations with other CIS states by El'tsin in August 1996]. Remember how he poured abuse on the El'tsin regime? He was further left even than Ziuganov, in my view. And what do we see now? He is already a minister, in that same El'tsin's pack.

Now one hears that Anpilov has said that if he is offered a leading post in television, that he will take it. Excuse me, but here we have it again: one more 'fighter' with the regime, ready to enter into the regime's service. Are the warnings not clear enough to you?

They say that they will fight, that we need more deputies. But here we have examples which show where this 'struggle' of the minister-socialists leads. It is an illusion, nothing more. [...]

I believe that practically all the Communist parties today either do not want to, or can not, correctly evaluate the situation from the point of view of the interests of the

working class. Consequently they can not develop a correct line of practical activity. In particular, they totally ignore the fact that the growth of activity by the workers' movement has an objective character. [...] Here is an example.

In relation to the 1905 revolution, Lenin quoted some very characteristic figures. In the ten years beforehand, on average 43,000 workers took strike action each year, i.e. 430,000 in ten years. And in January 1905 alone there were 440,000 workers on strike. More in a month than in a decade! And this increase came about, above all, for objective reasons.

Lenin further noted the presence of both economic and political strikes and the relationship between them. In 1905, among the most advanced engineers, there was a preponderance of political strikes over economic ones, especially towards the end of the year.

'Among the textile workers, on the other hand, we observe an overwhelming preponderance of economic strikes at the beginning of 1905, and it is only at the end of the year that we get a preponderance of political strikes. From this it follows quite obviously that the economic struggle, the struggle for immediate and direct improvement of conditions, is alone capable of rousing the most backward strata of the exploited masses, gives them a real education and transforms them - during a revolutionary period - into an army of political fighters within the space of a few months.' (V.I. Lenin, Lecture on the 1905 Revolution [see collected works, standard English edition, vol.23, pp. 241-242]).

What more could be said, to make the point that a proletarian activist must base his activity on reality? Only with a correct estimation of development is successful activity possible.

You are aggrieved that I described the RCWP as 'an apology for a revolutionary organisation'. I completely agree with you that one should criticise essentials, and that that often does not happen. But in this particular case, I used that epithet in an absolutely concrete context: in criticism of the call for a general political strike. You yourself admit: there is no realistic prospect of this. No prospect - and yet the idea is thrown in.

I can not resist mentioning the folk tale about the boy who cried wolf when no wolf was there (he threw in the idea, so to speak). You remember the ending: when a wolf really showed up, no-one believed him. In my opinion, that's a classical example of a provocation and its consequences.

None of the Communist parties want to see the objective character of the development of workers' political activity; denying reality, they seriously overestimate their own ability to bring about political change. Instead of studying that reality, they again and again mistake what they

want with what really is - and end up back where they started. If all the energy that communists expend in attempts to unite 'all the opposition forces' was used to work politically in the working class, their real base, then we might have less shouting and more real ideas.

Further. It is precisely those proletarian activists that throw themselves into the political struggle, overestimating workers' political development in this way, who end up getting 'offended' by the working class. They react by bestowing the most insulting epithets on the workers - and even by completely rejecting any perspectives towards them. You and Pyzhov are by no means alone in this. But the revolution of 1905 (and not only that example) showed that the most backward layers may very rapidly be transformed into an army of political fighters. And it showed how that happened. Was this experience really made in vain? Don't we really have to study it?

Here something should be said of the mutual relations of the working class, peasantry and the intelligentsia, and of the revolutionary potential of the latter groups. [...] Both the peasantry and the intelligentsia are significant forces in society. [...] But it would be a mistake to exaggerate their revolutionary potential.

The point is that peasants and members of the intelligentsia, by virtue of the work that they do, are more individualist than workers. If one talks with them, they may appear more independent, more thoughtful and even more decisive. But this applies to independent, isolated cases. The mass of these social groups depend less on other members of the collective and have less experience of collaborative, collective work than workers. The intelligentsia occupies an intermediate social position which could hardly do otherwise than guarantee its inconsistency. And when the time arrives for organised, collective political activity, neither the intelligentsia or the peasantry will be very well prepared for it.

Right from Marx's time (when the idea that the workers must emancipate themselves was put forward in the Communist Manifesto) the industrial workers have remained, and remain, the most well-prepared for collective action, the most exploited - and today, the most numerous - class. Right from that time, these workers have comprised, and comprise, the most revolutionary class. It would be mistaken to allow the decline of the class' activity, and the fact that it has changed in many respects during this time, to obscure this. Objectively it is precisely the industrial proletariat, and it alone, that may play the leading role in future social transformations.

In your letter, a tendency to separate theoretical and practical work can be seen clearly. But it is characteristic of Marxism that it has always been seen as uniting theory

and practice as two necessary components of successful work. (Remember: there is nothing more practical than a good theory, etc.) [...]

It is another matter that one or other of these components, one or other form of work, may predominate at a particular stage. If a proletarian organisation does not constantly concern itself with the comprehension of reality, with the generalisation of experience, it will end up being defeated. The type of practical work that an organisation can undertake depends on the forces it has at its disposal, on the conditions. If the organisation is small, if it does not have the support of large sections of the workers' movement, there is no way that it can expect seriously to participate directly in political struggle or promise to bring about political change. Proletarian organisations and parties are notorious for deceiving themselves and others on these matters.

What can a weak organisation of the kind we have described really do? Can it work to attract working-class activists to its ranks? It can. Can it work on theoretical material? It can. Can it undertake propaganda and agitation among workers, thereby giving them help? It can and must. All this is entirely feasible, practical and successful work.

[...] The most important thing for a serious proletarian organisation is to help to organise the working class, to help raise the level of working-class struggle and to make that struggle conscious. If proletarian organisations today concentrate on 'practically attainable aims' (such as participation in elections, unification of all the opposition forces etc), will they be working towards this crucial goal? No! Such activity will simply sow a new crop of illusions among workers, that their problems can be resolved without their participation. That is how it is. [...]

None of us will dispute the proposition that, unless it conquers political power, the working class can not realise its political interests. But we must not forget that this task will be carried out not by a party but by the class: the organised class, the class acting consciously, the class prepared by previous economic struggles. And the aim of the party now consists precisely of helping the class to organise, to bring to it ideology. This is the main aim - even if in achieving it we use political means (such as participation in representative organs etc). But today we see that the means are overshadowing the ends. [...]

In conclusion may I thank you for your letter. [...] With very best wishes,

V. Avdevich.

## Comment

Simon Pirani

It is heartening to learn from Politprosvet that comrades thousands of miles away in the Urals are debating questions similar to those raised in the discussions in London which led to the publication of International Socialist Forum.

Viktor Avdevich's arguments, against 'communist parties' that try to substitute themselves for the working class or speak in the class's name, ring true. So does his argument that socialists must clarify ideas. The most important thing, he says, is to raise the level of working-class struggle and make that struggle conscious. 'If proletarian organisations today concentrate on "practically attainable aims" ... will they be working towards this crucial goal. No!'

'Why not fight for "the purity of ideas"?' asks Avdevich. Good question!

With this in mind, I would raise two points.

1. Comrade Miliakha says: 'The trouble is that, in socialist times, the majority of people became so used to the idea that the state would not leave them in poverty, that they can not believe that it will throw them out of their flats or refuse to help them resist hunger.'

For a start, I do not think that this is 'the trouble'! If Russian workers regard flats, or protection from hunger, as theirs by right, this is the reflection in consciousness of past class struggles - which, albeit indirectly and not straightforwardly, produced a situation in which the state felt compelled to protect workers from hunger and provide them with flats. (British history, which could hardly be more different from Russian history, has also produced in workers the belief that state education, state health care, etc, are theirs by right. That is not a bad thing.)

More important, however, is that Miliakha takes for granted the very thing that must be challenged by socialists: that the Brezhnev years, to which many older Russian workers look back fondly, were 'socialist times'.

If we use the word 'socialist' in this way, without qualification, we accept the foul perversion of its meaning carried on for decades by bourgeois ideologists and the rulers of the USSR alike. Without entering here into discussion of the class character of the USSR, or of the historic achievements of the Russian revolution (vital subjects which must be discussed), I would say that a rejection of the idea that the USSR constituted 'socialism' is an im-

portant starting-point for such a discussion.

Socialism surely implies a society in which the domination of capital is thrown off, in which the oppression and inequality left over from class society is being overcome, in which the state 'withers away'. The USSR, trapped in a world in which capital remained dominant, was a society corroded and finally overwhelmed by the oppression and inequality bred by capital, a society in which the state did not wither away but on the contrary grew into a monstrous weapon of tyranny.

Political education must START by rejecting the proposition that Brezhnev's USSR was socialist.

2. Another starting-point of discussion must be to reject the notion of Ziuganov and others, embraced by S. Miliakha, of uniting 'all national-patriotic forces'.

V. Avdevich explains perfectly well that the replacement of El'tsin by Ziuganov would change little for workers, and that what is required is to build an independent workers' movement. Further. Such a movement will be corrupted and damaged by the idea of uniting 'all national-patriotic forces', which in the present-day Russian context implies uniting - as both the CPRF and RCWP have done consistently and continue to do - with Russian nationalists and near-fascists of every kind, simply on the grounds that they are opposed to El'tsin. Ziuganov and co. embrace this nationalism equally enthusiastically when it is directed against Russia's traditional colonies, e.g. Chechnia, and age-old targets of racism, e.g. the Jews, as they do when it is directed against 'imperialism'. A serious discussion of socialist ideas can not even begin without a categorical rejection of this reactionary poison, and an acceptance of revolutionary internationalism - the unity of the international working class in struggle against capitalism - as a fundamental principle.

This is by no means a 'Russian' issue. In western Europe, those of us who campaigned to assist workers' organisations in Tuzla, Bosnia, to defend their multi-ethnic community from Serbian genocide, found ourselves up against 'socialists' who would not condemn this genocide because they saw something 'socialist', or at least 'anti-imperialist', in Milosevic and Karadzic.

These two issues are in no way separate from the points raised by comrade Avdevich. 'Communism' that identifies itself with Brezhnev's rule, and replaces internationalism with 'national-patriotism', is the same 'communism'

that arrogantly presumes to substitute itself for the working class and to strive for 'practically attainable aims' (election victories etc) outside of the struggle to rebuild the working-class movement. This 'socialism' is alien to the working class; it is the 'socialism' of fragments of the shattered state bureaucracy in the eastern countries or of

the pro-bourgeois labour bureaucracy in the western countries. The fight against its methods (substitutionism, parliamentarism) must be bound up with a fight against it on ideological grounds, to re-establish the meaning of socialism and internationalism.

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In its work the library will pursue educational aims. It will organise regular meetings of readers, and discussions of published works and of a wide variety of social-political issues.

The library is not a commercial organisation. Those who participate in its work do so on a voluntary basis. Finance for technical and maintenance expenses will be provided by voluntary donations.

A management committee has been formed with the following members:

A.V. Buzgalin, Doctor of Economics, Professor at the Lomonosov Moscow State University; A.V. Gusev, Doctor of History, teacher at the Lomonosov Moscow State University; K.A. Buketov, editor of the journal *Rabochaia politika* (Working-class Politics); L. Akai, political commentator; Iu.V. Guseva, librarian and translator; V.A. Evstratov, research student at the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences; R. Clark, journalist and political commentator; M.A. Tsovma, translator.

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# Revolution & Counter-revolution in Iran

## A Marxist View

### Introduction:

*The following document was published by "socializm va enghelab" (Socialism and Revolution) in 1984. It was written in early 1983 by Saber Nikbeen, then a member of the IEC of USec, as part of the pre-world congress discussions and represented the views of the now disbanded Iranian Socialist Workers Party (HKS). A resolution based on the recommendations of this document was passed by the IEC immediately following the world congress which called for the expulsion from the FI of the supporters of the American SWP in Iran who had collaborated with Khomeini's regime, public self criticism by the USec of its mistaken positions on the Iranian revolution and support for the regroupment project initiated by the Iranian comrades. To this day, the USec has not yet published that resolution.*

*Despite its age we feel that its republication is necessary if only to help understand the background to the discussions within the Iranian revolutionary socialist groups. We also feel it can help many comrades to review their own positions on this important revolution of the 20th century.*

## Part 1: The Present Situation

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

## 1. The Situation of the Masses

### a. Organizational Gains

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

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

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

### b. Economic & Social Gains

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

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

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

### c. Democratic Rights

The political pattern of all the revolutionary upsurges in Iran's modern history indicate that the central political demands of the masses have always been around the question of democratic rights. The February insurrection brought about many democratic rights, the struggles for which have marked the entire history of the last 80 years of political movements.

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

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

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

## 2. The Reconstruction of the State

### a. Democracy & Dictatorship

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

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

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

The ultra-centralised state, which was formed with the help of the imperialist powers after the Russian Revolution to block the advance of Bolshevism, had to be based on a system of national privileges for the Farsis and the total suppression of the national rights of all other nationalities. The Islamic rulers who claim Iran recognises no sa-

cred borders or nationalities have, however, faithfully followed the Pahlavi path as far as the rights of oppressed nationalities in Iran are concerned. Any victory in the struggles of these nationalities for their national rights is considered a major threat for the centralised state apparatus. The Iranian Kurds who are heroically defending their rights to self-determination are threatened with total physical annihilation. From military occupation of the Kurdish areas, the Tehran regime has now "advanced" to forced eviction of entire communities by the use of systematic bombing of villages and the destruction of crops, which has led to the devastation of entire regions.

## b. Repressive Forces

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

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

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

## c. The Bureaucracy

The enormous size and power of the state bureaucracy has been a focal point of popular struggles in Iran. During the Shah's rule, its dimensions grew to unprecedented levels (almost over 1.5 millions). The largest part of the social wealth was in fact unproductively swallowed up by this bureaucracy. Many institutions were created to sim-

ply legitimize "official" bribery for the "social base" of the dictatorship. Today, the size of this bureaucracy living off the back of the masses has more than doubled. The integration of the instruments of clerical rule into the reconstructed bourgeois state apparatus has resulted in one of the largest bureaucracies in the backward countries. In addition to the over 1.8 million "normal" state employees, there is now a clientele base of over 1.3 million paid mercenaries of the regime. Furthermore, in addition to the so-called "mass revolutionary base" of the regime (consisting of over 200,000 *Pasdarans*, 300,000 committee men and all the other more loosely set up associations like the *Basij* - mobilization corps - or the Islamic *anjomans*), a large proportion of the Shiite clergy itself with its entire network of mosques and hangers-on is now also either directly paid by the state or indirectly living off the proceeds of nationalised industries.

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

## 3. The Return of the Capitalist Order

### a. The New Capitalist Class

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

The scarcity in most basic necessities, the runaway inflation and super-exploitation of workers and poor peasants are the only noticeable characteristics of the "new" Islamic economics. Under the banner of Islam, the worst



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

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

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

Khomeini's Islamic regime, whatever grudges it may have against any specific group of capitalists, is proving daily that it is in the service of private property and class rule, based on exploitation of the majority by a handful of reactionary profiteers. If anything, the concentration of property and the rates of exploitation today, are higher than ever before.

## **b. Anti-Imperialism**

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

Of all the exploitative and oppressive secret treaties which the Pahlavi regime signed with various imperialist powers, only one which was known to the public and much hated has been actually declared annulled by the new re-

gime. Even in this case, the actual content of the treaty remains to be published. In order not to upset U.S. Imperialism, the Iranian regime did more. It also, at the same time, cancelled another entirely different treaty: the 1921 treaty with the Soviet Union.

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

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

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

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

## **c. International Alliances**

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

The policy of “neither East nor West” has meant in the Middle East a convergence of Iranian policies with the interests of some imperialist powers, despite its contradictory aspects. Within the nonaligned movement, they are in agreement with the anti-communist bloc.

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

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

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

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

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

## Part 2: The Lessons of the Revolution

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

*How has the Iranian revolution resulted in such an outcome?*

### 1. Victory of the Counter-revolution

#### a. Counter-Revolution in Iran

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

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

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

of the counter-revolution or say that the Iranian Regime is not the active representative of this counter-revolution in Iran.

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

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

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

The reasons why the Shiite clergy, especially Khomeini’s faction, was well suited for this task should be obvious. The clergy has always been an important institution of the state, well trained in defending class society and private property. After all, the Shiite hierarchy has been the main ideological prop of the state. Khomeini himself had come from a faction which had already proven its loyalty to the ruling class by helping it in the 1953 coup.

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

Given the weakness of the bourgeois political opposition, which was not allowed to operate under the Shah, the clergy, with its nationwide network of mullahs and mosques, provided the strong instrument-cum-party necessary for “organising” and channelling the spontaneous

mass movement. It could also provide the type of vague populist ideology needed to blunt the radical demands of the masses and to unite them around a veiled bourgeois programme.

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

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

## b. Bourgeois Factions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The formation of Sharif Emami's cabinet represented a

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

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

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

### c. Bazargan's Government

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### d. The Clergy

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

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

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

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

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

apparatus.

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

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

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

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

## 2. The Defeat of the Mass Movement

### a. The Revolutionary Movement

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

plete sway over the masses.

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

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

It is extremely simplistic to portray the mass movement as having a homogeneously confused consciousness with total illusions in Khomeini. Despite Khomeini, the workers organised *shoras* (councils), threw out the capitalists and their managers, including those appointed by Imam's government. The peasants occupied the land, despite a call to wait for the Revolutionary Council's permission. The national minorities began to organise themselves, despite the open repression of the new regime. Women demonstrated for equal rights in direct opposition to Khomeini himself. Students took over the running of all the educational establishments, despite the appeals by the "leaders" to return to their studies. The masses did not give up their arms, despite the call by Khomeini himself. The soldiers resisted attempts by the new regime to dissolve their *shoras* and themselves began to purge the army of the old officers.

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

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

By the summer of 1979, Khomeini had lost all support

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

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

### **b. The Schism of the Mass Movement**

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

When Khomeini's faction was imposing its own slogans on the mass demonstrations against the Shah, the left did not protest. When Khomeini appointed his Provisional Revolutionary Government, the Fedayeen, Mojahedeen, Tudeh Party and many other groups gave it support. When the newly set up Islamic Courts were issuing sentences of execution in secret trials against the members of the old regime, the left was hailing this. When the regime began to attack the rights of women under the banner of "down with the Westernised prostitutes (sic)", the left at best ignored it as being a "women's" problem and having a secondary importance. When the freedom of the press was under attack, because it at first affected only the bourgeois press, the left did not resist. But soon afterwards, the left press was also shut down.

When the working class came under attack by the new regime, it was under the banner of "the Islamic shoras". Many militant workers who had themselves radicalised

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

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

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

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

### **c. Khomeini's Base**

The composition of the mass base of Khomeini itself was also a major factor in contributing to the confusion of the masses and their defeat. Khomeini's instruments of repression fed from the social forces that were the most downtrodden and least privileged sections of the population. "Khomeini's soldiers" were recruited from the huge

layers of the urban poor (the unemployed peasant migrants) and the pauperised petty bourgeoisie. Thanks to the Shah's White Revolution many peasants were forced to come to the urban centres looking for jobs, whilst the limited industrialisation could only absorb a small proportion of them. The consumer-goods-oriented industrialization was also gradually eroding the petty bourgeois share of the internal market and forcing these layers into increasing reliance on family labour. The average size of the urban petty bourgeois family had increased to 7.6 members in the 70's.

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

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

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

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

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

### 3. The Failure of the Left

#### a. The Absence of a Revolutionary Party

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

The basic lesson of the Iranian revolution is indeed the fact that, unless such an organization already exists before the revolutionary upheaval, it would be extremely unlikely that it can come about in the course of the revolution itself. Given the rapidity with which the revolutionary crisis changes and transforms, given the complexity of social class formations and alliances in the more developed of the backward countries and given the relative strength of the bourgeois formations, it is extremely difficult for a revolutionary force of any considerable size to grow out of the revolution itself, unless it has already established roots and traditions within the masses.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Without the active support of the Tudeh Party, which had many professionals in its ranks, it would have been a lot more difficult for the clergy to crush the mass movement. The Tudeh Party provided the clergy with many managers and foremen for the nationalised industries, propagandists

within the state-controlled newspapers, T.V. and radio and even political interrogators in Khomeini's jails. The present fate of the Tudeh Party itself is the best proof of what such a policy can lead to.

## **b. Capitulation to Khomeini**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The left were also less interested in helping to organise the independent organs of the self activity of the masses than they were in their own badly put-together groups. No real efforts were made to extend the independent organization of the masses or to fight to democratise them

and prevent the clergy's zealots inside them from imposing the will of the counter-revolution.

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

In this way, instead of patient and consistent intervention in the actually existing Shora movement and instead of struggling for their nationwide unity as a basis for the more general fight for a workers' and peasants' government, all the major groups were at best trying to form their own "real" shoras.

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

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

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

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

## Part 3: Tasks and Perspectives

### 1. For the Overthrow of the Regime

#### a. Demands of the Masses

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

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

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

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

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

These demands and the fight for such a programme, can provide the means for bringing together in a common

movement all the sections of the masses in the necessary fight to overthrow Khomeini's regime.

### **b. Bourgeois Stability**

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

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

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

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

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

## **2. Rebuild the Workers' Organizations**

### **a. Workers' Movement**

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

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

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

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

### **b. Workers' Vanguard**

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

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

as well as in the fight against the imposition of many new capitalist laws which are trying to deny all working class rights in the face of a capitalist offensive to push up the rates of exploitation.

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

### c. The Oppressed

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

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

## 3. Building the Revolutionary Party

### a. The Left

The defeat of the Iranian revolution is reflected particularly in the way in which the entire force of the left has been decimated. Almost the entire leadership of all the revolutionary organizations has either been physically destroyed or forced into exile. The vast majority of the leading cadres of the opportunist and class collaborationist

groups have publicly denounced Marxism and declared their submission to "Imam's line". The mistakes, vacillations and open betrayals by these groups have created a condition of deep demoralisation inside the working class vanguard and a sense of suspicion towards the left in general. A long period of patient work is needed to rebuild the influence of the left among the workers and toilers of Iran. On the other hand, however, these defeats have also shown the complete bankruptcy of Stalinism and petty-bourgeois populism, which have been for a long time the historical scourge of the Iranian left. What has been defeated is opportunism and class collaboration.

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

### b. Regroupment

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

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

### ISF Meetings

This journal is being launched by comrades - socialists from Britain, Iran and other countries - who have participated in a series of discussion meetings in London in recent months.

Our discussions began around the document Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Iran, published in this issue of ISF. The question it raises - that the 1979 revolution, the Islamists' seizure of control and the subsequent bloody repressions exposed terrible weaknesses in would-be revolutionary organisations, their programme and theory - is not new. In fact it was written more than ten years ago. However, notwithstanding discussions held then, many socialists internationally failed to undertake the harsh questioning of preconceptions that the document calls for. This, at any rate, was the argument put forward at our first forum in April, opened by the document's author.

A second forum, in May, focused on Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution. The argument was advanced (as in the document Revolutionary Socialism, also published here), that the Iranian revolution and other post-war developments have rendered the theory outdated. There was a good attendance from, among others, Trotskyist organisations: an especially welcome delegation from the Revolutionary Communist League of Japan, and members of the Workers International and the International Workers League (LIT-CI). Members of the latter spoke in defence of the theory. Others argued for synthesis and development of it for the new historical period.

The nature of this period and the contemporary crisis was the subject of the opening contribution by Hillel Ticktin, editor of *Critique*, at the June forum. *Critique* supporters joined in another wide-ranging and stimulating discussion.

Our July meeting, held as this journal was in preparation, was on the Transitional Period. Other London discussions are planned on Party & Class, Revolutionary Theory, the Necessity of Socialism, and The Significance of the Russian Revolution Today.

A statement on the purpose of our discussions, and of the journal, agreed for publication in the first issue, is reprinted here on page 2.

We welcome readers to participate in our meetings.

### We need YOU

- to write - to participate in meetings - to distribute the journal - to send donations

We hope that International Socialist Forum will appear quarterly. But, frankly, its future depends on it becoming

a wider arena for discussion of the burning issues we face.

We do not believe we can carry out the great task of developing revolutionary programme and theory by ourselves. We need YOU to help us. We do not pretend to have all the answers, or a monopoly on finding them. Neither are we aspiring 'socialist academics' cut off from the workers' movement; our appeal is addressed, above all, to the many comrades who are active, who understand problems, but have the opportunity to write about them all too rarely. This must be a common effort.

There are many ways you can participate:

**WRITE** articles or letters. Above all, we welcome responses to the material in this issue. We will do our best to publish all letters (i.e. approx 600 words or less); we welcome proposals for longer articles, too. We also hope to carry book reviews.

**PARTICIPATE** in meetings. We are meeting approximately once a month in London and hope to meet with comrades elsewhere too.

**DISTRIBUTE** the journal. We will arrange reduced bulk rates and sale-or-return.

**SEND DONATIONS.** We are on the way to covering our basic start-up costs of £1000, but we are not there yet.

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