REVOLUTIONARY REHEARSALS

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"We are the power," protest poster from France, 1968

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FOUR

IRAN 1979

Long live the Revolution! ... Long live Islam?

Maryam Poya

THE VICTORY of the revolution in Iran in February 1979 was the outcome of years of struggle by workers, peasants, women and national minorities against the repressive regime of the Shah. These struggles ranged from peaceful demonstrations to armed confrontations, from sit-ins to sabotage, from small gatherings to mass demonstrations of millions. In the end the oil workers' strike in 1978, and the general strike that followed it, played the crucial role in bringing the Shah's regime to its end.

It is, however, one thing for a popular revolution to smash a hated and oppressive regime, and quite another for the popular movement to succeed in creating a new political and social system conforming to its needs. Tragically, the eventual outcome of the Iranian revolution was the imposition on the population of a new form of repression, now flying the flag of the 'Islamic Republic'. The events in Iran revealed simultaneously both the immense potential power of the working class, and the desperate consequences of a workers' revolutionary movement that lacks adequate socialist organisation.

The forces which were to overthrow the Shah were the product of capitalism's uneven development in twentieth-century Iran. If imperialism is the international expression of capital's historic mission to develop the productive forces, the process is by its nature uneven and contradictory. In Iran, the form of development was one that strengthened the role of the state. The Iranian state has been the key agent for the accumulation of capital.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, Iran's peasant economy began to be incorporated systematically but unevenly into the world capitalist economy. In this period the Shah, members of the royal family, government officials, tribal leaders and prominent members of the Islamic clergy controlled between them 55 per cent of all Iran's cultivated land, though they constituted only 25 per cent of all landowners. Central government was weak; the holders of large

landed properties exercised considerable political power, and carried out most governmental functions. Further capitalist development required a change in the state form: a more centralised state was required that could provide the conditions for capital accumulation for Iran's ruling classes in alliance with international capital.[1]

The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-6 broke out as a protest against the weakness of the Shah and the domination of Iran's economic resources by Britain and Russia. The Majlis, Iran's first National Assembly, met in 1906. It abolished the traditional land assignment and established a modern tax system, taking away from the landlords and the clergy their governmental functions. But the heart of the new central power passed to the monarchy, the Shahs.[2]

Throughout the twentieth century, Iranian development has been tied to oil. Initially, most of the swelling mass of oil profits passed to Western capitalist companies, above all the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), founded by the British engineer William D'Arcy in 1909. Up to 1951, when Iranian oil was nationalised, APOC produced £700-£800 million for Britain, while Iran received no more than £105 million.[3] Little of the company's wealth flowed to its workers, whose wages remained sufficient only to secure the barest necessities of existence. The company dealt ruthlessly with strikes and other opposition, using its own police force.

Iran was a client state of British imperialism. From 1921 until the Second World War the government of Reza Shah brutally suppressed all the movements of trade unionists, of national minorities and of all oppositional groups whether communists, liberal nationalists or the Muslim clergy. At the same time, the regime promoted an extensive development of the infrastructure of roads, ports and railways, in support of the oil industry. Numbers of modern industrial plants were developed, along with a working class. The Shah confiscated land from the large landowners and himself became the largest national landlord.[4]

During the Second World War, in the face of the pro-German policy of Reza Shah, Britain and Russia invaded Iran to keep it 'safe'. They forced Reza Shah to abdicate in favour of his more reliable teenage son, Mohammed Reza. The new Shah continued to pursue economic development. But after the war nationalist sentiment against the foreign domination of the oil industry expanded. In 1947 the nationalist leader, Dr Mohammed Mossadegh, and his followers set up the National Front, which won power in 1951 and nationalised the Iranian oil industry. The international oil companies responded by organising a boycott of Iranian oil.

Over the next two years, workers' strikes and demonstrations pressed for further economic and political changes. The pro-Russian Tudeh Party, in alliance with the National Front, worked to defuse the revolutionary mood among the workers. In August 1953, the Shah's Imperial Guards attempted a coup, but were defeated by loyal army officers and soldiers. Faced with popular demonstrations demanding a complete clean-out of Iranian politics, however, Mossadeq called on the army to clear the streets and restore law and order.

The very forces that might have saved the Mossadeq government were thus demobilised. Within days it was overthrown by a second coup engineered by the American CIA with the help of British Intelligence. The oil companies again won access to Iranian supplies, but the British monopoly was now broken. A consortium of international companies struck a new deal with the revived Shah: the Iranian state's share of the oil revenues rose from 16 per cent to 50 per cent; 40 per cent of the consortium's share went to five US companies, 40 per cent to British Petroleum, and the rest to several smaller companies.

With considerable American guidance and assistance, a new military dictatorship under the Shah was developed between 1953 and 1973. Central to the operation was the creation in 1957 of SAVAK, Iran's notorious secret police.

The Shah's oil revenues rose by more than twelve times over the decade from the early 1950s. To these oil revenues were added $500 million in military aid sent by the United States between 1953 and 1963. This enabled the Shah to expand his armed forces from 120,000 to over 200,000 men and to lift his military budget from $80 million in 1953 to nearly $183 million ten years later.

Little of the regime's hugely increased wealth had flowed to benefit the people. In 1960, 87 per cent of Iran's villages were without a school; only one per cent had any kind of medical facility; 80 per cent of the population was illiterate. Prices had risen steeply, while the Shah was spending between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of his budget on the military.

The early 1960s, however, brought a serious economic crisis. Heavy overseas borrowing had depleted the foreign reserves, obliging the Iranian government to seek emergency aid from both the International Monetary Fund and the American government. The economic crisis was magnified by an upsurge of popular opposition. The strike rate in industry went up sharply: there had been no more than three major strikes in the years 1955-57, but over the next four years the number jumped to over twenty. Some strikes ended in bloody confrontations between workers and the army. And resistance was spreading to other sectors. In 1962 there were mass student demonstrations and university occupations. Hundreds were injured, and numbers killed, when the Shah's troops stormed Tehran University. In June 1963,

after several days of street fighting in the capital city, the Shah ordered his troops to 'shoot to kill'. Thousands of people were slaughtered.

In the face of this crisis, the Shah's government launched a major programme of reform-from-above, the 'White Revolution of the Shah and People'. The 'White Revolution' transformed Iran. Its key objective was to provide a stable social, economic and political basis for the regime. The means chosen was the promotion of two important social groups who would have an interest in the Shah's stability: medium-sized capitalist farmers in the rural areas, and a vastly expanded state-employed petit-bourgeoisie in the cities. This effort was accompanied by a re-casting of the state apparatus to develop an infra-structure of health and education services. Gestures were made in the direction of political and cultural 'modernisation': women were given the vote to the Iranian parliament, profit-sharing for industrial workers was introduced, rural courts of justice were reformed.[5]

Those who lost out were the traditional middle classes of the bazaar. Their position had been constantly threatened by the pattern of capitalist development of Iran, whether by the state or by international capital; they wanted the return of religious power and tradition, and were to remain in opposition to the state until their representatives, the Islamic clergy, came to power in 1979. Under the 'White Revolution' the regime made less effort to conciliate the traditionalist clergy, whose opposition now grew.

In the countryside, large pre-capitalist land-holdings were broken up; capitalist relations of production were given a major impulse through the introduction of monetary rents, loans and debts. Rich peasants were provided with capital so that they might become capitalist farmers, employ wage labour and produce for the national market. In this way land reform broke the power of the large-scale landowners and created a new layer of land-owning farmers.

The Iranian countryside was differentiated along new class lines. At the top, the remnants of the old land-owners, enriched by land-reform compensation, developed their smaller but still significant holdings; beside them purely capitalist operators ran 'industrial farms' and numbers of richer peasants became medium-sized capitalist farmers. Below them were sizeable numbers of small-holding peasants, hanging on to their plots and producing little more than was needed to feed their own families. This group dreamt of becoming successful farmers, and had nightmares about being forced further downwards. For below them again was a swelling class of 'poor peasants', in reality of landless wage labourers. The land reform failed to improve food production or to abolish rural poverty. Agricultural production from the early 1960s onwards rose by at most 2½ or 3 per cent a year, well below the rate of population increase. As a result, food imports rose considerably: by 1977 they were running at $2.6 billions, paid for out of oil revenues.[6]

In the 1970s about a million of these landless wage labourers migrated to the cities, in search of the 'great civilisation' their radios had told them was being built there. Yet once in the cities, most of them could find no regular work. Would-be proletarians, they drifted back and forth between casual work and unemployment. Living in slums and shanty towns, the great majority of them experienced a profound sense of rootlessness and alienation. They lacked a material base that could enable them to relate positively to the urban world, and were thus unable to throw off their past with its roots in the 'idiocy of rural life'.

The onset of the 'White Revolution' was accompanied by a quite rapid economic expansion, from the mid-1960s onwards. The state's role in capital formation became ever more important, at the same time that it spent massive funds on the military and the state bureaucracy as a means to hold society together.

In the early 1970s, Iran joined the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) which gave it, along with other oil-producers, a degree of power over the oil industry. When, from 1973, OPEC raised the price of oil by five times, Iranian oil revenues multiplied accordingly. In 1963-4 they had been $555 millions; in 1975-6 they amounted to nearly $20 billion.

This vast increase in oil revenues fuelled a further expansion of Iranian industry, and further strengthened the position of the Shah's state. Industrial production, at the height of the oil-boom, accounted for 15 per cent of Iran's Gross Domestic Product, and for 20 per cent of total employment. The main areas of development were textiles, construction, steel, petrochemicals and plastics, vehicles, mining (copper and aluminium), food processing and modern consumer goods assembly.

Three main forces acted as agents of capital accumulation within Iran: the state, Iranian private capital, and foreign capital. As an illustration of the relative weight of these three forces, the Plan for 1973-78 projected state investment at $46.2 billion, private local capital at $23.4 billion, and foreign capital at $2.8 billion.[7]

The Iranian state, as the recipient of the oil revenues, had always been the main instigator of industrial growth. It was itself a major investor in industry. In 1975 a full 60 per cent of all industrial investment came from government sources. Secondly, the state also provided funds for the private sector throughout the financial institutions. By this means, the government promoted a significant develop-

ment of an indigenous Iranian bourgeoisie which, while participating in the fruits of industrialisation, remained dependent on state funds and thus subservient to state policies. Thirdly, Iran attracted foreign investment. By the mid-1970s more than 200 foreign firms were investing in Iran. Initially the Americans, with 43 companies investing in 1974, were the largest group, but in the wake of the oil boom Japanese capital overtook the USA. In 1975-76 Japan accounted for 43 per cent of all foreign investment, much of this going into capital-intensive petro-chemical projects.[8]

Iranian and foreign investors alike benefitted substantially from rapid industrial growth. Iran's exports of manufactured goods and its imports of industrial equipment both increased. The rising consumption of the professional middle classes and to a degree of the working class expanded the domestic market, providing a basis for growth for the indigenous Iranian bourgeoisie.

Both the growth of industry and the expansion of the state's civil apparatus promoted the growth of a modern professional middle class. The state bureaucracy grew to 304,000 civil servants.[9] And, more significantly, there was a substantial growth in the numbers of workers in manufacturing and construction. By the time of the revolution in 1979, it was estimated that there were some two and a half million workers in manufacturing industry (though only 30 per cent worked in modern industrial units of any size), while the service industries (the civil service, education and health, communications, electricity and gas supplies) employed another three million.[10] Most of the large-scale enterprises were in the public sector. The growth of industry increased the bargaining power of skilled workers especially; they were able to use labour-market shortages to push up their wages by 30 to 50 per cent a year.[11] The modern working class had become a decisive force in Iranian society.

The modernisation of the economy, however, was accompanied by a strengthening of the state's repressive machinery. The oil revenues were used to finance not just industrial development but also the Shah's expanded dictatorship. Political opposition was brutally suppressed, and domestic consumption was subordinated to high profits and a high rate of exploitation.

The Shah used his massive oil revenues for more than simply industrialisation. They also strengthened his iron grip over Iranian society. Iran in the 1970s became the world's largest importer of armaments, at the same time that the state's client relationship with the USA was further developed. In 1973 Tehran became the Middle East headquarters of the CIA. The number of American 'military advisers' reached 24,000, and was projected to rise by 1980 to some 60,000.

The Shah's already extensive repressive apparatus was built up further. SAVAK, the notorious Iranian secret police, grew to a total of over 5,300 full-time agents with a larger but unknown number of part-time paid informers. In 1975, the existing political parties were dissolved as the Shah announced a one-party political system, centred on his newly-formed 'Resurgence Party'. In the workplaces, only state-run 'Syndicates' supervised by SAVAK were permitted; in most major factories SAVAK officials had their own offices.

The state was fiercely repressive. All political challenges to the Shah's dictatorship were dealt with by the most brutal methods: murder and torture were everyday weapons of the state. The Shah's highly authoritarian regime allowed no room for the growth of political democracy or for any degree of trade-union freedom.

This political regime reflected the highly uneven character of Iranian development. On the one hand the state was pressing forward the technological modernisation of economic life, a process which implied raising the cultural level and overall productivity of the working population. On the other hand, this modernisation programme co-existed with older forms of labour exploitation, based on long hours and the depression of popular living standards.

Rapid economic growth produced sharp economic and political tensions. The sudden increase in oil revenues had inflated people's expectations. The gap widened between what the regime promised, claimed and achieved and what the public expected, obtained and considered feasible. Although economic development did permit great forward strides to be made in the field of public welfare, Iran still had one of the worst health and education services in the whole of the Middle East. The regime's economic and social programme did not benefit all classes equally. Not only class but also regional inequalities widened, fuelling the demands of Iran's national minorities.

Working-class activity began to revive. The number of strikes rose from a mere handful in 1971-3 to as many as 20 or 30 a year by 1975. None of the strikes was permitted to last any length of time: either the regime immediately met the workers' demands, or they quickly suppressed the strikes by force. The strikes in the key oil industry were mostly short and successful: here at least, despite the repression, workers' confidence in strike organisation could grow a little.

Despite the industrialisation, the role of oil in the economy was larger than at any time in the past. Thus the fall-off in world demand for oil from the end of 1975 was quickly reflected within Iran. A drop in oil revenues, coupled with the high rate of international and domestic inflation, led to cash-flow problems. In order to continue with its

industrialisation plans Iran had to borrow massively from the international banks. Rapidly Iran's image altered. What had seemed a country enjoying spectacularly successful modernisation now appeared increasingly as a country unable to feed large parts of its population, in massive debt to international banks, with falling oil revenues and even more rapidly falling oil reserves.

In the face of growing crisis, Iran's ruling class launched on an orgy of corruption and speculation, making and spending quick profits and salting money away in foreign banks in anticipation of the crash they sensed was coming. Property speculation and generalised hoarding of commodities contributed to an inflation rate of nearly 40 per cent a year. In 1975, the government imposed strict price controls. SAVAK and the Shah's Resurgence Party organised 10,000 inspectors, despatching them to harass small traders and shop-keepers; 8,000 small businessmen were arrested, fined and banned as 'profiteers, cheaters and hoarders' in the name of an 'anti-inflation war'.

Workers found their rents were now consuming a quarter of their earnings. Cheap food disappeared from the market. Industrial production began to fall back, and urban unemployment reached 15 per cent — with no unemployment benefit available to soften the hardship. The regime responded by intensifying the cult of the Shah and praise for his 'White Revolution'. The official media portrayed Iran as 'the great civilisation' and 'the seventh great power of the world'.[12]

The Iranian Opposition

The 'White Revolution' failed in its most important aim: it never won the Shah an adequate social basis for his regime. A variety of social forces remained in active opposition.

Firstly, and crucially, the working class: industrialisation has expanded its forces in Iran very considerably during the twentieth century, while leaving it profoundly dissatisfied. Iranian workers have participated centrally in every major movement of resistance: in 1905-6, in the 1920s, in the 1940s and 1950s and in the 1960s as well as in the 1970s.

Secondly, the national minorities: Kurds, Azaris, Arabs, Baluchis, Qashquaia and Torkmans between them constitute one third of the population of Iran. All are non-Persian. Living mainly in the countryside, the various national minorities have been regularly repressed by each ruling regime in Iran. Their linguistic, cultural and national rights have been denied. Each of these groups has a long tradition of fighting the central state for their political and cultural autonomy, as well as for economic demands.

Thirdly, intersecting with the national minorities, various religious minorities. Iran has a non-Muslim minority. The majority Muslim population is itself divided into a Shi'ite majority and a Sunni minority, consisting of the Kurds, Torkmans, Arabs and Baluchis. The non-Muslim population is made up of Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, Zoroastrians (remnants of the ancient religion of Iran) and Baha'is. The religious minorities, including in particular the Sunni Muslims, have always suffered a double oppression by the state. Baha'is in particular have been persecuted by the state since 1844 when they split from Islam. According to Shi'ite Islam, the Baha'i faith is the only one that cannot be recognised. Its followers are condemned to death.

Fourthly, the mullahs and the bazaar. Capitalist development in Iran has reduced the power of the clergy. Various developments have undermined the clergy's role in education and law: the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-6, the Shahs' modernisation drives and the growth since the 1920s of a centralised and powerful state, promoting secular courts and modern schools. The land reform of the 1960s was a major blow to the mullahs, for they lost the religiously endowed lands which were a major source of both their income and their independence from the state. Simultaneously, the rise of commercial and financial institutions such as large supermarkets and banks threatened the class interests of the numerous small traders and merchants of the bazaar. This class continued to provide vital economic and political support to the mullahs, especially by paying *zakat* (religious taxes). Their joint resentment and opposition to the Shah grew with every strengthening of the capitalist state.

Fifthly, students and intellectuals concerned to enhance freedom of cultural, religious and political expression: these have provided the leadership of many of the political oppositions during this century, including the 1905-6 nationalist movement, the communist movement of the 1920s, the nationalist and communist movements of the 1940s and 1950s, and the 1960s student movement. Their social composition reflects a mixture of the traditional and the modern professional middle classes.

A mixture of state repression and political failures over the previous decades produced a situation, by the 1970s, in which two political forces dominated the opposition to the Shah's regime: the guerrilla movements and the Islamic clergy.

From around 1970, two guerrilla organisations developed within Iran: the Mojahedin and the Fedayeen. Both had their origins in the student struggles of the early 1960s, but their political roots lay further back, in the nationalist and communist movements of the

1940s and 1950s. In that period opposition to the Shah was focussed firstly on a loose 'National Front' representing two divergent social forces: the traditional middle class, based on the 'bazaar' and inspired by the Islamic way of life and Islamic laws, and a modern professional middle class whose intellectual representatives considered religion to be a private matter. The professional middle class grew in size and importance under the Shah's modernisation drive; economic development involved the expansion of new occupations and with them the attractive power of new concepts and aspirations. This class was partly integrated into the state apparatus during industrialisation. Its opposition to the Shah tended to be secular and nationalistic. There was much less room for the traditional middle class of the bazaar, however, within Iranian capitalist development. They disliked intensely the material and cultural effects of 'modernisation', and desired the re-shaping of the state to restore religious power and traditionalist values.

To the left of the National Front stood the Tudeh Party, formed after the Anglo-Russian take-over in 1941 by a group of 53 intellectuals under Russian protection and encouragement.[13] This party, from the beginning, took 'popular front' tactics for granted, regularly subordinating the specific interests of workers to their supposedly 'progressive' allies in the middle classes. The Tudeh Party, despite the growth of working-class activity, argued consistently that Iran was not ready for socialist revolution.

Until 1945 Tudeh Party trade-union leaders opposed militant action by workers for fear of damage to the war effort. The party's degree of surbordination to Moscow was revealed at the end of the war, when it supported Russian imperialist claims on Iranian oil. This stance completely alienated the Tudeh Party from the nationalists, who wanted both the English and the Russians out of the country. In 1946 the Tudeh Party — at that stage represented in the government — helped to demobilise a general strike of oil workers at the Abadan oil terminal. Shortly afterwards, they were nonetheless thrown out of the government, and — like the Communist Parties of Western Europe — swung left and supported the National Front demand for oil nationalisation.

Both the National Front and the Tudeh Party were suppressed in the wake of the 1953 *coup d'état*, an event for whose success they were, as we saw earlier, partly responsible.

Both of the guerrilla movements of the 1970s reflected the impatience of a section of the young radical intelligentsia with the failures of the traditional methods of the old opposition parties in Iran. The Mojahedin and the Fedayeen were both inspired partly by the apparent successes of Mao, Castro and Ho Chi Minh and the ideas and practice of Palestinian and Latin American guerrilla groups. The Mojahedin emerged out of the religious wing of the National Front, while the predominantly secular Fedayeen grew out of a split from the Tudeh Party, drawing its forces also from the left wing of the National Front.

Both movements shared a common conviction that armed struggle was the prime means by which the masses could be activated. However, the politics of both the Mojahedin and the Fedayeen also reflected those of the previous Iranian oppositions. Both organisations had inherited elements of conservatism from their respective predecessors, the National Front and the Tudeh Party. The Mojahedin had illusions in Muslim nationalism and the Fedayeen in Russian Communism.

The guerrilla movements were the regime's most active opponents, and their bravery was immense. They carried out a series of successful armed operations against banks, police informers, millionaire industrialists, foreign embassies and police and military buildings. But by 1975, the regime had succeeded in hunting down many of their members, practically defeating their two movements.

The guerrilla organisations' key weakness was that they operated in isolation from any mass movement. Neither the Mojahedin nor the Fedayeen saw any need to engage themselves in the specific struggles of industrial workers in the towns. They saw the mass movement as 'dormant and in a general state of inactivity' and saw themselves, by contrast, as 'a vanguard that would revive the mass movement through struggle'. For both workers and peasants in Iran, it was impossible to identify with the middle-class intellectuals of the guerrilla organisations. As for the guerrillas' strategies, they amounted to a vote of no confidence in the working class. Neither the Mojahedin nor the Fedayeen ever argued seriously that the workers of Iran should themselves struggle for power, for their own class rule. Though both organisations regularly applauded each round of working-class resistance for its heroism, neither made any serious attempt to gauge the real material forces at work in Iran. Their guerrilla strategy involved placing the whole emphasis on the heroic actions of a brave minority, rather than on the perhaps less glamorous but essential work of propaganda and agitation among the broad layers of the urban and rural masses.

The tragedy of guerrilla politics in Iran is that the militants thereby cut themselves off from the day-to-day struggles and problems of the mass of the Iranian population, leaving the political field open to the other major opposition force, the Islamic clergy. It was the clergy who took the leading part in calling for protests against the regime and its brutality. Relatively protected from arrest by their

religious positions, the Islamic clergy commanded a sort of national network beyond the immediate reach of the secret police. The left's weakness made the clergy appear great.

The social basis of the clergy is to be found above all in the traditional middle classes of the bazaar. They expressed that class's resentment at its exclusion from the state capitalist development pattern under the Shahs. The development of capitalism in Iran was severely undermining the clergy's political role. They organised opposition, on traditionalist religious lines, to the evils of 'Westernisation'.

At this stage, in the 1960s, the mosques' influence among factory workers and white-collar employees was still small. But for the large masses of the urban poor who had been driven from the countryside by the land reform, the mosques provided a rallying centre. While the populations of the slums and shanty-towns were largely ignored by the guerrilla organisations, the religion of the mosque offered them a sense of community.

Not surprisingly, therefore, all the popular struggles against the Shah's regime were invested with religious meaning. In the mass movement that developed against the Shah in the later 1970s, the religious leaders' vision of utopia developed a vast popular appeal. The Islamic clergy offered the dream that 'everything will be better' once the Shah was overthrown and an Islamic society founded. Millions, whose unbearable life gave them little to lose, were inspired to fight and be ready to die for that vision of heaven on earth.

The Islam that appealed to the urban poor was a 'modernised' version that spoke directly to their material grievances. Some of its leading exponents, such as the religious ideologue Dr Shariati, operated from modern mosque buildings using closed-circuit television and other up-to-date devices. Shariati's message to the faithful was that Islam — and especially the Shi'ite wing that predominates in Iran — was no fatalistic conservative creed, nor a purely personal faith, but rather a revolutionary ideology permeating all spheres of life and especially politics.

Modern Islam, he preached, inspired true believers to fight against all forms of oppression, exploitation and social injustice. To be a Muslim was 'to create a dynamic community in constant motion towards progress and not just a monotheistic religion'. The new social order 'would be completely united by virtue, striving towards justice, human brotherhood, public ownership of wealth and finally a classless society'. Shariati also stressed that 'Shi'ism raised the banner of revolt because their contemporary rulers, the corrupt caliphs and the court elites, had betrayed the people and given up the goals of a classless society.'[14] Ideologues like Shariati came to express the feelings and aspirations of the urban poor more effectively than the more traditional clergy like Khomeini.[15]

Ayatollah Khomeini himself had remained aloof from political struggles until the early 1960s. His active intervention into politics in 1962-63 focussed on opposition to the Shah's land reform, but also took in the regime's corruption and dependence on the USA and Israel and its neglect of the bazaar. For centuries the clergy had relied on donations from large pre-capitalist landowners as well as donations from the bazaar and money given by pilgrims at the major shrines. Land reform ended one of their sources of revenue, leaving them dependent on the bazaar — which was itself being weakened by the industrialisation drive. Khomeini and the traditional clergy increasingly faced a future in which their role as a serious political force would require state funding.

Khomeini was exiled by the Shah in 1963, essentially for his opposition to the development of capitalist modernisation and land reform. In 1968, sections of the traditional clergy protested against Shariati's 'secularist' lectures. Khomeini himself, aware of Shariati's popularity, remained silent on this question. Instead, he stole the clothes of the left and the liberal clergy, concentrating his fire on the regime's corruption, its neglect of the economic needs of the workers and peasants, its lack of freedom and its barbaric jails. Unlike the overtly traditionalist clergy, he did not publicly voice opposition either to the Shah's grant of the vote to women, or to the increasing tendency for women to work outside their homes. Instead, he issued calls for the overthrow of the Shah and the establishment of an Islamic society based on equality and brotherhood.

The Rising Revolution

As the economic crisis deepened, popular opposition revived. Beginning in the early summer of 1977, wave after wave of demonstrations and strikes propelled the Iranian masses forward, at each stage deepening the revolutionary movement and strengthening its methods of struggle. The Shah's regime had become unendurable. They began to break down the barriers separating them from political life, and to lay the initial groundwork for a new social order.

The demonstrations began in June 1977 with a peaceful march of Tehran's shanty-town population. The army, implementing the city government's planning decisions, had moved in to bulldoze their homes. The Shah's troops and police fired on and killed many of the demonstrators.

The previous month, fifty lawyers had issued a public declaration

of protest at the executive's interference in judicial matters. In June, forty writers called for freedom of speech and the abolition of censorship. In July, a group of intellectuals addressed an open letter to the Shah, asking him to put an end to despotism. A growing flood of articles, leaflets and pamphlets began to circulate openly.

These activities marked a turning point in the political life of the country. Until then, protest had occurred only in the form of isolated strikes and sabotage in the factories, or attacks by urban guerrilla groups and protests by students and intellectuals abroad. After a long period in which SAVAK had ruthlessly hunted down and silenced critics both in Iran and abroad, the opposition was coming back to life. Resistance to the Shah was now voiced loudly and clearly everywhere.

Under these pressures, the regime launched a 'liberalisation programme' in the hope of relaxing tensions. SAVAK continued to maintain a close watch on the various movements, but it reduced its active harassment. There was also a slight easing of censorship. But with every concession the opposition gathered strength. Khomeini, still in exile, sent the opposition messages of support from Najaf, the Islamic holy city in Iraq. These were distributed among the population in the form of smuggled tape cassettes.

In early November 1977, the Writers' Association organised a series of public poetry readings. Each evening between 10,000 and 20,000 people attended these. On the tenth night, the police attempted to disband the session, and the poetry reading immediately turned into a mass demonstration shouting slogans against the regime. Many of the crowd were killed in the subsequent clash with the police.

On 6 December there was a further mass demonstration to celebrate *16th Azar* (the unofficial student day) when many more were killed. SAVAK seemed no longer able to intimidate the protestors, while the 'liberalisation programme' was stimulating political activity against the regime.

The same month, US President Carter visited the Shah in Tehran. For two days before his arrival, the motorway leading from the Mehrabad Airport to the Shah's palace was closed to the public, and all houses and apartments along the route were occupied by the police. At the end of his stay, Carter told journalists that he 'admired Iran's rapid progress and the enlightened monarch who enjoys his people's total confidence'.

In mid-January 1978, on the eve of *Muharram* (month of religious mourning) Khomeini called from exile on the clergy and the faithful to protest against repression. When a demonstration in the holy city of Qom was staged, the police and army attacked it, killing several people. This initiated a new series of protests every forty days. By Iranian Islamic tradition, the dead are commemorated forty days after their departure from life. Since each new demonstration created new victims, the demonstrations were repeated at this regular interval.

In the meantime the revolutionary movement was spreading fast among its various but divergent forces: the industrial workers, the urban poor, the students and intellectuals of the modern middle class, and the clergy and their supporters from the traditional middle class of the bazaar.

In Tabriz, one of Iran's main industrial cities and the capital of Azerbaijan, in February 1978, demonstrators for the first time fought back when the police attacked them and killed young students. Shouting 'Death to the Shah!', the demonstrators launched assaults on police stations, the headquarters of the Shah's official Resurgence Party, banks, luxury hotels, cinemas specialising in sex films. Many of the premises they attacked were owned by the Shah and his family.

Faced with the growing opposition, the regime attempted to build itself a new social base by coming out openly with policies favouring the petty-bourgeoisie of the bazaar and their clergy representatives. The 'anti-inflation war' against small businesses was called off; the government abandoned a plan for establishing huge state-owned markets which would have undermined the small shopkeepers, apologised publicly to the clergy for the attacks on some religious demonstrations and on clergymen's homes, and announced a ban on pornographic films. The Shah and the Empress began a public series of visits to religious shrines, while their media ran pictures of them praying, with the Empress wearing the *chador* (the long Islamic veil). In 1971, to celebrate 2,500 years of the monarchy, the Shah had ordered the rescinding of the Islamic calendar for a monarchical calendar; now, in 1978, this decision was reversed to conciliate the clergy. High-ranking clergymen who had been under arrest since the early 1960s were released.

The Shah ordered a cut in the subsidies to his Resurgence Party. He closed down 57 gambling casinos owned by the Pahlavi (royal family) foundation, and sent the most openly corrupt members of his family on extended foreign vacations. To placate the Islamic fundamentalists, he abolished the post of Minister for Women's Affairs in the government, replacing it with a Ministry of Religious Affairs. As a specific concession to Khomeini, he launched a campaign against the Baha'i religion, and ordered police attacks on the liberal nationalists of the National Front, the parties of the left and the intellectuals. SAVAK raided their homes, beat them up and attacked their meetings.

The Shah's aim was to split the forces of opposition to his rule. In an interview on 26 June 1978, he declared:

> No one can overthrow me. I have the support of 700,000 troops, most of the people and all of the workers . . . In ten years we hope to be what Europe is today . . . In twenty years we hope to be a fully advanced nation.[16]

As the movement against the Shah's regime grew stronger still, Khomeini sought to secure the maximum advantage from it. The National Front and the Tudeh Party had been crushed after the 1953 coup. The guerrilla organisations had conducted armed operations between 1971 and 1975, but were also defeated by the regime. Shariati, whose ideas had incorporated elements of Islam, liberalism, Fanonism and Marxism, had played an important role as a focus for the opposition, especially as the regime was always more tolerant to its religious than to its left opponents. After Shariati's death, Khomeini was able to win over his followers, who saw him as accepting Shariati's liberal version of Islam. Khomeini denied that he or any other clergy had any desire to rule Iran, agreed that there should be a freely elected Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution after the Shah was gone, and declared that — as women and men were equal in the eyes of Islam — women should have the right to vote and should have equal rights with men.

In early November 1978, Karim Sanjabi and Mahdi Bazargam, leaders respectively of the National Front and the Liberation Movement of Iran, a body established in 1961 by religious supporters of Dr Mossadegh and of the National Front, left Tehran to join Khomeini in Paris. There they announced their open alliance with Khomeini and declared that 'mass movements of the previous year had shown that the people followed Ayatollah Khomeini and that they wanted the monarchy to be replaced with an Islamic system of government.'[17]

The guerrilla organisations, which had suffered heavy losses with their members tortured and murdered in the Shah's prisons, changed their tactics. In Iran their sympathisers accepted many of Shariati's ideas, and abroad they stepped up their activities within the student movement. When, in late 1978, the mass movement forced the release of many political prisoners, the guerrilla organisations moved into action, recruited new members, published leaflets and newspapers and fought the Shah's army and police. At the same time, having built no base among the workers and the urban poor in the early years of their guerrilla activity, they too acccepted Khomeini's leadership.

Khomeini now began to issue calls for the overthrow of the Shah and the whole monarchical system.

The struggle escalates

Up until June 1978, the demonstrations against the Shah were predominantly made up of students and intellectuals, the urban poor, and the modern and traditional middle classes. Industrial workers were less prominent. A survey of workers' struggles during this period[18] suggests that from March to June 1978 most of the strikes, sit-ins and other industrial protests were confined to economic demands.

From June onwards, however, industrial workers' movements took on an increasingly political as well as economic character. Demands for pay increases, for improved conditions and paid holidays, and against non-payment of wages, sackings and plant closures were now combined explosively with wider issues. Calls for independent trade unions, in opposition to the SAVAK-run 'Syndicates', were now openly voiced, along with a whole series of other demands: for housing benefits and health services, for credit and insurance facilities for workers, for a five-day week, for workers' participation in 'profit-sharing schemes'.[19] Demands for changes in management and for the removal of SAVAK offices from industrial plants were more and more loudly voiced. Other popular demands that emerged in strikes included the re-instatement of sacked workers, for workplace nurseries and equal treatment for Iranian and foreign workers.[20]

As the movement advanced so the demands became more overtly political. New strike demands — the ending of martial law, the freeing of political prisoners, the return of political exiles — surfaced for the first time. In September, workers in the vital oil industry struck at the refineries in Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz and Abadan, adding their weight to strikes already begun in other industries. Economic questions were combined with political demands concerning such matters as Japanese managements and political prisoners. The oil workers' list of demands was now directed against the army's presence within and outside the plants, against media censorship, against the very existence of SAVAK; they demanded a national judicial system to prosecute those identified as betraying Iran, and a revoking of all the current international oil agreements.

In September 1978, the strikes overflowed the bounds of the workplaces. Industrial workers marched from their factories to the city centres, joining into the millions-strong mass demonstrations. The oil workers now began to use their industrial muscle to weaken the regime directly. They decided to cut oil production from six million to only one million barrels a day, to halt exports and produce solely for domestic consumption. The customs workers followed suit, allowing the entry only of medicines, baby food and paper.

In October, the oil workers halted production to protest against the regime's links with South Africa and Israel. Tobacco workers struck against American tobacco imports. Oil workers cut back production further, to just 220,000 barrels a day. Coal miners struck in support of the students' and teachers' demonstrations and strikes.

Every few days a new section of the workforce came out on strike or joined the street demonstrations and protests. Every night for an hour communications workers blacked out the regime's radio and TV propaganda. Railway workers refused to allow police and army officers to travel by train. Atomic Energy workers struck, declaring their industry had been imposed on Iran by the great powers in the interests of nuclear war rather than creative industry. The Russian-built steel complex was completely shut down. Just about every industrial establishment was closed, with the exception of gas, telephones and electricity: here the workers explained they were continuing to work to serve the public, but that they supported the strikes and demonstrations to overthrow the regime. Dockers and seamen only offloaded foodstuffs, medical supplies and paper required for political activity.

The whole working class was now involved in the insurrectionary movement, united by the call for the overthrow of the Shah and his entire regime. And workers began to formulate their own political concerns for the future: the oil workers sent an open letter to Khomeini, expressing their support but also demanding workers' participation in the future government. They were followed rapidly by the communication workers. Workers in the electrical and electronic industries demanded a new labour law involving workers' control of industry. Oil workers' committees sent messages of support to airforce technicians and cadets who were now fighting the Shah's army.

Under the pressure of the developing revolutionary situation in the winter of 1978-79, Iranian workers' consciousness evolved by leaps and bounds. Their experience and combativity expanded rapidly. Many of the most important factory owners and managers panicked and fled the country. This sudden departure of their bosses promoted a strong feeling among workers of responsibility for their factories and a determination to take control of them. Elected strike committees took over management functions, deciding production limits, hours of work and hours of strike, and so forth.

The strike committees were essentially political bodies. The state-organised 'Syndicates', under SAVAK control, had been deeply hated. Time and again during disputes, workers attempting to choose their own militant representatives had had to confront SAVAK. At the Zamyad car plant in Tehran, for instance,

> . . . when a militant worker had stood for the leadership of the factory syndicate, SAVAK was sure he would win the election. He was banned from entering the factory on the election day in two successive years. For this reason, in the third year, a day before the election he hid himself at the top of the factory water-reservoir for the night. The next day he was inside the factory, took part in the election and won. Immediately after his victory, he was fired.[21]

Now openly elected strike committees replaced the SAVAK Syndicates. Their position was strengthened by the power vacuum in the factories after the bosses' flight and by the generalisation of the popular revolutionary tide.

Sections of the workforce in the oil, printing and textile industries had been involved in the political and trade-union movements of the 1940s and 1950s,[22] but the majority of Iran's workers were relatively recent migrants from the rural areas, with no such traditions. Among both sections of the workforce, however, the strike committees mushroomed with equal force.

Where previously workers had felt defenceless, now they felt a deep sense of their collective power. The newly organised intervention of the working class in the revolutionary movement — which combined all the other oppressed and exploited layers of Iranian society — tipped the political balance. Together this vast popular movement overthrew one of the most repressive regimes of modern times.

The Shah departs

On 16 January 1979, after eighteen months of bitter struggle, the Shah was forced to leave Iran. His departure triggered an absolute carnival of public rejoicing. As the radio broadcast the news, the population thronged into the streets to cries of '*Shah Raft*' (The Shah has gone). Strangers embraced each other. Cars sounded their horns. Confectioners' shops were offering sweets to the crowds for celebration, an old Iranian tradition.

The crowds fraternised with the soldiers, throwing flowers to them and appealing to them 'Do not kill your brothers and sisters'. The conscript soldiers, mostly from peasant backgrounds, wept and embraced people. Demonstrators pulled down the statues of the Shah and his father.

In a final effort to save the monarchy, Shapour Bakhtiar, a member of the old National Front, became prime minister. The whole country, however, refused to recognise him; immediate mass demonstrations demanded his resignation. Meanwhile army officers were secretly discussing the possibility of a *coup d'état* with their American advisers.

On 1 February, Ayatollah Khomeini returned from his last place of exile in Paris. Five days later he declared himself head of state, and published a decree appointing Mehdi Bazargan as prime minister. Bazargan was a leading member of the Liberation Movement and of the National Front. At the same time Khomeini set up a secret Revolutionary Council, consisting of a number of the clergy together with members of the National Front and the Liberation Movement, to negotiate with the army's chief of staff.

The army officers, shaken by the Shah's departure, now found they were losing the support of the rank-and-file soldiers. They were distressed, too, by the departure of the American general, Robert Huyser, deputy commander of the NATO forces, who quit Iran on 8 February after a month of negotiations with the army command in which he had dissuaded them from attempts at a coup. Meanwhile Washington advised the Shah to take a long vacation abroad. In the face of the revolutionary movement, it had become clear to the US that, if they were to protect their interests in Iran, they could no longer support the Shah. In hopes of re-securing their position, they officially confirmed their intention to cooperate with the provisional government.

The army officers were divided and uncertain. Finally they determined to remain neutral and to begin negotiations with the provisional government.

While these developments were taking place behind the scenes, the guerrilla organisations, together with the airforce technicians and cadets who had come over to the revolution, engaged in open battle with the Shah's last loyal troops, the imperial guards, defeating them and distributing arms among the whole population. On 11 February the fighting reached a climax, when the armed people took control of police armouries and barracks, together with the main army garrison in Tehran and the military academy.

As the fighting intensified, representatives of the clergy tried to disperse the armed population under 'Islamic guidance'. 'This is not yet the time for armed confrontation,' they argued, 'Khomeini has not yet issued the *Fetwa*' (religious decree). But the clergy was not yet in a position to control the movement: after two days of intense fighting, the guerrilla organisations, joined by large numbers of eager and armed volunteers, brought the insurrection to its completion and the 2,500 year-old monarchy to utter destruction. Prison doors were opened; the radio and TV, taken over by revolutionaries, announced 'This is the voice and the face of revolution' and declared to the world the end of the monarchy and the victory of the revolution.

As the Shah's state disintegrated, power passed into the hands of the people. Strike committees in all the factories, installations, offices, schools, universities and other workplaces re-formed and began to function as *Shoras* (councils): workers' *Shoras*, students' *Shoras*, office workers' *Shoras*. Peasants in the villages established their own peasants' *Shoras*. In the cities power passed to local *ad hoc* bodies called *Komitehs* (committees). The membership of the *Komitehs* was made up mainly of supporters of the guerrilla organisations but also included local clergy and other fanatical supporters of the idea of an Islamic republic. Among the national minorities, power fell into the hands of their local *Shoras*.

Factories were occupied by workers who took control of production. Peasants, with the help of their *Shoras*, began seizing land from the landlords. The Iranian left, together with the Mojahedin and with the help of students' *Shoras*, took over the offices and other premises of SAVAK, turning them into their own headquarters. From their new bases they organised meetings and rallies.

Within the oil and other older-established industries, workers with direct traditions of organisation (or with parents or close relatives who had passed on their experience), played a leading role in founding the workers' *Shoras*. But in the newer industries, whose workforces were mainly recent rural migrants, the emergence of the *Shoras* owed little either to previous working-class traditions or to the influence of the organisations of the left. In these industries, the workers' recent experience of developing and running insurrectionary strike committees, together with their hatred of the Shah's SAVAK-imposed Syndicates, provided the main impulse behind their formation of *Shoras*.

Ayatollah Khomeini became Iran's new Head of State, largely because of the organisational and ideological weakness of all the other existing opposition groups. However, for eight months after the victory of the February insurrection his power was anything but assured. In reality there was a complete power vacuum in Iranian politics. During this period, the newly created workers' councils, the *Shoras*, were to play a fundamentally important political and economic role. As long as they maintained their momentum, Khomeini could not consolidate his power.

The rise of the workers' *Shoras*

A few days after the insurrection, Khomeini ordered workers to begin work again 'in the name of the revolution'. The workers went back to the factories — to find that nothing had changed. Wages and working conditions were as before. They reacted quickly. In many

factories, the absence of the manager or owner provided an opportunity to establish *Shoras* immediately. Elsewhere, the continued presence of the same manager, the same supervisor and even the same old SAVAK representative was the motive for the *Shoras'* formation.

Within most workplaces, the pre-revolutionary strike committees provided the core of the leadership of the new workers' organisations. Within the *Shoras*, workers established committees to identify and investigate the authoritarian and oppressive elements within the factory, and to weed out those having close links with the old regime. As one worker argued:

> Those who were managers under the Shah have been re-appointed. These men have oppressed us so much, how could the state have appointed them as our managers? We will never put up with this, never accept such a burden as long as we have blood in our veins.[23]

The *Shoras* began to exercise their power at every level of factory life, in purchasing, sales, pricing and orders for raw materials. Different committees were organised to carry out various tasks: guild committees to secure trade-union demands with respect to wages, conditions, insurance, health and safety; financial committees to control the incomes and expenditures of the individual factories and to watch over managerial financial affairs; communications committees to maintain contact with *Shoras* in other factories; supervising committees to oversee production and sales; political committees to organise small factory libraries, to produce wall newspapers and distribute leaflets and newsletters so as to keep workers informed of the latest news of their own and other factories; guard committees, consisting of armed workers, to protect the factories from former owners and managers and/or from counter-revolutionary elements; cooperative committees to organise strike funds; women's committees, made up solely of women, to press women workers' specific demands, especially in the chemicals and textiles industries where women constituted the majority of the labour force.

The workers were effectively in control of industry. They were discussing, planning and managing the individual factories. They had control of hiring and firing. The *Shoras* were their key instrument for exercising power over production and distribution. Typical was the Chite Jahan textiles factory near Tehran — famous under the Shah for the number of political activists among its workers and for its tradition of strike activity — where the workers' council achieved a high level of control over the factory's affairs. During the first few months of the revolution, the workers increased production, doubled minimum wages by cutting the top salaries of engineers and managerial staff, and provided free milk for the workers.[24]

The workers' task, as they saw it, was to keep the factories open and running under their control, and to win legal recognition from the government for their *Shoras*. All too soon, however, several major problems were to affect the *Shoras'* independent role.

Firstly, the provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan declared that workers' intervention in management affairs was 'un-Islamic'. Refusing to recognise the *Shoras*, the regime sought to combat their power by dividing the workers on the basis of religious belief. Through small groups of workers organised in Islamic societies, the government started to intervene in the affairs of the *Shoras* and to support the state-appointed managers. The Islamic societies began religious agitation, organising meetings on the general importance of Islam, and more specifically on the Islamic meaning of work and property and control. Their aim was ideological control of the workplace. As a worker from Roghan Pars, a subsidiary of Shell, described it:

> The revolution was victorious because of the workers' strike. We got rid of the Shah and smashed his system, but everything is the same as before. The state-appointed managers have the same mentality as the old managers. We must strengthen our *Shoras*, because the management are afraid of them. They know that if the *Shoras* remain powerful they've had it. They can't impose their anti-working-class policies directly; but they're now opposing the *Shoras* on the basis of religious belief. If we say anything, their answer is, 'This is a communist conspiracy to weaken your religious belief.' What I would like to know is, what have *Shoras* got to do with religion? Workers are exploited all the same: Muslim, Christian or any other religion. That bloody manager who's been sucking our blood has suddenly become a good Muslim and tries to divide us by our religion; so we should know the only way for us to win is to keep our unity through the *Shora*.[25]

Secondly, the *Shoras* had real difficulties with obtaining raw materials and undertaking economic reconstruction. Typical was the Azmayesh electrical and gas appliance factory, formed by private capital and employing a workforce of 900. After the revolution the factory was nationalised with a state-appointed manager. An Azmayesh worker explained:

> After the revolution, there were 60 million *tomans*' (£6 million) worth of goods in the factory. But, before we returned to work, the management had already distributed these among middlemen in the bazaar. We had no means either of getting back the goods or the money for them. Not only that: a year ago — at the time of strikes and the escalation of the fight against the Shah — the previous management stopped all orders for raw materials. In a factory like Azmayesh, 90-95 per cent of the materials have to be imported from abroad, and orders for them have to be placed a

year before delivery. So we could not start production. We didn't give up, and decided to sell anything of value from our personal belongings — our carpets, etc — to save our factory. Then we realised we wouldn't get anywhere that way, by ourselves, and we'd have to cooperate with the new management. We needed government credit and financial support to keep the factory open.[26]

Raw materials were not the only problem. Many of the modern factories were primarily final assembly plants, such as those putting together automobiles from components shipped in by such companies as General Motors or Talbot. This pattern of economic development, a crucial element in Iran's effective integration into the world market, had involved the creation of a layer of highly skilled industrial engineers. While numbers of these were foreign experts connected to multinationals, many others were Iranians educated in Europe and America. These Iranian skilled engineers lived in a world apart from that of ordinary workers. They had been through the experience of higher education. They enjoyed huge salary differentials. They worked closely with management and the foreign experts, and participated in the extraction of surplus value. They possessed a social and technical superiority which gave them authority over the workers.

The workers, through their *Shoras*, were trying to implement full control over production and distribution, and not to allow the anti-working class managements to regain control, but the whole situation was obviously putting serious obstacles in their path. The mass of the workers were unskilled or semi-skilled. As the most effective force in the revolutionary movement against the Shah, they had been strong enough to halt production, and felt strong enough now to mount an effective challenge to bourgeois relations of production. But they were caught on the horns of a dilemma. Now, in the aftermath of the revolution, if they were to restart and sustain production under their own control they needed not just the financial assistance of the state but also the skill and expertise of the engineers and other technically equipped managerial personnel.

Many owners, managers and foreign experts had fled the country; the skilled Iranian engineers who remained constituted a vital force if production was to continue. They were hostile to the idea of the Iranian working class exercising power through its *Shoras*. When the workers' *Shoras* appealed to the government for financial help, the regime had a perfect justification for sending this layer of skilled personnel to take control of the factories.

The struggle for workers' power in the factories had reached a critical point. For the workers to consolidate the power they had won at the point of production, they needed a state machinery that was directly under their control and responsive to their needs as a class. With their own power and resources at the factory level alone, they could not overcome the problems of economic backwardness. As the Iranian workers sought to develop their struggle into one for emancipation from exploitation, these problems faced them starkly and imperatively demanded further solutions.

The Iranian workers faced the danger of losing all their revolutionary gains and being thrown back to where they had started. On the one hand, the contradictory unevenness of development of Iranian capitalism had produced the immense popular upsurge of the February 1979 revolution. Now the same contradictions were leading to the breakdown of the economy, whose maintenance was crucial for the survival of the working class. The smashing of the Shah's state was relatively simple compared with the difficulties the Iranian workers now faced.

Yet the working class, having gone so far, did not want to stop. They wanted to continue the revolution, and to make it genuinely theirs. No doubt the fact that they were still a minority within the country was an objective difficulty, but not necessarily an insuperable one. The numbers of the industrial proletariat, their concentration, their culture and their political weight are all affected by the degree of capitalist development, but these matters are not the only determinants. The power of the working class is dependent not only on the level of development of the productive forces, but also on workers' traditions, initiatives and readiness to fight. Among the Iranian workers these were certainly not in short supply.

The Founding Council of the Iranian National Workers' Union (*Shoraye Moassesse Ettehadieh Sarasariehe Karegarane Iran*) was established to strengthen the individual councils and develop unity between them. On 1 March 1979 this body published a set of 24 demands:

> We the workers of Iran, through our strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations, overthrew the Shah. During these months of strike, we tolerated unemployment, poverty and even hunger. Many of us were killed in the struggle. We did all this in order to create an Iran free from repression, free of exploitation. We made the revolution in order to end unemployment and homelessness, to replace the SAVAK-oriented Syndicates with independent workers' *Shoras*, formed by the workers of each factory for their own economic and political needs. Therefore we demand:
>
> 1) government recognition of the *Shoras*; 2) abolition of the Shah's labour law and enactment of a new labour law written by the workers themselves; 3) wage increases in line with the cost of living; 4) tax-free bonuses; 5) a free health service instead of the present semi-private insurance system; 6) housing benefits in the shortest possible time;

7) sick pay; 8) a forty-hour five-day week; 9) the sacking of all elements closely linked with the old regime; 10) the expulsion of all foreign experts and foreign and Iranian capitalists and expropriation of their capitals in the interests of all workers; 11) an end to discrimination against blue-collar workers and an increased annual holiday of one month; 12) improved health conditions in the factories; 13) sick pay; 14) an end to disciplinary punishments and fines; 15) an end to the intervention of the police, army and government in labour disputes; 16) inclusion of workers' *Shoras* in industrial decisions such as investment and the general condition of the plant, as well as buying, selling, pricing and the distribution of profit; 17) determination of hiring and firing by the *Shoras*; 18) freedom of demonstrations and protests, and legalisation of strikes; 19) return of the capital of co-operatives to the workers; 20) free meals, washing facilities and improved safety at work; 21) provision of ambulance, nurse, bath and nursery services at work; 22) official employment and job security for all temporary workers; 23) creation of a medical consulting body to review the condition of unhealthy and sick workers and to grant them exemption from work and retirement; 24) reduction of the retirement age in the mining and moulding industries from 30 to 20 years' service.[27]

The provisional government of Bazargan had a definite project in view: the establishment and consolidation of an 'Islamic Republic'. What this term meant was becoming increasingly clear: there was to be no place in an 'Islamic Republic' for anything but orthodox capitalist relations of production. The workers' *Shoras* stood in the way.

The provisional government declared that, because of their interference with management and production, the *Shoras* were 'anarchistic'. Darioush Frouhar, minister of labour and social affairs, announced at a press conference, 'The Ministry of Labour is in favour of Syndicates and believes that workers can defend their interests only through a healthy Syndicate; therefore the Ministry will support such organisations and intends to dissolve any other forms of organisation which are wasteful.'[28]

While ordinary trade unionism — which is restricted to collective bargaining and involves recognition of management rights — is perfectly compatible with capitalist production relations, workers' councils are a very different matter, and infinitely more dangerous to capitalism. Yet despite the government, the struggle for workers' control within the factories continued.

The oilfield workers' *Shora* expelled the entire membership of the state oil company's board of directors for being 'corrupt and anti-working class', locked them out and occupied their offices. Hassan Nazih, the company's director general, complained that 'to threaten the management in such a way is seriously to damage our economy, especially in the absence of foreign experts who have left Iran and are not prepared to return because we cannot ensure their safety and security in the existing atmosphere'.[29]

Khomeini himself publicly avoided expressing any views about the *Shoras*, although he made comments in various speeches about industrial disputes, wages, conditions and unemployment. But he revealed his real position in the speech for the May Day celebration:

> Workers, especially the oil workers, played the most important role in the victory of the revolution. And it is still you who can continue the revolution with your production. But you have to be aware that the hands of the devils are waiting to divide you and weaken your power; you must be aware and awake, and serve your country, Islam and the Koran. The whole of Iran and all Islamic countries are one Islamic society; each of the Islamic Societies are small branches of that Islamic society which is under the leadership of God and the absent Imam [the Messiah]. We have to be together in these Islamic societies.[30]

The Struggle of the Unemployed

The workers also had to contend with a serious problem of unemployment. According to government statistics, only 50 per cent of industrial units were operating, and they were functioning at only 80 per cent of capacity. In the conditions of revolutionary excitement, private capital was neither secure nor prepared to invest, and the government itself lacked the means to pay for the reconstruction of the economy.

The drop in oil revenues, combined with international and domestic inflation, made the economic crisis especially intractable. Iran's oil revenues had paid in part for imports of food, raw materials, goods and services, together with foreign experts and foreign workers. The fall of the Shah had resulted in some necessary economies, by cutting corruption and by saving of funds previously spent on expensive weapons and extravagant showcase projects. But these savings were insufficient to bring better economic conditions for the mass of the people: Iran remained far too dependent on oil revenues for these reforms to have the required impact.

The government's response to the economic crisis was to close newly nationalised factories, sacking part of the workforce, lowering wages and cutting such services in the workplace as nurseries, washing facilities and canteens; at the same time the government loudly promised to build new houses for the poor, to start unemployment benefit and even to raise wages in the near future.

Unemployed workers especially bore the brunt of the financial crisis. After the revolution these unemployed workers — according to official figures, some four million out of a total workforce of ten and a half million — remained in the big cities. The worst affected were construction workers, who provided the largest number of the unemployed. They had already been hurt in the Shah's last year by the fall-off in large-scale construction — itself a factor in creating the revolutionary situation.

Often the unemployed were former rural migrants, unskilled and on low incomes. Generally they had been hired on a daily basis, and thus had proved exceptionally difficult to organise in the period of the Shah's regime. But the months of anti-Shah mobilisations had had a tremendous effect on the consciousness of the unemployed. After the revolution they joined and supported political meetings organised by students and different left political organisations, and participated in factory meetings organised by employed workers. They themselves organised various demonstrations in large cities against unemployment, demanding jobs or state benefits.

In Isfahan, one of the big industrial cities in the south, their demonstration was attacked by pro-Khomeini 'Revolutionary Guards' and one worker was killed. This outrage led to more demonstrations and sit-ins in other cities. In Tehran, unemployed workers occupied the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Labour. They demanded that news of their protests be given on radio and television, and a lifting of the censorship newly imposed by Sadeg Ghotbzadeh, Khomeini's appointed head of broadcasting. They sent an open message to Khomeini: 'We have been shot at by the *Komitehs* and have been accused of being subversives. We are unemployed workers, we made the revolution and we now want to rebuild our country. We will continue our protests until we get what we want.'[31] One of the workers occupying the Ministry of Labour said:

> I suggest that we remain in this place until this ministry of bosses becomes a ministry of workers. The Minister of Labour should know that he is a minister of a provisional government, and is himself only provisional, not permanent. It is his duty to tell the owners and managers that for 25 years they robbed millions and millions, so how are they now suddenly bankrupt? We don't want your promises, we want action. Don't accuse us of being non-believers. You meet our demands, and we will pray 37 times a day instead of 17.[32]

The unemployed converted the former headquarters of the old SAVAK-controlled Syndicates in Tehran into a centre for their meetings. They named the building '*Khaneh Kargar*' (Workers' Home). Every day unemployed workers from different cities sent delegates to *Khaneh Kargar* to discuss local unemployment problems, to determine further actions and to participate in sit-ins, demonstrations and occupations. Delegates from *Shoras* in different plants also sent delegates to *Khaneh Kargar* to announce their solidarity with the unemployed and to invite them to join in the fight to defend the *Shoras*.

The unemployed workers also played a major role in the First of May demonstrations. These demonstrations represented a trial of strength between the working-class movement and the provisional government. The Founding Council of the Iranian National Workers' Union called on all employed and unemployed workers to celebrate May Day, by joining a workers' march from *Khaneh Kargar*. On the day, unemployed men and women and their children led the march, carrying their banners and congratulating each other on the celebration of Workers' Day. They were followed by employed workers, each plant or industry represented with its own banners. School and college students and political organisations also supported the march.

The workers' demonstration was massive: it took six hours for the one and a half million marchers to pass in the streets of Tehran. Slogans in Farsi, Arabic, Kurdish and Azari expressed the marchers' demands: 'Education for children, not child labour'; 'Nationalisation of all industries'; 'There is no kind capitalist in the world'; 'Long live real unions and real *Shoras*'; 'Death to imperialism' and 'Death to America'; 'Pay the Workers' Wages' and 'Equal Pay for Men and Women'; 'Today is Workers' New Year: In our first new year, we remember all those who gave their lives for the revolution'; 'Unity everything; disunity nothing'; 'Free speech, free press'; 'Down with the old labour law; compile a new law with workers' participation;' 'Workers, peasants, unite and fight'; 'Work for the Unemployed' . . .

At times the march was harassed by small groups of Islamic thugs shouting anti-communist and pro-Islamic slogans. The demonstrators replied: 'The workers will be victorious, the reactionaries will be defeated.' When the thugs threatened violence, the march organisers and political groups decided not to confront them as 'they were only a small group'; indeed, they even agreed to change the route of the demonstration to prevent confrontations with these agents of the regime. The Islamic group, however, took this to be a victory for themselves; they tore down placards and banners, shouting 'Long Live Khomeini, Long Live Islam, Death to Communists'. Thus, despite the massive size of the workers' demonstration, the organisers permitted the political initiative to pass, in part, to their numerically much weaker opponents.

Meanwhile, the newly formed Islamic Republic Party organised a separate rally from 'Iman Hussein Square' in East Tehran. They

only managed to gather a few thousand demonstrators, whose slogans expressed the anti-working-class character of this rival rally: 'Workers and peasants, Islam is your real supporter'; 'Muslim workers we must work hard today'; 'Splits and agitation are the tasks of betrayers'; 'We are followers of the Koran, we don't want communism'; 'Islam is victorious, conspirators will be defeated'.

The Mojahedin refused to join in with the independent workers' rally, for fear of seeming to oppose the Islamic Republic. They too held their own separate demonstration in Karaj, near Tehran, but this was joined by only a few thousand, chiefly their own members and supporters. Their contradictory position was revealed in their slogans, which sought to reconcile utter opposites: 'Support Khomeini' and 'Support *Shoras*'; 'Support the provisional government' but also 'Support nationalisation of all industries'.

The Islamic reaction

The events of May Day revealed the potential strength of the workers' movement, but also two other factors: first, the regime's open opposition to independent activity by the working class; and, second, the confusion of the Iranian left. The activity of the groups of Islamic thugs was nothing new. Within days of the Shah's overthrow, the new regime had been encouraging fanatical Islamic groups to launch attacks on the democratic rights and demands of every section of society, and using its own forces to the same end. Women's rights, the national minorities, the peasants, the unemployed and the left had all suffered from the onslaught. But the resistance was divided in its response. Why were the thugs not dealt with on May Day, and prevented from gaining a symbolic victory? Indeed, why were they allowed so many other victories?

Essentially, the problem was that the left thought it should simply *tail after* working-class and other oppositional activity, rather than intervene and propose alternative strategies. They believed that they should avoid having ideological arguments with various currents within the working class. In practice, this meant that the left ended up taking its lead not from the most advanced but from the most backward sections — those who were most influenced by Khomeini's supporters. Numbers of the members of left organisations tried to conceal their middle-class origins by dressing and trying to sound like workers, believing that this faking was necessary as a way of winning workers' confidence. *Later*, they hoped, they would be able to put forward their ideas. In the meantime, they avoided supporting potentially unpopular causes, leaving the field open to the Islamic reaction.

This attitude — and its dangerous consequences — first revealed itself over the issue of women's rights. On 26 February 1979, Khomeini's regime opened an assault on women by suspending the Shah's minimal reform, the Family Protection Act. By this means Khomeini restored to the husband the exclusive right to divorce, permitting him at the same time to take four permanent wives and an unlimited number of temporary wives (*Sighe*) without the first wife's permission. A few days later, on 3 March, another decree forbade women judges to work since, according to Islam, women are not fit to judge. On 6 March, the Ministry of Defence barred women from military service (which some women had used as a way to get weapons training). And on 7 March Khomeini proclaimed that women, while not prohibited from taking jobs, must wear the Islamic veil (the *hejab*).

The next day, when millions of women celebrated International Women's Day and protested against the anti-women Islamic laws, thugs from the Hezbollahis — the 'Party of God' — attacked women with stones, while Islamic fundamentalist members of the *Komitehs* and the Pasdaran (Khomeini's guards) shot at women demonstrators. Every day for a whole week several million women came out to protest against Khomeini's Islamic rules, as these affected every aspect of their lives. The Iranian left did not try to rally support among workers for the women's cause, but largely evaded the issue. Some indeed argued that the women's demands were merely 'bourgeois demands' which it was not important to support.

The position of Khomeini and his forces was thereby strengthened, not least within the *Komitehs*. These, it will be remembered, were formed after the revolution, and took over much of the local administration. Initially they were made up of revolutionaries and young men from the working class and the urban poor who had been exposed to revolutionary ideas during the months of mass struggle against the Shah. In Tehran and the other big cities, the Fedayeen and Mohajedin had considerable influence within the *Komitehs*.

Among the national minorities, the local *Komitehs* were generally under the control of the leaders of their movements. Thus the Kurdistan *Komitehs* were led by the Kurdish Democratic Party and a radical Sunni clergyman, Shaykh Ezaldin Husseini, who was sympathetic to Marxist ideas. The *Komiteh* members in Azarbaijan were followers of the liberal Ayatollah Shariatmadari; in Khuzistan (the land of the Arab minority) they were followers of the guerrilla organisations and the radical Ayatollah Al Shabir Khaqani; in Torkamansahra and in Baluchistan, again, the guerrilla organisations provided the leadership, and under their influence the *Komitehs* expropriated lands belonging

to the royal family and large landowners who had escaped the country. All of these groups were opposed to Khomeini's plans for an Islamic Shi'ite Republic. Of course, in other areas where the left political groups had no influence the *Komitehs* were under the control of the bazaar and of the mosques run by the Shi'ite clergy and Khomeini's followers.

The top police officers and army officers had fled the country, and those who remained were disillusioned and not in favour of the new regime. The regime therefore lacked a reliable army and police force, and needed to develop new forces to defend its own existence and further its interests. It began to transform the reliable *Komitehs* into state organisations, while setting out simultaneously to smash the oppositional ones. It began to recruit those elements who had strong ideological links with the regime, giving them a social and ideological role in areas under the control of Khomeini's supporters. These men became part of the new state apparatus, and in turn went on to recruit their relatives (a significant factor in Iran, where the extended family plays an important role). The left did not conduct any kind of systematic political struggle within the *Komitehs*.

As a result, in a very short time the *Komitehs* became the regime's police force, and began to purge revolutionary elements within their ranks. In March — only a few weeks after the victory of the revolution — they strengthened their position by establishing the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran) as a fanatical elite group within the *Komitehs*, taking on the job of savage suppression of any activity against the Islamic Republic. To all intents and purposes, they became Khomeini's SAVAK, viciously active in the streets, in the factories and among the national minorities.

After the women came the turn of the national minorities. On 18 March Kurdish villages were bombed for demanding national self-determination, and for seizing land from the landlords. On 29 March, troops shot down Torkaman peasants in Gonbadkavoos, again for seizing land. The Iranian left organisations stood apart from this struggle, in that they did not support the major Kurdish organisations' demand for self-determination, including the right to secession from Iran — thus they subordinated their politics to Iranian nationalism.

Bazargan's government sought to strengthen its position by pushing ahead with its proposals for an Islamic constitution. It announced that 30 March would be 'Referendum Day for the Islamic Republic'. The Tudeh Party and the Mojahedin both backed the regime's proposals, but the rest of the left, the women's organisations, the national minorities and the *Shoras* of many of the factories argued for a boycott of the referendum. They demanded, not a narrow Islamic form of government, but a constituent assembly of elected representatives from the different sections of society, which was itself to determine the form of the new republic.

The government began its preparations for the referendum by lowering the voting age to sixteen, announcing that 24 million voters should now participate. They began, at the same time, to rebuild the atmosphere of intimidation and fear that people had so recently experienced under the Shah. To 'combat counter-revolutionary activity', they announced, the armed forces would remain on alert until after the end of the referendum.

For the referendum itself, they produced two different voting slips, a red one with 'No' and a green one for 'Yes'. Members of the local *Komitehs* handed individual voters their preferred voting slip, at the same time stamping the identity cards of those who participated. The identity card had for years been used as an effective means of policing individuals' activities in Iran; people had had to use it for a whole variety of activities, including school and university attendance, buying and selling, marriage, travel abroad, military service, and so on. For years people had lived with the mentality of fear produced by the secret police and the suppression of any genuine elections. Now, once again, they were afraid: if they boycotted the referendum, their identity card would not be stamped; if they chose the 'No' card, their names would be recorded by the local *Komiteh*.

Despite this intimidatory atmosphere, there were reports from all over the country of severe clashes between sections of the people and the local *Komitehs* and Pasdaran. In Kurdistan and Torkamansahra, people burned the ballot boxes.

Though they did not reveal the overall figures, the regime declared a clear majority in favour of the Islamic Republic. Armed with this result, the provisional government spurned the demands for a constituent assembly that came from workers, women, national minorities, students, intellectuals and *Shoras*; instead they began to prepare an assembly of Islamic experts to approve the Islamic constitution. The Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran) were now formalised under the leadership of Hashemi Rafsanjani, later to be head of the Islamic parliament, in order to 'save the Islamic Revolution'. These organised and armed groups of fanatical Islamic fundamentalists now formed the core of the police force of the new Islamic state machine. A new party, the Islamic Republic Party, was set up to counter the influence of the left groups, and to organise counter-demonstrations when revolutionary demands were raised.

On 10 April, as we have seen, the Pasdaran opened fire on an unemployed workers' demonstration at Isfahan. They also launched

attacks on bookshops, burning books while shouting '*Allaho Akbar*' (God is the greatest). The regime took control of the radio and television stations, sacking 'un-Islamic' women and representatives of the left. Gangs of thugs armed with knives and clubs attacked the headquarters, bookshops, meetings and demonstrations of both the left and the Mojahedin. Anyone not fanatically Muslim was labelled a 'counter-revolutionary'.

The regime intensified the level of repression, banning progressive newspapers and monopolising the official media. The Shah's army officers were reinstated, and used to lead extensive military offensives against Kurdistan and Khusistan. The local *Komitehs*, now called Islamic *Komitehs*, were purged thoroughly of revolutionary elements, whose places were taken by Islamic fundamentalists.

There followed a gradual series of attacks on the labour movement, including purges of the *Shoras* and the sacking of individual workers. The regime used Islamic ideology to divide the working class. The *Shoras*, they declared, must be Islamic. Their purpose was to reduce the influence of revolutionaries among the mass of the workers. New terms for capitalists and workers were introduced: workers were now to be known as *Mostazafin* (the downtrodden) and capitalists *Mostakberin* (oppressors). Khomeini announced himself the protector of *Mostazafin*, while all those who opposed his regime were labelled *Mostakberin*.

It was amongst the most backward sections of the working class that these ideas appeared attractive. They identified with Khomeini's Islamic terminology, and with the idea of the Islamicisation of the *Shoras*. At the same time, their support for Khomeini was deeply contradictory, as many of them partly grasped. For they opposed the state-appointed managers and believed that the *Shoras* should make all decisions. One worker put the matter as follows:

> If they don't recognise the rights of our *Shoras*, there will be sit-downs and sabotage. If they outlaw the *Shora*, the workers will never let them inside the factory. If they dissolve the *Shora*, they themselves must go.[33]

The reality was that, despite the regime's anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist slogans, and despite Khomeini's claimed 'support for *Mostazafin*', the development of the Islamic state rested upon the revival and strengthening of capitalist relations of production.

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the Mojahedin were in favour of Islamic *Shoras*, though the way they interpreted this was much more liberal than Khomeini's. The Fedayeen and others, rather than oppose Islamicisation on principle, believed they should concede to the ideas of the most backward sections of the working class, so as to 'gain their confidence'. The process of Islamicisation, as a result, was by no means evenly accomplished across the whole of industry. The outcome in different workplaces was shaped by the level of workers' consciousness and the variable influence of the left.

On 9 August, Khomeini declared the formation of a new Islamic organisation, the 'Reconstruction Crusade', with which workers would be required to cooperate fully. From now on, he explained, strikes would be crimes, for the time for 'reconstruction' had come.[34] Hot on the heels of this announcement, the Islamic Societies and Islamic *Shoras* argued for going back to the Shah's 48-hour week. They began sending workers out of the factories to work on the land or on cleaning the streets, washing the windows of ministry buildings and so on.

Workers from large assembly plants such as General Motors, Caterpillar, and Iran National — all highly dependent on imported parts — now found themselves being sent out on 'reconstruction crusades', on the grounds that with a cut in production workers should not be left idle. Many workers refused and took part in strikes and sit-ins. One worker from Iran National, a subsidiary of Talbot, argued: 'With millions unemployed, still they move us from the factory floor where we can be productive, and send us on the reconstruction crusade.' Another, from General Motors, asked, 'Why doesn't the government force the capitalists, who've salted away their capital in European banks, to bring it back so we can carry on production and modernise industry and agriculture? That's real reconstruction.'[35]

Of course the regime had a specific political purpose in seeking the removal of the skilled and semi-skilled workers from the factories: if the most militant and conscious sections of the workers could be got away from the factory floor, it would be that much easier to strengthen the Islamic Societies and *Shoras*.

In the wake of Khomeini's decree, strikes and sit-ins were labelled 'communist conspiracies' and came under attack from armed *Komitehs*. In early October, the unemployed workers' centre, *Khaneh Kargar*, was occupied by the local *Komiteh*. It was then taken back twice by the unemployed workers.

The autumn of 1979 was a critical period for the regime. For despite the intensive repression, all manner of popular struggles continued. Large numbers of women were in opposition to the revived Islamic laws; factories were still being occupied; all over the country demonstrations and meetings of the unemployed were still occurring. Peasants were still involved in land seizures and in battles with the regime's guards, while the war between the national minorities and the central government was reaching its highpoint.

The Iranian ruling class was also divided, with the fight for power among the different factions of the regime intensifying. The Bazargan government represented a bourgeois nationalist tendency, looking for a pro-Western kind of capitalist reconstruction programme; while a state capitalist tendency within the Islamic Republican Party wanted extensive nationalisation and economic centralisation; and the Islamic fundamentalist Hojatieh Group favoured a policy of Islamic private capitalism based on a strengthened bazaar and petty bourgeoisie. No single wing of the bourgeoisie yet had dominance over the others; no-one within the regime seemed to have a clear view of the way forward.

It was in this situation, with the Iranian revolution facing a relative *impasse*, that a wave of 'anti-imperialist' activities began which led to the occupation of the US Embassy on 4 November. The 'anti-imperialist struggle' was to provide the means both to settle the argument within the ruling class and to bring to an end the movement for workers' control.

The American Embassy Occupation

On 4 November 1979, the 'Islamic Students Movement Following the Imam Khomeini's Line' occupied the American Embassy in Tehran. The regime organised demonstrations 'against imperialism', throwing its domestic opponents within Iran into utter confusion. All political attention and activity was diverted towards the 'anti-imperialist' campaign. The political groups of the left, deeply confused about what was going on, deserted independent activity against the Islamic regime as they began heated debates about the 'anti-imperialist' nature of Khomeini's government.

The Iranian left forgot that, despite the victory of the revolution and the destruction of the Shah's imperial regime, much of the old state machine remained in place. According to a US government estimate,[36] while 30 per cent of the Shah's officer corps had been removed, 70 per cent remained. There had been some nationalisation of banks, insurance companies and some private industrial concerns, but under the control of Islamic laws and Islamic organisations rather than under workers' control. Past promises concerning the demands of the national minorities had been forgotten and broken: Persian chauvinism, together with the Islamicisation of society under Shi'ite rule, left no space for minority rights.

Khomeini's exploitation of the religious issue had already seriously divided the opposition; now, with the US Embassy occupation, Khomeini played his militant nationalist card to complete their disorientation. He was able to split the left opposition completely. Khomeini now declared that all problems arising in factories, among women and among national minorities were due to US imperialism. It was US imperialism that was fighting the governent in Kurdistan, in Tabriz, in Torkamansahra and in Khusistan. Women opposing Islamic laws were US and Zionist agents. Workers resisting Islamic *Shoras* were imperialist agents.

The Tudeh Party fell in with Khomeini's argument, and backed his line. The biggest left organisations — the Fedayeen, the Mojahedin and the Paykar[37] — also broke away from the struggle, abandoning the militant workers, the women and the national minorities, among whom they had some significant presence.

In an attempt to justify their position, all the left parties now spoke of the 'low level of consciousness' of the workers. After all, they claimed (very inaccurately), the *Shoras*' demands were no more than economic demands. The Fedayeen and Paykar declared that the *Shoras* needed to be led, under the left parties' guidance, towards political demands. This might sound like socialist sense, except that the proposed political demands were no more than nationalist. The Mojahedin's attitude to the *Shoras* was that a bridge must be built between workers' control and Islamic ideology, so that the socialism of *soviets* could be combined with Islam. Under the circumstances of the US Embassy occupation, the left agreed, all forces must be united with the 'progressive anti-imperialist bourgeoisie'.

The national mobilisation around the occupation of the American embassy provided Khomeini with a favourable political climate in which to silence the opposition. He seized the opportunity with both hands. A new referendum for the proposed Islamic constitution was announced. Anyone opposing the referendum was branded as a Zionist and agent of imperialism.

All the left political groups supported the referendum 'so as not to jeopardise the anti-imperialist struggle'. However in Tabriz, home of the Azari Turks, supporters of Ayatollah Shariatmadari, a leading representative of the liberal clergy, organised a general strike and mass demonstration against Khomeini's Islamic constitution. This was brutally suppressed. By such means, even a section of the clergy and the liberal bourgeoisie who opposed the new constitution were driven into silence.

Under the new constitution, personal liberty, freedom of the press, of association, of assembly, of speech and of religion (with the exception of the Baha'i faith) and similar rights were constitutionally guaranteed — but only according to the 'Islamic standard'. Women appearing in public had to wear Islamic dress. Music and alcohol were

forbidden. Anything critical of either the Islamic Republic or Islam was banned from the press and other media. Other religions beside Shi'ite Islam — again, except the Baha'i faith[38] — were permitted, but their followers must behave according to the Islamic rules, for example as regards women, alcohol and music. Other nationalities might exist, but their languages and cultures were not recognised.

In the factories, the Islamicisation programme was pushed ahead, using the Islamic *Shoras* and Societies. A wave of wildcat strikes mounted again, demanding the expropriation of private capital, and especially capital involved in joint ventures with foreign capital. Many of the *Shoras*' leaders were arrested, and their strike funds were expropriated by the Islamic *Shoras*.

Once the Islamic constitution had been ratified, the next step was the establishment of the presidency and parliament. This was the occasion for the eruption of a factional struggle within the regime. Two especially influential forces were contending with each other. On one side was the liberal nationalist tendency, led by Khomeini's former adviser and foreign minister, Bani Sadr, with a programme for relatively orthodox bourgeois reconstruction. On the other side was a tendency within the Islamic Republic Party, led by Ayatollah Beheshti, who was seeking a state capitalist solution to the problems of economic reconstruction; it had been the Islamic Republic Party which had actively intervened in the struggle in the factories, and brought the Islamic *Shoras* under its control.

The first round in the power struggle went to Bani Sadr, who was elected president in January 1980, chiefly because the Islamic Republic Party was internally divided and unable to agree on a single presidential candidate. The Mojahedin put forward their leader, Massoud Rajavi, for president, on a programme of support for the rights of women and national minorities, and for the workers' *Shoras*. Rajavi, however, was forced by the government to withdraw his candidacy on the grounds that 'according to the constitution he was not a real Muslim and he was really a counter-revolutionary'. Bani Sadr then adopted the Mojahedin's programme, including support for workers' *Shoras*, and on that basis gained the victory.

After his election, the conflict between Bani Sadr and the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) sharpened. The party mobilised its supporters in parliament and the cabinet to weaken his position. In the factories, the Islamic *Shoras* under IRP control also became vehicles for the consolidation of the clergy's power. They opposed both the workers' *Shoras* and the liberal managements, introducing '*Maktabi* management' (Islamic management), which together with the Islamic *Shoras* campaigned against the workers' *Shoras*.

Bani Sadr's minister of labour, Mohammed mir Sadeghi, who favoured recognising trade union rights within bourgeois democracy, was replaced by Tavakoli, an Islamic fanatic and a member of the Hojatieh faction within the IRP. Tavakoli disapproved even of Islamic *Shoras* on the grounds that 'property, factory, government and everything belonged to God, his prophet and the 12th Imam; in the absence of this Imam (the Messiah) they belong to the deputy of the Imam' — in other words, to Khomeini.

During this period many factory *Shoras* were closed down, among them the *Shoras* for the Tool-making, Lift Track, Pomp Iran and Kompidor factories in Tabriz, the Union of Workers' *Shoras* of Gilan (with 30,000 workers), the Union of Workers' *Shoras* of Western Tehran, the Ahwas oil industry *Shoras* and the railway workers' *Shoras*. *Khaneh Kargar*, previously the free headquarters for workers' assemblies, became the centre of pro-IRP *Shoras* and Islamic Societies.

In August 1980 the regime abolished the former profit-sharing law. This had been one of the Shah's industrial reforms, through which enterprises paid part of their profits to their workers. As one worker in Tehran stated: 'This was part of our wages, which the previous regime paid us each year in the name of profit-sharing. Now the Islamic regime is taking even this from us.'

Industrial disputes still rumbled on. The main issues were the closing down of the *Shoras* and the sackings of workers for opposing *Maktabi* managements. Though the regime's aim was a complete end to every vestige of the *Shoras*, workers' continuing resistance made the task difficult. In August 1980 the Iranian parliament ratified a law on Islamic *Shoras*, granting them only a consultative role. The majority of workers refused to recognise this law, protesting strongly. In a survey carried out by **Keyhan**, one of the national newspapers, workers expressed their strong objection to the new law. 'We do not recognise this law,' said one, 'we want a law giving us control over production, distribution and management.' Another said:

> This law aims to weaken the power of the workers; this is in effect the recognition of semi-Syndicate rights, which only preserves the rights of the capitalists. *Shoras* are the basis of our power in the factories. It is now clear that as long as capitalists are running the factories, they will continue to weaken our power.[39]

In September 1980 Iraq invaded Iran. The effect was to give a huge boost to the counter-revolutionary Islamic Republic in Iran. The Islamic *Shoras* passed resolutions declaring, 'We are at war, we must sacrifice and be united' and 'We must work even at the weekend to win the war'. Khomeini launched his 'cultural revolution' to Islamicise all educational and cultural institutions. Revolutionary Guards and

Komitehs attacked the left in their last sanctuaries, the universities, which were closed down indefinitely. The wearing of the veil became compulsory; women without the veil were beaten up, had their bones broken and their faces burned with acid.

The left shattered and split. The Mojahedin allied themselves with Bani Sadr, a representative, at best, of the liberal bourgeoisie. The Fedayeen split into two wings: the majority joined with the Tudeh Party, arguing that Khomeini's regime was anti-imperialist and hence progressive; while the minority held it was a reactionary capitalist regime. As the left, the *Shoras* and even the liberal nationalists were weakened, so the Islamic Republic grew stronger.

In June 1981 Bani Sadr was dismissed as president. A country-wide campaign of urban guerrilla warfare against Khomeini's regime began, launched chiefly by the Mojahedin but also the Fedayeen minority. A bomb killed 72 of the IRP's top leadership, including Ayatollah Beheshti. Bani Sadr and the Mojahedin leader, Rajavi, fled to France. Another bomb killed the new president, Rajai, along with his prime minister, Bahonar. The guerrilla campaign, and the war, provided the final excuse for the regime to begin militarising all the factories and liquidating every opposition element still remaining there.

Nothing remained of the gains of the popular revolution of February 1979. The Iranian workers' movement had been crushed. The left had collapsed back into its old mistakes: either uncritical support for a murderous anti-working-class regime, or the terrible isolation of guerrilla politics.

Conclusions

The Iranian working class provided the key force in the struggle to bring down the Shah's appalling regime. But power did not pass into the workers' hands. Instead, the provisional government under Khomeini's leadership determined the policy content and the form of the new state power that emerged on the ruins of the old. As the Khomeini government worked to develop a new system of bourgeois state rule, the working class became its prisoner. In the final outcome, the workers found themselves subjected to a new, Islamic regime in which their rights and powers were no greater — and in some important respects even less — than those they had possessed under the Shah.

The counter-revolution was pushed forward under the guise of Khomeini's phoney 'anti-imperialism' and consolidated with the development of the Gulf war. Some of the popular enthusiasm for the war, especially in the backward areas of the countryside, can be explained by the way it was presented as an 'extension of the revolution'. The appallingly high number of deaths was defended with the grotesque claim that dying for Islam meant 'liberation for paradise'.

The war also provided a perfect cover for the regime's wiping out of any remnants of left-wing opposition. Independent trade-union organisation and the right to strike were abolished as 'un-Islamic', returning workers to the situation under the Shah; here Islam found a perfect unity with the needs of capitalism. Women were subjected, in the name of God, to a patriarchal humiliation that destroyed all their basic rights to choose their own fate as far as such matters as marriage, divorce, custody of children, right to work and the like are concerned. National and religious minorities were fiercely repressed.

The 'Irangate' scandal of 1986 exposed the real nature of the Islamic regime. Rafsanjani, Khomeini's second-in-command, suggested in his arms dealings with the Reagan government of the US that Iran should resume its role as policeman in the Gulf. Fundamentalist Islam is now poised, in a sinister fashion, to throttle other progressive developments throughout the Middle East, Near East and North Africa, while the ruling classes of the West are adjusting and beginning to make overtures to this strange new ally.

This tragic outcome need not have occurred. The history of the Iranian workers' struggle, over the months after February 1979, points to the possibility of a very different result. Iran's workers wanted a very different kind of society from that imposed on them in the name of the Islamic Republic. They wanted a society directly under their own control. The demands they advanced through their *Shoras* indicated this clearly.

The workers' struggle for power through their *Shoras* linked together demands of an 'economic' and a 'political' character. The *Shoras* were revolutionary instruments, initially forged in the fire of the battle to remove the Shah, through which the workers' aspirations to their own power were given expression. The demands they posed did not simply concern pay, hours, conditions of employment, but involved centrally issues of control over production and indeed over the whole of social and political life.

For a number of months after the Shah's overthrow, there was to all intents and purposes workers' control in industry. But for this to be consolidated as the basis of a new social order, the question of state power had to be confronted. From the beginning, the Islamic Republic had sought to undermine the *Shoras*, the instruments through which the workers sought to develop their control over production, distribution and the like. It was the Khomeini regime which backed the 'Islamic' managers and the middle-class technical experts against the

workers' committees, and whose laws and regulations inhibited the full extension of working-class power.

A political struggle over the form of the new Iranian state was a vital precondition for victory in the workplaces. Socialist relations of production at work can only be guaranteed if the working class can extend its collective power beyond the factory to the state itself. The demands of the *Shoras*, and especially of their National Founding Council, revealed a strong awareness of this among the leading militant workers.

Had the workers succeeded in developing their power in this way, they would have had to broaden out the basis of their demands and thus of the Iranian revolution as a whole. Not only would they have had to push ahead with their own specific demands, but they would also have needed to take up and unify the demands of other oppressed sections of Iranian society: the unemployed, women, the peasants, the various national and religious minorities. For the interests of these various overlapping groups, like those of the workers, were bound up with the further development of the revolution. All these groups were the workers' potential allies in the struggle against Khomeini's provisional government.

However, almost from the start, Khomeini and his allies were able to divide the forces opposed to his project for an Islamic Republic. Why was Khomeini's offensive against the democratic and working-class potential of the Iranian revolution so successful? At least two of the explanations that have been offered seem very inadequate.

Some commentators have suggested that Iran was peculiar, in the hold that Shi'ite Islam held over the minds of the Iranian masses. This is firstly to exaggerate the degree of religiosity of the Iranian workers and peasants; secondly, the mere existence of widespread religious belief does not explain why a section of the Islamic clergy should have come to political power in the way they did. The reality is that the Islamic Republic was the *form* taken by bourgeois counter-revolution in Iran. The same essential result — the defeat of the revolutionary forces of the working class — has been produced in a whole variety of different guises in a host of different countries during the course of the present century.

Nor can the defeat of the workers' movement be explained in terms of Iran's economic backwardness. After all, in proportional terms the modern Iranian working class is very much larger than was the working class in Russia at the time of the 1917 revolution. In both cases, certainly, the contradictions of uneven capitalist development within an imperialist world economy pushed the working class to the forefront of the political struggle against the old regime. In Iran, as in Russia, the Marxist thesis of 'permanent revolution' proved crucially correct: the working class occupied the centre of the revolutionary arena, and sought to press the revolution onward from an unstable 'bourgeois democratic' stage towards socialist, working-class democracy.

Alas, in Iran the left badly misread the situation. The parties of the left consistently saw their historic tasks as no more than the overthrow of the Shah and the inauguration of a democratic structure. For them, the principal content of the revolution was to be a 'democratic revolution' only, with the socialist revolution pushed away into some indefinite future. Insofar as they perceived the proletariat's struggle for power, it was only through the lens of the 'bourgeois-democratic' revolution.

The exploited and oppressed peoples of Iran, having tasted their potential power in the struggle against the Shah, sensed the possibility of carrying the revolution onward towards a socialist society under their own direct control. Not so the bourgeoisie: they had no impulse to continue the revolution, indeed they wanted it rapidly halted and the popular forces demobilised. Thus the revolution against the Shah was immediately transformed into a bitter class struggle over the future form of Iranian society. The workers and the other oppressed sections did not want the revolution to stop: they wanted to continue it until all their urgent needs and aspirations were met.

This was the significance of the *Shoras*, the women's groups, the peasant bodies that seized the land, the organisations of Iran's various national minorities. Together, these various movements had immense potential power. But in practice they were cut off from each other: the workers' struggle for the *Shoras* was conducted in isolation from the women's battle for emancipation, from the movements for national self-determination, and from the peasants' struggle for the land; and in turn these movements were equally isolated from the workers' struggle. The Iranian left proved incapable of unifying these different movements, for they lacked the overall perspective within which this unification would have been seen to be necessary. While they discussed the issues of rights for women and national minorities in their papers and meetings, they never campaigned actively for them within the *Shoras* and the unemployed workers' committees.

A revolution in a backward country poses with particular sharpness some fundamental issues of socialist politics. The working class cannot gain power by itself, in isolation from and in opposition to a struggle for the emancipation of society from all forms of oppression, whether national, sexual, cultural or religious. The fullest extension of democratic rights is an essential precondition of workers' power.

When the Mojahedin and Tudeh Party fell in with Khomeini's proposals for an Islamic Republic, they condemned Iranian women and the religious minorities to a continuation of their repression. When the left as a whole failed to argue for the rights of women and the national and religious minorities among the workers, they merely strengthened their opponents. And when they fell in with the utterly reactionary call for 'national unity' in Khomeini's phoney 'anti-imperialism', they cut their own throats.

A complete victory for the popular revolution was only possible on condition that it broke with the bourgeois provisional government and began a decisive struggle for a new form of society *centred* on workers' power, on the realisation of the demands of all the different revolutionary forces, and the complete shattering of the Islamic state. That meant a fight to extend the power of all the different kinds of secular *Shoras*, to coordinate their activities and to make them the basis of a new kind of society.

As it was, the establishment of the Islamic Republic represented the complete end to any revolutionary enthusiasm on the part of the Iranian bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie. In reality, not even the original project of the left, the creation of the institutions of a normal 'bourgeois democratic' regime, had been achieved. In the specific conditions of Iran, that project was always utopian: the real choice lay between on one side a democratic workers' and peasants' republic, able to lay the foundations of a socialist regime, and on the other the re-establishment of a highly authoritarian capitalist regime.

For some months after the fall of the Shah, there existed in Iran a potentially revolutionary situation. But for the outcome to have been different, a revolutionary socialist party able to break decisively with the failed politics of the Iranian left — the Tudeh Party, the Mojahedin and the Fedayeen alike — was an absolute pre-requisite. Unfortunately, such a party did not exist.

The Iranian left's theoretical armoury completely lacked the central Marxist conception of socialist revolution. Whatever the differences among those various parties, they all shared two inter-related ideas, both of them rooted in the theory and practice of both Stalinism and social democracy. The first was that the perspective for social transformation must be limited to the democratisation rather than the overthrow of bourgeois social relations. The second was that the role of a revolutionary party is to act *on behalf of* the exploited and the oppressed, rather than to encourage and lead them in their own revolutionary self-activity. In the history of Iran, as of so many other countries, the application of this false perspective by the left has regularly led to the defeat of revolutionary movements, whenever the workers' struggle has created a revolutionary situation with the potential for socialist development.

The Tudeh Party and the Mojahedin supported Khomeini's proposals for 'Islamicisation', despite the fact that this meant the weakening and destruction of autonomous working-class organisation in the shape of the workers' *Shoras*. The Mojahedin and the Fedayeen, alike, never broke with the elitist politics of the guerrilla struggle, which involved them in substituting their own activity and courage for the self-development of the struggle of Iran's workers and peasants. None ever centred their politics on the development of the popular struggle, and especially the workers' movement, towards the creation of a democratic workers' and peasants' state. Other organisations which might have shown a revolutionary socialist alternative were too small and too weakly rooted in the working-class movement to make any significant difference to the outcome, however formally correct their politics.[40]

Socialist revolution is centred on the self-emancipation of the working class. In such a process, it is the job of a revolutionary socialist party to point the way forward, but not act for the real subjects of history, who are the exploited themselves. Such a party cannot substitute itself for the action, consciousness and organisation of the workers themselves. Nor can it make the revolution *for* the workers, or for the rest of the oppressed and exploited population. It has to argue with them, consistently and patiently, for the necessity of their taking power into their own hands. What it cannot do is abstain, as the Iranian left did, from political argument within the workers' movement.

The absence of a revolutionary socialist party in Iran during the first eight months after the Shah's fall meant that no one was able to propose a means for filling the power vacuum, or to prevent the various left organisations from vacillating in a way that helped the Islamic regime to consolidate its position. As a result, immense possibilities were missed. The workers' *Shoras* revealed an amazing resilience in their courageous effort to build an independent national organisation. A large part of the population, as a result of the battle to remove the Shah, possessed arms. Yet no party argued that the *Shoras* should advance from being a kind of militant pressure group, acting on the newly emerged Islamic state, towards arming themselves and developing their power as the embryo of a new state.

Of course, the national organisation of the *Shoras* did not amount to a full network of workers' councils (*soviets*) of the kind that characterised Russia in 1917. But it was not impossible for them to have developed in just this way. To do this, they would have had to assume

political responsibility for the administration of the towns and cities, thus competing with the new *Komitehs* and absorbing their best elements. This was by no means impossible: the *Komitehs* were, at first, extremely unstable formations. Their membership often comprised many of the best of the guerrilla fighters from the period of the struggle against the Shah. Many of them could have been drawn towards a revolutionary socialist perspective had such a clear political lead been given within the *Shoras*. Instead, in the absence of such a vital pole of attraction, those militants were drawn towards the Islamic Republic as Khomeini's regime began to consolidate itself.

A revolutionary socialist party would have had to be uncompromisingly atheist, opposing the clergy's influence on political life and the constitution, and uncompromising in its support for the struggles for women's liberation, for peasant land seizures, and for the rights of the national and religious minorities. It could not hope, immediately, to overcome the deeply contradictory brew of Islamic ideas that co-existed with advanced socialist ideas in the minds of many of the most militant workers. But it could have organised a clear minority faction in the factories which would have been prepared to break completely with the notion of the Islamic revolution.

The condition for all of this, of course, was precisely the existence of a revolutionary organisation that consistently presented a clear case for carrying the revolution forward to a socialist conclusion. Such an organisation would have had to understand, and patiently explain, the anti-working-class nature of the Khomeini regime. On such a basis, the project of a struggle for socialism could have won majority support within the *Shoras*, even among workers who retained illusions in Islam.

The question for the future of Iran, and thus of the whole Middle East, is whether such a socialist organisation will be created within and through the struggles that now inevitably arise between Iran's Islamic Republican government and the mass of the population whom that regime now oppresses so severely. Unless and until such an organisation is developed, the tragedy of the Iranian revolution of 1979 is liable to be endlessly repeated.

FIVE

POLAND 1980-81

The self-limiting revolution

Colin Barker

'PEOPLE'S POLAND' was born at the end of the Second World War. By the end of the 1970s what had been a backward, predominantly agricultural country had become the world's tenth industrial power (with the world's eighth largest military budget). Rapid, state-directed development had created great factories and industrial cities. The working class was now the biggest class, and the majority of workers were no longer former peasants but an educated and culturally more sophisticated 'second generation'. That working class had several major experiences of battle with its rulers, in 1956, 1970 and 1976, and was to produce, between July 1980 and December 1981, the most advanced workers' movement of the post-war world.

For at the end of the 1970s 'People's Poland' was racked by crisis. Beginning in 1979, it was to experience the largest collapse of production yet seen in any post-war industrial country: GNP fell in 1979 by 2 per cent, in 1980 by 8 per cent and in 1981 by 15-20 per cent. Poland's debts were phenomenal: as well as millions of rubles owed to the USSR, the regime owed between $20 billion and $25 billion to Western banks. The 'economic miracle' of the early 1970s had come to a shuddering stop.[1]

The crisis was more than merely 'economic'. Rapid growth in the first half of the 1970s had been accompanied by a widening of inequalities. Public corruption had become endemic. Popular belief in the regime was at an all-time low. And the prospects of improvement seemed thin. The housing shortage remained acute; food supplies were a permanent source of difficulty; Poland was the most polluted country in Europe; the women of the textile city of Lodz suffered the continent's highest still-birth rate.

Among the Western left there are still those who fondly suppose that Poland and its sister regimes are somehow more 'advanced' than their Western capitalist rivals. 'State planning' and 'nationalised property', they imagine, give Eastern Europe a superior form of