

Why Washington Hates Iran

**A Political Memoir of the Revolution
that Shook the Middle East**

by Barry Sheppard



About the author

Barry Sheppard was a member of the US Socialist Workers Party for 28 years, and a central leader of the party for most of that time.

In 2005, Resistance Books published the first volume of his political memoir, *The Party: The Socialist Workers Party 1960-1988*. His book is the story of a life committed to social justice, that is, democracy and human values.

Why Washington Hates Iran is a chapter from the second volume of Barry Sheppard's memoir, now in preparation.



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Introduction

The United States and its client garrison state of Israel are openly saber-rattling against Iran. The immediate issue is Iran's nuclear program. Both Washington and Tel Aviv have stated that it would be "unacceptable" for Iran to develop the capacity to make nuclear weapons, and threaten a pre-emptive military strike possibly including atomic weapons.

Iran states its nuclear program is for peaceful uses only. But even if Iran wants to have a future capacity to develop its own bomb, the U.S. and Israeli stance is patently hypocritical, as both are armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons. They seek to preserve Israel's status as the sole nuclear power in the Middle East. However, more is involved. Washington seeks to turn back Iran's growing influence in the region resulting from the failed U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Widening the war to include Iran and possibly Pakistan, however irrational it would be, could be a desperate gamble for the U.S. to somehow pull its chestnuts out of the fire.

If there is such an attack, the Iranian people will unite to oppose it. Iran has many cards to play. Its armed forces are stronger than Iraq's were before the U.S. invasion. It has middle-range missiles. It has important influence with its ally, Syria, and armed sympathizers in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Partisans of Iran are capable of waging irregular warfare ("terrorism" in Washington's jargon) against U.S. interests throughout the world. The recent escalation of tensions between Washington and Moscow has redrawn the map of international relations and thrown a monkey wrench into any plans to attack Iran. As of this writing cooler heads are prevailing in the U.S. administration, but this could rapidly change in the current



"2,500-year-old despotic monarchy collapses. Cities liberated by the revolutionary army." Kayhan newspaper, February 11, 1979

unstable situation.

The confrontation with Iran is the latest manifestation of the hostility the U.S. has maintained against that country for three decades, since the 1979 Revolution. A central thrust of that Revolution was the overthrow of U.S. imperialism's direct control of Iran through its proxy regime of the Shah. This anti-imperialist aspect of the Revolution was very deep and survives to this day, which explains why any attack on Iran will be met with a mobilization of the Iranian people.

This pamphlet consists of a chapter which will appear in the second volume of a political memoir of my time as a central leader of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party and earlier of its youth group, the Young Socialist Alliance. It tells the story of the first year of the Revolution from the prism of my involvement in it. I was in Tehran during the February 1979 insurrection, and returned twice. It isn't a history of that year, and it doesn't cover the development of Iran in the following years and decades. Other chapters of my book will include information on the years 1980-1988 in Iran, including the violent suppression of the left and the U.S.-backed Iraqi war against Iran.

My companion Caroline Lund and I were living in Paris in 1979. We were part of the leadership team of the Trotskyist Fourth International, representing the Socialist Workers Party. I was assigned to go to Iran early in 1979, and Caroline went back to New York while I was in Iran. That is how I happened to be there during the insurrection.

I agree with the editors of *Socialist Voice* that publication of this chapter at this time, before the book is published, will help explain U.S. hostility toward Iran and the anti-imperialism of the Iranian people as a background to the present crisis.

The chapter also, I believe, sheds light on the contradictions of the Revolution, contradictions which persist to the present day. Many on the left internationally have a one-sided view of the Iranian Revolution, and tend to dismiss it because of the capitalist Islamic clerical regime that emerged from it. It is beyond the scope of this pamphlet to describe present-day Iranian reality, but the contradictions between the capitalist regime and the demands of the workers, peasants, women and oppressed nationalities continue, with the regime being forced to make concessions while at the same time continuing repression to maintain its rule.

Iran's response to the imperialist threats suffers from the fact that it is governed by a capitalist regime, beset by corruption and conflict within its leadership, while the workers movement in the country is not politically independent although it has waged some militant struggles for better wages and living conditions.

Another aspect of this chapter is the heroic role that was played by Iranian revolutionists, in spite of the small size of their organizations, in the cauldron of the Revolution. They got it right. They were intransigent supporters and defenders of the Revolution unlike many Iranian leftists who turned against it in face of the repression of the new capitalist regime. At the same time, as they formed the Iranian Socialist Workers Party, they retained their independence and intransigent defense of the workers, peasants, women and oppressed nationalities — the backbone of the Revolution.

I am grateful to Richard Fidler, who worked with me tirelessly to check and edit the text of *Why Washington Hates Iran*, and who prepared the manuscript for publication.

— Barry Sheppard, August 2008

The Party, Volume One The Sixties, 1960-73

**A political memoir about
the Socialist Workers Party**

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WHY WASHINGTON HATES IRAN

A political memoir of the revolution that shook the Middle East

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In 1978 demonstrations against the Shah of Iran swept the country in ever more powerful waves. Shah Reza Pahlavi had been installed in a CIA-backed coup in 1953 that overthrew the nationalist regime of Mohammed Mosaddeq two years after it had nationalized the oil industry.

The Shah's dictatorship was characterized by unbridled brutality, murder and torture. The hated political police, SAVAK, had been organized by the CIA and Israeli intelligence. There were tens of thousands of US military personnel in Iran training the army and the Shah's elite Royal Guard. The jackboots of the United States were everywhere. The US embassy, the final seat of authority, was huge, occupying a square city block. Iran was a bastion for Washington in the Middle East along with the garrison state of Israel. The Shah maintained close relations with the Zionist regime, in an alliance against the Arab countries and the Palestinian people. Bordering the USSR, Iran was also a high-tech US listening post monitoring the Soviet Union.

Millions of migrants from the countryside, forced off the land, lived in the slums in southern Tehran. They had demanded the government provide services such as electricity, running water, sewer systems, health centers and transportation, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. The inhabitants resorted to tapping into electric and water lines. The regime had tried for some time to evict the settlers, and in the summer and fall of 1977 the shantytowns had become a violent battleground. The regime sent in demolition squads escorted by hundreds of paramilitary soldiers with dozens of bulldozers, trucks and military jeeps.

The people fought back with shovels, clubs, stones and anything else at hand. Government cars were set on fire and offices ransacked. Some demolition squad agents were killed. The authorities agreed to negotiations, and the Shah retreated and halted the demolitions in October. These millions of super-exploited people, most of whom were employed on and off again in industries such as construction, had struck the first blow in what would become an upsurge so pow-

erful it would overthrow the Shah in less than two years. These slums would remain the backbone of the movement.¹

Demonstrations against the US-backed despotism became larger and larger during 1978. In September, some 3-4 million took to the streets. The Shah responded by declaring martial law on September 8, unleashing murderous repression. Hundreds of unarmed demonstrators were gunned down in Tehran alone. Massacres occurred in other cities throughout the country. However, not only did the repression not crush the movement, it spurred millions more to take action.

During the year, weekly demonstrations following Friday prayers, and especially the commemorations after police and army massacres, became the calendar of ever more massive peaceful demonstrations. In Islamic tradition, there is a forty-day mourning period after a death. In the absence of any national organization, these dates provided the broad masses with a schedule for the next actions. In some instances, demonstrators would wrap themselves in white clothes, the Islamic burial dress, before going out, signifying their willingness to die.

On October 3, employees of the National Bank walked out and in a matter of hours all bank workers were on strike. They were followed by teachers, journalists, telegraph and postal workers, radio and television personnel, and then virtually all sectors including the industrial workforce. The oil workers were key, given the central role oil played in the Iranian economy. Thus began one of the most powerful general strikes in history, with both economic and political demands aimed at the regime. The oil workers, while shutting down production for export, kept up enough production for domestic use including gasoline and heating oil — vital in Iran's cold winters.

Mass demonstrations continued daily. Battles between the determined but unarmed populace and the police and army resulted in many casualties.

The Shah's renewed bloody repression was combined with concessions. Big wage increases were granted. Some of the thousands of political prisoners were released. But their stories of torture only fueled the rebellion. The despot also promised elections, but the general strike and the mass mobilizations continued.

As the regime crumbled, Washington reiterated its support. President Carter praised the Shah as a force for democracy. On November 5, the demonstrations exceeded even those in early September. The next day, the Shah appointed a military government. The State

Department endorsed it and Carter, who had become a master of Orwellian doublespeak, said it was a step toward “liberalization.”

However, behind the scenes, Washington was demoralized. “The military government is about the last card the shah has to play,” one US official told the *Washington Post*. “He doesn’t know what to do next, and neither do we. It will be a miracle if he is still around to hold the elections he has promised.”²

The Militant and *Intercontinental Press* covered the events weekly and extensively.* We were aided greatly in this by Iranian militants in the US who were drawn around the SWP in the 1960s and 1970s. The Iranian comrades were able to get through to people in the country, making our coverage lively. No other tendency on the left came near to matching our coverage.

Iranian revolutionary socialists organize

Iranian students in Europe and the United States formed the backbone of a worldwide Confederation of Iranian Students opposed to the Shah’s dictatorship. It was led by Mosaddeq’s National Front, a bourgeois nationalist movement, and Maoists. The latter, under the influence of Beijing’s position in the Sino-Soviet conflict, had come to see the Soviet bloc and Cuba as the “main enemy” and to support Washington in the Cold War. The pro-Moscow Tudeh (Masses) Party was sidelined in terms of numbers and influence.

During the last decade of the Shah’s rule, a current had developed among Iranian students in the US that sought political independence from the National Front and the Stalinists of both the pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing varieties. This tendency published its own paper, *Payam Daneshjoo* (Student Correspondence). We in the SWP found opportunities to collaborate with the new current in the areas of civil liberties and anti-deportation campaigns in the face of US government hostility. In this process, the Sattar League, a revolutionary socialist group, was formed. It developed a program for national liberation and socialism in Iran. While working closely with the SWP and the YSA, the Sattar League had its own democratic structure and elected leadership, and decided its positions autonomously.

Many ad-hoc activities in defense of Iranian political prisoners

* *The Militant* reflected the views of the U.S. Socialist Workers Party. *Intercontinental Press* was published by the SWP in collaboration with the Fourth International.

enabled the League and the SWP, together with Iranian intellectuals in exile, to form the Committee for Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Iran (CAIFI). During the 1978 upsurge, CAIFI held meetings and demonstrations around the country to draw attention to the situation and to call for the US to stop supporting the Shah.

Unfortunately, these activities were hampered by sectarian opposition from Maoist elements within the Confederation of Iranian Students. Fervent anti-Trotskyists, they physically attacked CAIFI meetings. The attacks were successfully repelled by defense guards organized in the main by the Sattar League along with the SWP and YSA. Ultimately, however, the Maoists were successful in expelling *Payam Daneshjoo* supporters from the Confederation.

Both Moscow and Beijing fell over themselves to indicate their support to the Shah during the general strike. Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev sent the Shah birthday greetings on October 26, 1978, addressed to “Your majesty Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the light of the Aryans, king of kings of Iran”! (The Shah liked to refer to himself as the “Shah an Shah” — “king of kings.”) In a fall visit to Tehran, Chinese Premier Hua Kuo-feng hailed the Shah, shaking the despot’s hand in a photo-op. Both Stalinist regimes were seeking favor with Washington. One result was the paltry coverage of the anti-Shah upsurge in the pro-Moscow and pro-Beijing newspapers.

In addition to the Sattar League in the US, there developed a group of Iranian supporters of the Fourth International in Europe. The two groups were in touch, and projected a course toward unity. The Sattar League had helped publish *Payam Daneshjoo* for five years as a monthly. Babak Zahraie, the central leader of the Sattar League, told *The Militant* that it would begin publishing weekly. The paper “is the most widely circulated Iranian publication abroad,” he said. “Before the military government, there were five articles in a row in the uncensored daily press in Iran about Iranian papers abroad. Every one of them mentioned *Payam Daneshjoo*.”³ The European comrades had been publishing *Kandokav* (Search). Unity would mean the merger of the two publications.

Carter began to hint of direct US military intervention if the Shah fell. This alarmed the Kremlin. Even though he supported the Shah, Brezhnev issued a sharp warning on November 19:

“It should be clear that any intervention, and still more any military intervention in the affairs of Iran — a country

that borders directly on the USSR — would be regarded as affecting the interests of the security of the USSR.”⁴

The Iranian masses knew that their struggle was against not only the Shah, but US imperialism. The Shah was a US puppet who administered pro-imperialist policies to the detriment of the Iranian people. The draining of Iran’s oil wealth was one aspect. Another was the Shah’s agricultural policy favoring big farms growing crops for the imperialist-dominated world market. Peasants were driven off the land, crowding into the cities to become impoverished workers going from one low paying job to another, and sometimes going back to the land for a time. These workers, tens of millions, retained family and other ties to the peasants in the countryside. So it is no wonder that the peasants began to join the struggle with their own demands for land, better prices for their produce and so forth.

Within Iran the majority were Persian, their language Farsi. In addition, there were many oppressed nationalities. One of the largest was the Turkish-speaking peoples of the province of Azerbaijan. Another was the Kurds. The Arab south was a center of the oil workers. Turkmens had ties to people in Soviet Turkmenistan. Baluch nationalities in the east extended into Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Shah had severely repressed these peoples, who totaled in the millions. The anti-Shah rebellion in these areas also became struggles for their liberation from Persian oppression. Often, they were in the vanguard of the movement. For example, in one of the initial actions, in February 1978, demonstrators had temporarily seized control of Tabriz in Azerbaijan.

Freedom and independence

The Iranian revolution combined the fight for *Azadi* (freedom or political democracy), a key slogan of the demonstrations, for the rights and living standards of the workers, for the interests of the peasantry, and for the freedom of the oppressed nationalities with a fight against US imperialism expressed in the historic demand for *Esteghlal* (independence). *Azadi* and *Esteghlal* are revolutionary demands that go back to the onset of the revolutionary national awakening of Iran at the beginning of the 20th century.

While the working people were the base of the rebellion, they lacked a mass political party to fight for their interests. The oldest left party, the pro-Moscow Tudeh party, had been discredited by

its failure in 1953 to fight the imperialist-backed coup. It had also joined one of the Shah's cabinets in 1972.

The Maoist groups were small reflections of organizations that had grown in the US and Europe. The Fedayeen and Mujahedeen were groups formed in Iran with sizable followings. They looked to the Palestinian resistance as a model and had waged guerrilla armed struggle against the regime. The Fedayeen was built by youth supporters of the Tudeh in the decade after the 1953 coup. They had concluded that armed struggle was the missing strategy that allowed the victory of the coup without a battle. The central leaders of this tendency were either killed during armed actions or were condemned to execution by military tribunals. Their founder, Bijan Jazani, was among ten members murdered by the SAVAK while serving long prison terms.

The Mujahedeen, known as a left Islamist group, had their roots in the National Front and a religious splinter of the Front called Nehzat Azadi. They were for an Islam without the clergy. Armed struggle gave them a more militant stance than more traditional Islamic groups. Their central leaders, like those of the Fedayeen, had been eliminated by the regime. They also suffered internal purges leading to the physical annihilation of some of their leaders by others who had become Maoists. These murders were lauded by many Maoists abroad.

The Feydayeen and Mujahadeen each had at most a few thousand supporters by the time of the 1978 upsurge.

Islamic clergy lead popular opposition to Shah

It was the Islamic clergy, however, that emerged as leaders of the popular opposition to the Shah. It should be noted that the Shah had allowed the mosques to function during his rule even as he shut down all other institutions that could become centers of opposition. He was forced to do this because to take on the religious establishment directly would have made it impossible for him to consolidate his rule after the 1953 coup. The coalition that was built to carry out the coup focused instead on uprooting the communists, terrorizing the working people, and coopting former oppositionists. This was in line with Washington's line internationally in the Cold War. Thus it was natural that the mosques would become centers of organization of the rebellion.

The more secular bourgeois nationalists, while opposing the

Shah, sought an accommodation. They had formulated a policy to safeguard what they defined as the three pillars of Iran — the Shah, the army and the United States. However, they sought to replace the Shah's absolute monarchy with a constitutional monarchy under the Shah much like Britain's parliamentary system under its monarch.

The most popular opponent of the Shah was the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He had supported an unsuccessful uprising against the Shah in 1963, leading to his forced exile, first in Baghdad and then in Paris. In exile, Khomeini maintained contact with the young clergy in the mosques, largely by smuggling in tapes of his speeches. His prestige grew during the rebellion because of his consistent opposition to the regime, in contrast to most of the clergy higher-ups who sought a compromise with the Shah. While many of the best-known leaders of the clergy were in prison, the lesser known younger members of the clergy in the mosques were pro-Khomeini and stood for abolishing the monarchy.

Khomeini had formulated his ideas about an Islamic Republic in writings after the 1953 coup. In these he polemicized against Marxism and the Tudeh Party, which had been strong before the coup. Thus it was no surprise that while he uncompromisingly opposed the Shah and the monarchy, he would not further the other aspirations of the workers, peasants and oppressed nationalities that came to the fore in the uprising.

However, during the 1978 uprising, Khomeini's weekly addresses played in the mosques supporting the general strike and urging the demonstrators to continue their protests and to attempt to win the soldiers to their side. Because of his uncompromising stance, Khomeini became the symbol of the anti-Shah fight.

Demonstrations on December 10 and 11 were the largest to date. "Opposition leaders asserted that 7 million protesters — *one fifth of the country's population* — marched in opposition to the regime on December 10," David Frankel reported in *The Militant*.

CBS News estimated that 1.5 million marched in Tehran alone. "The sheer weight of numbers of the procession took even seasoned observers by surprise," Tony Allaway reported in the December 11 [*Christian Science*] *Monitor*. "More than a quarter of Tehran's population had turned out to register their protest." . . .

Although the shah had threatened to ruthlessly sup-

press the December 10 and 11 protests, the determination of the masses forced him to back down. Clearly, he was afraid that the army would crack if ordered to fire on such throngs....

According to wire service reports, numerous placards demanded: "US imperialists pull out of Iran." Students insisted that reporters "tell Jimmy Carter we want democracy and not a royal tyrant."

One demonstrator told Allaway: "It is wrong that we hate foreigners. That is the government telling lies so that the foreigners will hate us.

"All we want is to tell the Americans that we don't want their Shah anymore and we want the Americans and British to stop stealing our oil."⁵

On January 16, 1979, the Shah fled, following other members of his family into exile. The country erupted in celebration. Just before his precipitous exit, the Shah appointed Shahpur Bakhtiar as the new prime minister.

Reporting from Tehran in *The New York Times*, Nicholas Gage wrote: "The streets, nearly empty during recent days of strike and gasoline shortages, were quickly clogged with automobiles that added the sound of horns to the din, as people threw flowers at soldiers, who seemed to share their high spirits. The cacaphony of celebration continued all afternoon and well into the evening."

The next day, members of the Sattar League and supporters of *Payam Daneshjoo* began to return to Iran, as did the European comrades. The Bureau of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International decided to send me and Brian Grogan to Iran. Brian was a leader of the International Marxist Group in Britain. One of our objectives was to facilitate the unification of the two Iranian groups. Before we could get there, a strike by Iran Air employees blocked commercial flights. However, the SWP was able to send Cindy Jaquith in under the wire to begin reporting firsthand for *The Militant*.

Jaquith reported that Bakhtiar launched a "bloody crackdown against the movement" following an announcement by Khomeini on January 25 that he was flying in from Paris the next day. Iran Air employees announced they would end their strike for one day to allow Khomeini to arrive. "The army then surrounded the airport with tanks and closed it down. Angry students demonstrated the next day

at Tehran University. They were met with army machine guns that killed more than 100....”

The blood of slain students was still on the streets when 1 million people poured out here today [January 27] to vent their anger at the Bakhtiar regime.

As I join the march, demonstrators are chanting, “my brother, you are gone, but we will continue.” Along with other journalists I am swept along in a sea of humanity down the street where the students died.

To our left is a contingent of 1,000 women, all in black veils, with raised fists. Women are nearly half the demonstration. These sisters chant: “It is good the students and workers are getting together.”

Behind them are signs denouncing Jimmy Carter and Shahpur Bakhtiar.

“Death to Carter, the shah, and Shahpur” is a popular slogan.

“If Khomeini comes late, we will kill you Bakhtiar,” is another.

Word passes quickly through the crowd that 160 airmen were executed this morning for mutiny. “Oh you airmen; you are the light of our eyes,” the demonstrators shout.

This demonstration has been organized overnight by supporters of Khomeini. It coincides with the traditionally observed anniversary of the death of the prophet Mohammad. Many of the slogans combine religious and political messages. The focus is on the massacre of the students, the call for an Islamic republic, and the demand that Khomeini be allowed to return.⁶

On January 22, the comrades of the Sattar League held a news conference attended by all the daily press and most foreign journalists to announce the formation of a new party in Iran, the Hezb-e Kargar-e Sosialist [HKS – Socialist Workers Party]. Babak Zahraie gave an overview of the party’s program, which supported the demands of the workers and peasants and called for a workers and peasants government to replace the government beholden to the capitalists and imperialists. The program included among its demands for freedom and democracy full rights for women and the oppressed nationalities. The central immediate demand was for an

elected constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The full program, called the “Bill of Rights of Iranian Working People,” was printed and thousands distributed. It became a reference point for leaders of all tendencies released from prison.

Comrades from the HKS accompanied Cindy and translated for her. When Grogan and I arrived, we were similarly escorted by our cothinkers.

Bakhtiar was forced to retreat and allow Khomeini’s return on February 1. The day before, a flight of journalists was allowed in. Brian Grogan and I were on that flight. As we approached the airport, I saw a fighter jet come alongside us, very close, but it apparently had orders not to interfere. After we landed I was surprised that there were no customs or border officials — they were on strike. HKS members were joking with baggage handlers and we were whisked away and taken to the Intercontinental Hotel.

Khomeini’s arrival

The next morning we watched a live broadcast on the TV in our room of the arrival of Khomeini’s plane and the beginning of his drive into the city. There were throngs along the route. Suddenly, the newscast was cut off, and the Iranian flag filled the screen accompanied by military music. If this was designed to prevent people from observing Khomeini’s return, it backfired when the disappointed viewers rushed out to swell the throng. HKS comrades came for us and we joined the massive demonstration, crushed into a side street. We were looked at somewhat askance as the Yankee and Brit we were. Our comrades explained in Farsi that we were against Carter, and the mood changed instantly. Scowls became broad smiles. One family brought us into their house and up onto the roof where we got a good view of the massive crowd. Girls of the family, smiling shyly, brought us tea and sweets.

When the cars carrying Khomeini and his entourage passed, the crowd broke up. We went out into the street with our HKS friends, into a crush of people. An old man shook his fist in my face, and said in halting English, “Shah finished!” before it could be explained that we were on his side. The swirl of the crowd whisked him away.

The next days were spent by Brian and I with leaders of the HKS and some European supporters of the Fourth International, negotiating a fusion of the groups. We met mostly in homes and apartments vacated by parents of members. These were in better off sections

of the city — not the most rich, but reflecting the middle class of professionals, etc. who feared the revolution even though their children had become revolutionists as students abroad. Cindy was often in these meetings, but she spent much of her time out in the streets observing the demonstrations and the continuing battles between the people and the armed forces.

One such confrontation she told us about was an attempt by Bakhtiar to crush an action of tens of thousand. He sent tanks into the streets. These were huge British Chieftain tanks that roared along at high speeds, smashing and riding over parked cars, firing at demonstrators with artillery and high powered machine guns. Many of the white-dressed protesters were killed or wounded, but the crowd continued to fight back. One tactic was for a group to hold up steel I-beams gathered from construction sites, and charge the tanks. While many were killed in the charges, they were replaced by others. Those who got through used the I-beams to smash the tanks' treads. The immobilized tanks could still fire on the people, but many demonstrators could get through with Molotov cocktails and set the tanks on fire. The soldiers inside would either be baked to death or forced to flee into the crowd and be killed.

I went on a demonstration at a plaza featuring a large monument called Shahyad (Shah's Remembrance — later changed to Azadi) on the road from the airport to the city. There were hundreds of thousands of people — there was no way I could get an accurate number. There were big contingents of women dressed in the *chador* (veil), a black garment from head to toe with only the face showing. Suddenly an American-made fighter jet roared low overhead. The noise was terrific, and I flinched. The crowd didn't but shook their fists at the plane in defiance. I was impressed by the women dressed in black shouting their anger with raised fists.

Brian and I were put in an empty apartment by our comrades. While we were there and discussing with HKS members one night, they overheard the concierge of the building calling SAVAK about us, saying we were suspicious. That a concierge would do this was not uncommon in the police state. They often were employed as eyes and ears for the hated institution. It was after 9 p.m., there was a 10 o'clock curfew, and the army would open fire on anyone in the streets after that. It was necessary for us to get out of there and to a safe place quickly. There were no safe homes close by. Babak's brother Siamak was one of those in the apartment with us, and he

had a jeep. We got in and he headed across town at high speed. Tehran is a sprawling city, like Los Angeles. We made it in the nick of time to the home of the parents of Kateh Vafadari, Babak's companion and a leader of the HKS.

At night, masses of people went to their rooftops, chanting "Allah Akbar" — God is Great — effectively breaking the curfew. The monarchy and army top brass were becoming more and more isolated in face of the strike and demonstrations, which were producing deep fissures in the ruling circles.

During the day, Brian and I continued to meet with leaders of the two groups. A formula for unification was agreed; a person we knew as Hormuz became the national chairman of the unified group and Babak the editor of the new newspaper. It was agreed to keep the name HKS. At my suggestion, the unified newspaper was called *Kagar* — *The Worker*. This name, while a good one to project the HKS' politics, did not have the connotation it did in the US, where for decades it was the name of the CP's paper.

Shah's army disintegrates in face of mass revolt

Upon his return Khomeini appointed his own cabinet with Mehdi Bazargan as prime minister, in opposition to the Bakhtiar-led military regime. Bazargan had served as the head of the oil industry after its nationalization by the National Front government of Mohammad Mossadegh. Although the National Front no longer played much of a role, Bazargan represented a religious wing of the Front called *Nehzat Azadi*. On February 8, there were demonstrations in support of the Bazargan cabinet against Bakhtiar's. In Tehran, one million marched.

Joining the action was a contingent of 1,000 airmen from the Doshan Tappeh airbase. During 1978, homofars (mechanics) at air bases around the country had begun to organize and hold demonstrations of their own. At the Doshan Tappeh base the next day, February 9, homofar trainees staged a demonstration. It was attacked by the Royal Guards, who inflicted many casualties. On February 10, the homofars themselves, who did not live on the base, returned to work and saw the carnage. They refused to work and started demonstrating. The Royal Guard attacked with tanks, machine-gunning everyone they could.

The civilian population around the base came to the homofars' aid. The airmen raided the base armory to get guns, arming them-

selves and distributing guns to civilians outside. Everyone on the base, knowing that the Royal Guard intended to kill everybody, joined the action — even the elite Green Berets. Women and children attacked the tanks with Molotov cocktails, setting some on fire. The homofars inside the base were joined by civilians firing on the Guards outside. The Guards were driven back block by block, the homofars and civilians building barricades as they advanced.

As we were being driven to and from our meetings, we noticed cars with white flags, some bloody, that had handmade scrawls on their doors indicating they were ambulances. We didn't know it at the time, but these were taking the wounded from the battle to hospitals. The army was no longer in control of the streets. The insurrection had begun although no one knew it, and attacks on army, police, Royal Guard and SAVAK headquarters spread.

We were eating with comrades in a restaurant. At about 2 p.m. a waiter came over and told us that the army had moved the curfew up from 10 to 4 p.m. We hurriedly drove back to the apartment we were meeting in. At 4 o'clock we all went up to the roof. We could hear from everywhere shouts of "Allah Akbar." A military helicopter flew overhead, firing. We ducked for cover in the stairwell. When it was gone, we went back out.

We could see fires and burning tires to the south, in the huge slums of the poorest section of town. Later we would learn that the masses in the south had openly defied the curfew and come out into the streets.

In the face of this show of force by millions, the army cracked. The high command issued a notice that the army would no longer attack the people. The army disintegrated, and the soldiers joined the people. The Bakhtiar government was overthrown.

The next day we awoke to the sound of car horns blaring. We drove out into the street, joining cars honking with their lights on, in celebration of the victory. We were swept along with cars converging on an armory. When we got there we saw people taking automatic rifles, machine guns, bazookas and other arms.

Battles continued two more days against holdout SAVAK and police headquarters. People from the guerrilla groups Feydayeen and Muhajadeen were joined by many other armed civilians. Over 1,000 revolutionists were killed in these final operations.

During these last battles, I went with comrades to a square near an army hospital. Wounded and bandaged soldiers were milling with

the crowd. When told who I was, they crowded around, wanting to tell their stories. One joyfully said “I’m so happy we are finally with the people!” Just then a rumor swept the crowd that a SAVAK force was descending on the square. The rumor was false, but the crowd ran in all directions.

I got separated from my Iranian friends. I did not have any addresses, and could not speak the language. I spent some anxious moments before I was found.

Insurrection spreads

The Tehran insurrection rapidly spread throughout the country following the stand-down by the army.

During the insurrection the state television station had been taken over by anti-Shah journalists. The station became an organizing center of the struggle, directing fighters to pockets of resistance, based on reports the station received from the field. Following the victory, it broadcast reports of further actions by armed groups of citizens taking control of the city.

Driving with comrades at night, we came across roadblocks at every major intersection; militants stopped cars and questioned their occupants in the search for supporters of the overthrown regime who might be trying to regroup. After explaining who we were and that we had no weapons, we were waved through. These roadblocks were manned by neighborhood committees which had formed during the revolution. In the general strike they distributed scarce supplies, dealt with health problems, and carried out some self-defense activities. They armed themselves during the insurrection.

Air traffic was halted to try to prevent top figures in the old regime from escaping. This had the effect of keeping us in the country, too.

We had been telephoning the US to transmit our stories. Jaquith wrote the articles with help from the Iranian comrades, who had their own first hand sources and translated from the daily press. I would go over the articles. Also present were journalists from *International Viewpoint*, *Rouge* (the paper of the French Revolutionary Communist League (LCR)), and from *Informations Ouvrières* (Workers’ News), published by another French Trotskyist organization, and we all collaborated.

Shortly after the insurrection, we were in the apartment of a friend of the LCR who was living in Tehran. We planned to telephone in a joint article to be shared by all these newspapers in addition to

Intercontinental Press and *The Militant*. But the phones were not working. We didn't know it then, but international telephone service had been cut to block communications by Shah supporters with their international backers. This apartment was located on a street where many of the foreign embassies were. Suddenly, the street was raked by sustained heavy machine gun fire. We had become used to the sound of automatic rifles, but these guns were using high caliber ammunition, and it was loud. Some bullets hit bars on a window where we were. We were pinned down, and couldn't get out. This was the most frightening time of my stay.

When the firing stopped, comrades were able to get through and get us out of there. We soon saw on TV that the real target of the counter-revolutionaries was not anything in our location — those shots had been a diversion — but the TV station itself, which was coming under heavy fire from three surrounding hilltops. We could hear the gunfire over the TV. The announcer appealed to “armed people” to come down to the TV station. Immediately, we heard a commotion on the street below and saw cars heading for the station. Confronted by large numbers of armed civilians, the attackers fled.

We also witnessed on TV the SAVAK torture chambers that the people were uncovering. These were truly horrifying. One was a room with electrical equipment where people were given electric shocks. In a blood stained room were a woman's bra and panties on the floor — the CIA-trained goons hadn't had time to clean up as they fled before people found the site. Another was of a small closet-like room, where the walls could be heated to scorching temperatures. Human skin was still stuck to the walls.

One complex was found almost by accident, when people noticed air vents coming up from the ground next to a steel mill. A tunnel was found leading to a prison complex, with people still inside, where “suspect” steel workers had been sent for interrogation and confinement.

The Khomeini-Bazargan government found itself in power through an insurrection it had neither called nor wanted. “The Iman [Khomeini] himself couldn't have predicted this,” one person on the street told the press.

The new government was under immense pressure to meet the demands of the people. To divert mass anger, it put on trial some of the hated officials of SAVAK, the Royal Guard and the army who had been captured. They were quickly shot. The trials were held in

secret at Khomeini's compound behind closed doors. Thus the facts of their connections with the US as well as the full extent of their knowledge of the crimes of the Shah's regime and its connections to the state bureaucrats now under the new government were kept secret.

I went down to Khomeini's compound during one of these trials. People who sought justice were also there. I met a young person who spoke English. He had been a law student when arrested by SAVAK. He showed me his crooked arm, which had been broken in multiple places. The bones healed at unnatural angles while he was imprisoned. He wanted to testify, as did others there and many more, but they were not allowed into the trials.

I learned from him and others that the regime had begun arresting anyone wearing hiking boots. Anti-Shah students had formed groups to climb the mountains overlooking Tehran where they could meet and discuss, away from the listening devices of the totalitarian regime.

Khomeini moves to restore capitalist order

The new government wanted to keep intact as much of the old state apparatus as it could.

Once phones were working again, Cindy sent in a report. "...[S]ince taking office, the new government has carried out no social or democratic reforms," she wrote.

In line with the bankers, businessmen and landlords this government is responsible to, Bazargan has been preoccupied with trying to restore capitalist law and order.

The workers, on the other hand, returned to the job with the opposite goal in mind. Their attitude is: 'We've gotten rid of the shah and his US advisors. So now the factories belong to us. *We* will run them from now on, through our own democratically elected bodies.'

Workers did begin to elect their own committees. Bazargan went on TV to counter this trend. Cindy reported:

It's all right if workers form committees that play a "consultative role" in decision making, Bazargan said. But there is a "dangerous logic" if the workers begin thinking they should elect their own leadership — either at the fac-

tory level or higher.

After all, he explained, if workers elect representatives to run the factories, why not elect representatives to run the cities? And if workers are to decide who runs the cities, why not elect the representatives that run the provinces and the central government as well. For that matter, why not elect the leader of the revolution itself?

“Ah, but this cannot be,” Bazargan insisted, “for we have our national leader — Imam Khomeini.” . . .

The next night another glum-faced representative of the government appeared on television to lecture viewers on workers’ control of industry. “The workers want to control the factories, what is produced and how,” he complained. “But this is against all laws of commerce and capitalism. In fact, it is the exact opposite of our system.”⁷

The Bazargan government was weak. He was not a popular figure. He was seen by the masses as tilting toward the West. He made repeated appeals for the revolution to stop, to allow the new government to consolidate. The real decision maker was Khomeini — either in his own name or in the name of the Islamic Revolutionary Committee, a ruling council set up by Khomeini and Bazargan. Khomeini had gone to the holy city of Qum, saying he trusted his representative on the Committee, Ayatollah Morteza Motahari, the youngest and most erudite among the clergy, in disputes on the Committee. Bazargan soon asked Khomeini to come back, however.

Khomeini became the arbiter among the contending factions. “Because of his uncompromising stand against the shah throughout his exile and upon his return to Iran — while members of his newly-appointed cabinet wavered on the monarchy — Khomeini earned the respect of the Iranian masses,” Cindy wrote. “The new regime is now banking on his past record to bring those same masses into line.

Thus it was Khomeini, not Bazargan, who called on civilians to turn in their arms after the insurrection, telling the masses it was a “sin” to hold onto their guns. It was Khomeini who ordered the banning of all demonstrations. And it is Khomeini who has launched the sharpest attacks on those advocating democratic rights, labeling them “antirevolutionary.” . . .

Wherever possible, Khomeini has sought to use the Is-

Islamic Revolutionary Committee to absorb the independent committees that have sprung up, or to take over the leadership of these committees where necessary.

No one knows who is on the Islamic Revolutionary Committee, which has been centered in Tehran. Its meetings are secret. Similar committees have been set up in other major cities, where they appear to play the same role of directing local government.⁸

It should be noted that while Khomeini was the figure publicly issuing these attacks on democracy and the masses, the Bazargan wing of the government fully supported them.

The community committees retained their arms. The regime sought to confront this danger to restoring “law and order” by incorporating these armed contingents into a new National Guard.

But as one “Western expert” quoted in the March 5 *US News and World Report* put it, “This country has tasted revolution. The Ayatollah may find that stopping one is much harder than starting it.”

We went on a demonstration in support of democratic rights. It was attacked by Khomeini supporters who had been told it was a counter-revolutionary action fomented by the BBC. Suddenly some armed youths in the kahfieh scarf made popular by the Palestinian fighters and adopted by the Feydayeen appeared on the rooftops, scaring off the attackers. At the same time, workers drinking tea in a nearby tea bar, pulled the foreigners inside to protect us. Through our interpreters, they expressed support for the demonstration, and we had a congenial discussion until they decided the coast was clear and we could go out.

In a week or so air travel was restored. Cindy and I flew out with the French comrades to Paris. After staying over one night, we went back to New York. On March 4, Cindy and I addressed a large meeting on the revolution in New York.

HKS fights for democratic rights

The HKS continued organizing in Iran. Its newspaper *Kargar* called for the “development, extension and coordination of the democratic committees of the toiling masses in the factories and offices, in the armed forces and in the neighborhoods.” The HKS also raised the issues of equal rights for women and freedom for the oppressed nationalities.

The HKS began a campaign for its right to function openly and for the democratic rights of all political parties. On March 2 the campaign was launched at a rally of 2,000 at the Polytechnic University. In addition to students, those attending included a busload of workers from a cement factory as well as autoworkers from a General Motors plant and the Iran National auto factory.

A Maoist sect had put up posters a day earlier denouncing Babak Zahraie and revolutionary poet Reza Baraheni as CIA agents. Baraheni had been a leading figure in the CAIFI. The Maoists chained the gates of the University. The crowd began to chant “The chains belong to SAVAK!”

Ten armed representatives of the Islamic Revolutionary Committee arrived. They said the socialists had a right to hold their meeting, and that the gates should be opened. But they refused to defend the meeting and they left. Maoist goons attempted to start a fight with the rally defense guards. To prevent a confrontation, the monitors allowed one of the thugs to speak. He launched into a diatribe again accusing Zahraie and Baraheni of being CIA agents. He demanded the crowd leave. When no one did, he left the podium hailing “the great Stalin.”

The disrupters, who were from various Maoist groups, brandished switchblades. The rally organizers decided to discontinue the meeting in order to protect the crowd. The disruption was reported the next morning on the front page of the daily *Ayandegan*, and became part of a broader discussion of democratic rights. Still calling themselves communists, the Maoists had become part of the government’s attack on democratic rights, another expression of the degeneration of this current.⁹

Women mobilize

The HKS also initiated an Ad Hoc International Women’s Day Committee to hold a celebration on March 8 of the international holiday. Women handing out leaflets for the meeting were harassed and threatened with violence. In response to the women’s demand that the Islamic Revolutionary Committee defend their right to hold a planning meeting on March 3, two armed guards were sent. When about 70 thugs armed with knives broke into the meeting, one of the guards lowered his automatic rifle at the thugs and said, “you take one step closer and I’ll shoot you.” The attackers retreated, but the women decided they couldn’t continue their meeting. As they

marched outside, the angriest were the women workers. Many wore the *chador*. Raising their fists at the goons, they shouted, “We went in front of tanks! Do you think we are afraid of you?”

There were several rallies March 8 and they were attended by thousands. “What sparked the outpouring in Iran,” *The Militant* reported, “was a March 7 statement by Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini that female government workers could not go ‘naked’ to work” but must wear the chador. “The government had also made statements against equal rights for women in divorce, against coeducation, abortion, and laws outlawing polygamy.” The Ad Hoc Committee changed its name to the Committee to Defend Women’s Rights.

High school women took the lead in the big demonstration that followed these rallies. Thousands of these students had gone on strike that day for women’s equality. Some 20,000 women marched from Tehran University to the offices of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan, denouncing government attacks on women’s rights....

Rightist goons attacked the marchers [but were unable to disperse the march]. But on March 10, 7,000 women returned to protest, holding a sit-in at the Justice Department. They were joined by a march of 10,000 women....

Public employess struck to protest government attacks on equal rights. Nurses, high school teachers, and women in the ministries of agriculture and foreign affairs walked out. Women workers at Iran Air issued a statement that the only veil women need is “a veil of purity in their hearts.”¹⁰

Rightist thugs continued their attacks. “On March 11, women activists held a news conference to declare they would not be intimidated by violence. Speaking for the Committee to Defend Women’s Rights, Kateh Vafadari announced there would be another rally the next day. She demanded that the Bazargan government halt the attacks on women protesters.”

Present at these meetings and demonstrations was Kate Millett, an American feminist and theorist and author of *Sexual Politics*, an influential book in the new wave of feminism that emerged in the Sixties. She had also worked with the SWP and the Sattar League in the CAIFI. She came to Iran at the invitation of the CAIFI and the Ad Hoc Committee. Millett chronicled her experiences in a book,

Going to Iran.

Millett described Kateh Vafadari's presentation at the news conference as she faced pro-Shah Western "reporters" and other hecklers.

Her hands tremble, she goes on with bravery and with polish; one sees only the courage and beauty, the ardor, the youth. "We are calling on all women, all Iranian women, and on our brothers who are in support of our democratic rights, to come out tomorrow in the streets of Tehran." I remember her forbearance when she told me late last night by the hotel desk that the Fedayeen did not see their way to protect our demonstrations. Nor the Muhajadeen. "But we need this coalition of leftists and women."

"Of course, but we will also go it alone when we have to." Kateh determined. ...

"We all want to unite, with veil or without veil... We all fought together, all the men and women with all different ideas, all different beliefs — against tyranny. *We* threw out the Shah. Today we don't want anybody to separate us."¹¹

The Militant reported:

Fifteen thousand turned out for the March 12 rally at Tehran University. A few speakers urged the crowd to refrain from more demonstrations, as right-wing hecklers shouted that women were "creating havoc and anarchy and trying to create divisions within the revolution."

But speakers from the Committee to Defend Women's Rights argued that women must stay in the streets until their demands are won. The crowd voted with its feet, marching out onto Shah Reza Avenue.

Bank workers, hospital workers, students and teachers participated. There was a contingent of radio and television workers there to protest the firing of women in the media and government censorship.

Women students and nurses waved from their buildings as the march passed by. The demonstrators chanted: "To deny women freedom is to deny freedom to the rest of society."

In the face of these unprecedented mobilizations, the government has been badly shaken. Khomeini retreated

on his statement about the *chador*, saying that wearing it is a “duty” not an “order.”

United Press International also reported that Khomeini disavowed those attacking the demonstrators and “warned them of ‘harsh punishment’ unless they stopped their assaults.”¹²

The government would impose the chador little by little. By June of the following year, it became compulsory for all women working in the public sector.

Islamic Republic vs. Self-determination of national minorities

The government decided to call a referendum for or against an Islamic Republic, as one prong of its attempt to put a lid on the masses. It also began to use remnants of the army that had survived the insurrection in some cities outside Tehran. These were now under the control of the Khomeini-Bazargan government. “By the third week of March,” Gerry Foley reported, “the reactionary offensive of the authorities had gone as far as a military attack on the Kurdish people, resulting in hundreds of deaths.”

Foley had been sent to Iran as a reporter for *Intercontinental Press* and *The Militant*. “The central government was not able to extend its authority to Kurdistan after the insurrection,” he wrote.

The people have kept their weapons and give their allegiance to Kurdish-controlled committees. As an oppressed nationality, they are demanding the right to set up their own local government.

Fearful of solidarity with the Kurds, the government has carried out its operation in Kurdistan as secretly as possible. Nevertheless, reports reaching Tehran tell of helicopter gunships and heavy weapons being used against the crowds in [the Kurdish city of] Sanandj.

In the Azerbaijani towns bordering Kurdistan, tens of thousands have reportedly demonstrated against the massacre of their sisters and brothers.

Foley gave a thumb-nail sketch of the struggle on the ground.

The process of organization among the masses that began in the fight against the shah has not been broken off.

It continues to give political life to the organizations that remain from the period of the insurrection, such as the neighborhood defense committees, although these have been brought under the tutelage of the religious hierarchy.

In most of these organizations, there was little consciousness of the need for class independence. As a result the religious leaders were able to assert their control over the local groups through coordinating committees — the so-called Imam's committees... the committees are not elected, but are chosen through a combination of appointment and co-option. The local and factory committees have been subjected to a process of purging and to introduction of right-wing elements, including former SAVAK agents.

The features and contradictions of this process are well-illustrated in Ahwaz. Harassment and intimidation of left activists by the Imam's committees have been widespread in the last few weeks. But this has been particularly intense in this hub of the oil industry and has focused on the Iranian Socialist Workers Party (HKS) branch in that city. Its members report that they are continually arrested by the local committees, often several times a day. They are taken to committee headquarters and threatened. They are followed by members of the central Imam's committee and committee cars are stationed in front of their homes. They are subjected to physical attacks.

But when they are taken in front of the committees and subjected to anticommunist inquisitions, they are able to argue with the groups and sometimes make such an impression on the members that the red-hunters have to back off. On some occasions they have been able to win over members of the committee to their political views.¹³

The referendum for or against an Islamic Republic was held March 30-31. The "yes" won, but the referendum did not create general enthusiasm. Foley reported that the Kurds and Turkmenis (another oppressed nationality) did not vote nor did a large percentage of the Arabs in Khuzestan. The government claimed an overwhelming turnout, but Foley, observing the polling stations in Tehran, thought the official figures were inflated. However, a large section of the population in the Persian areas did vote "yes," he reported.

The pro-Moscow Tudeh Party urged a “yes” vote, a position echoed by the US CP. Writing in the March 21 *Daily World*, Tom Foley said, “The Tudeh Party in its statement declared its support for the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and for the creation of an Islamic Republic.” In its same issue it smeared the big women’s demonstrations: “...the question of the behind the scenes hand of the CIA cannot help but be raised. It [the demonstrations] has the stamp of their typical handiwork: utilize a legitimate demand in order to disrupt the revolutionary process.” The HKS, too small to mount a boycott campaign, said the vote was undemocratic and explained that the content of an “Islamic Republic” was unknown and left up in the air.

Shortly after the vote, Bazargan attacked those opposed to the vote, singling out the Trotskyists. Following his address there was stepped up harassment from the Imam’s committees of activists selling *Kagar*. One woman comrade was badly beaten in Ahwaz.

Abolhassan Bani Sadr, a theoretician and finance minister of the regime, challenged the Marxist groups to debate him. Only the HKS accepted the challenge, as the others shied away from talking publicly about socialism. The debate was held on national television on April 11, with Babak Zahraie speaking for the HKS. An estimated 22 million watched.

Bani Sadr “could come up with little more than vague formulas” Foley reported, “and he was obviously floundering about.”

By contrast, Zahraie offered concrete immediate solutions to the burning questions of unemployment, inflation, food shortages and so on, linking these to steps to attack the backwardness of Iranian agriculture. Foley reported:

The favorite formula of the Muslim politicians is that the Islamic Republic means national independence. Zahraie demolished that point by showing how the Bazargan government is doing nothing to combat the wrecking of the economy by the big imperialist corporations. He contrasted this passivity with the bold moves the Castro leadership took in Cuba to break the power of the imperialists and rebuild the economy....

The two major Iranian dailies, *Kayan* and *Ettela’at* ran the full text of the debate along with editorials about the importance of public discussion of these problems.

There has been a wave of sympathy with the HKS. This has, for example, forced the Imam's committee in Ahwaz to back away from its persecution of Trotskyist activists.

There are many reports of workers in the plants saying that Zahraie said exactly what was on their minds.

Even many Tudeh (Communist) Party members have called Zahraie to congratulate him for raising the voice of socialism in the country as it never has been raised before. And rank and file members of some of the sectarian Maoist groups, which in the past have disrupted HKS meetings and called the Trotskyists CIA agents and traitors, are now coming to the HKS to apologize for their actions.¹⁴

The Tudeh Party published an article after the debate entitled "Trotskyism, Handmaiden of Imperialism." In it the Stalinists denounced not only the HKS but the national radio-TV network for airing the debate. It accused the network of "helping to mislead the people," "besmirching socialism," "dimming the luster and weakening the attractive power of scientific socialism," and promoting "division, confusion and deviation among the revolutionary forces."

No further televised debates were held.

There were big demonstrations on May 1, May Day. The *New York Times* reported May 2 that "the call for marches and rallies to mark the traditional workers' holiday was first issued by leftist groups. However, in recent days, the call was taken up by the religious revolutionary leadership in an apparent attempt to reduce its leftist content."

"Unfortunately," Gerry Foley wrote, "the mobilization of working people in Tehran was not united or on a clear class basis. There were several demonstrations. The two largest were called by the Islamic Republican Party led by Khomeini's ideologist Bani Sadr and by the Coordinating Committee.... One to two thousand persons participated in each." The Coordinating Committee, an attempt to set up embryonic unions, was dominated by the Fedayeen.

In addition, tens of thousands of persons attended a rally called by the Mujahedeen-e Khalq.... And the Stalinist Tudeh Party held its own much smaller rally.

The Islamic Republican Party leaders tried to turn the demonstration they called in a rightist direction. Groups of rightists within it raised anticommunist slo-

gans. But large numbers of working people also shouted demands for the nationalization of industry. The Iranian Trotskyists sold their paper on this demonstration, getting a generally friendly reception.¹⁵

On May 30, there was another debate between Bani Sadr and Zahraie at the Teachers Institute in Tehran, on the topic, “Property, National Independence, and the State.” Some 70,000 attended.

On June 1, Zahraie was scheduled to speak at the University of Tabriz in Azerbaijan Province. Seven thousand gathered for the meeting, but the organizers decided to postpone it when a gang of about 100 hoodlums showed up, armed with knives, swords and revolvers. Comrades reported that the disruption became a topic of discussion in the streets. Residents expressed their outrage at the attack on freedom of speech. When one of the thugs returned to his house, a crowd of neighbors surrounded him and demanded he get out of the city because he had “besmirched the good name of Tabriz.” However, a month later Zahraie spoke to 6,000 at a rally organized by the HKS in the port city of Anzali on the Caspian Sea, the hub of the Gilak nationality and language.

Gerry Foley visited Turkmenistan and Kurdistan. (His impressive facility with languages helped him communicate with many Iranian peoples.) The army had pulled back from its initial assault on Kurdistan, and there was an uneasy truce there and in Turkmenistan. In both places, the general leadership view, he reported, was that “revolutionary fortresses can be built among the oppressed nationalities, and after that revolutionists can sit back in those areas and wait for the revolution to advance in the rest of the country.” This proved to be a dangerous illusion.

The Khomeini regime played on the racist fears of the Persian majority to oppose the demands of the oppressed minorities. These included the Arabs in Khuzestan. The *Militant* reported:

Strikes and mass demonstrations by thousands of Arabs in Khuzestan province, which contains Iran’s main port and oil-producing centers, have sparked a crackdown by the capitalist Khomeini-Bazargan government. The aim is to disarm revolutionary-minded workers there and crush their protests for national and trade-union rights....

Customs workers in Khorramshahr — the majority of whom are Arabs — began a strike in mid-May for higher

wages and recognition of their union. On May 29 a right-wing gang fired on the striking workers, wounding two.

At around the same time some twenty steelworkers leaders were arrested in Ahwaz, and a central Arab leader of the oil workers council there was seized and taken to Tehran.

On May 30, elite units of the Iranian navy launched pre-dawn assaults on two Arab cultural centers in Khorramshahr, where Arab activists had been conducting sit-ins in support for their demands for national autonomy and cultural rights.

An Arab cultural center in Ahwaz was also attacked and occupied by military forces of the central government on May 30, and a wave of arrests was launched against Trotskyist supporters of the Arab struggle....

There were more attacks, and the “Arabs resisted, and fighting spread to other parts of Khorramshahr and to the neighboring oil-refining center of Abadan....The central police station in Khorramshahr, the post office, a government tobacco factory, and various stores and shops were set afire.”¹⁶

In another report, Cindy Jaquith wrote:

As 200 oil workers began a strike and sit-in demanding the release of their leaders in jail in Ahwaz, Iran, pressure intensified on the Khomeini-Bazargan government to free the hundreds of worker militants imprisoned in Khuzestan Province since late May.

The mass arrests occurred during the wave of protests by Arabs for their national and cultural rights in the province....

Among those jailed were three members of the oil workers council, some twenty steelworkers, and nine members of the Hezb-e Karagan-e Sosialist, the Iranian section of the Fourth International.

Two of the HKS members, Omid Mirbaha and Mohammed Poorkahvaz, are being held in Karoun prison along with the three oil workers leaders — Javad Khatemi, Nasar Hayati, and Shobeyr Moiyo — and others. The oil workers and HKS members are on a hunger strike....

Prominent writers and intellectuals in Iran, with long

records as antishah fighters, have joined the campaign to free the HKS members and the oil worker leaders.”¹⁷

International campaign to defend imprisoned militants

Members of the Fourth International began an international campaign to free the HKS members and oil workers, enlisting protests from prominent people. In France, these included the feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir and the head of the Socialist Party. The president of the New Zealand Labour Party, the chair of the Danish Federation of Transport and General Workers, the Danish Metalworkers Federation and Office Workers were among the many joining the campaign from around the world.

In Paris, 1,000 demonstrated at the Iranian embassy, and a delegation from the LCR, the OCI, the League for Human Rights and trade unions entered the embassy to meet with officials. In Sri Lanka, Bala Tampoe, a leader of the FI and general secretary of the Ceylon Mercantile Union, sent a letter to Barzagan. Protests were pouring in from around the world.

In the US we went on a similar campaign, enlisting unionists, Palestinian fighters, clergy, civil libertarians and many more. In New York, we organized a picket of the Iranian embassy.

On June 29 more than 50,000 people attended a rally in Tehran, called by the Feydayeen to honor guerrillas killed in the struggle against the Shah. The gathering also called for the release of the more than 40 members of the Feydayeen imprisoned by the Khomeini-Barzagan regime. Although the Feydayeen were sectarian opponents of the Trotskyists, one speaker called for the release of the HKS members.

At the request of the International Federation for the Rights of Man in France, two lawyers, Mourad Oussedik and Michel Zavrian, went to Iran to make inquiries about the HKS prisoners. The international and domestic campaign clearly was having a big impact. After much bureaucratic evasion, the Ministry of Justice authorized the lawyers to visit the prisoners.

Their report, published in *Informations Ouvrières* and translated in *The Militant* and *Intercontinental Press*, detailed the horrible conditions and brutality meted out in the prison where the 14 were held. From what they saw and heard, the lawyers concluded that there were three categories of prisoners. One was “those who can

be called the ‘indeterminates,’ arrested without the slightest reason” and without charges. The second were the Arab prisoners. “The only charge against them is being Arabs.” They were brutally tortured.

For them the exactions of the old regime, based on the local feudal rulers continue, oppressing them both economically and socially. The same feudal rulers are today allied with the officials of the new regime.

The third category is the militants of the Socialist Workers Party [HKS]. We were able to talk with them. All have suffered brutal treatment.... The sole proposal that has been made to them is that they would be released if they would sign a written statement recanting their views — an offer they have rejected for obvious reasons. Their political maturity, their refusal to compromise, and the influence they have won over their fellow prisoners through their dignified comportment and their solidarity have won them the hatred of the Islamic Committee¹⁸

Repeated demonstrations and sit-ins, including a mass demonstration of 30,000 on July 10 in Ahwaz, demanded the release of Arab prisoners and the withdrawal of government troops enforcing martial law in Khuzestan. These troops were drawn from Persian-dominated cities in the north of the province, stirred up by government lies about “Arab terrorists” that played to the racism and fears of the Persian majority.

Repression against the Arabs in Khuzestan took a sharp escalation when the Khomeini-Bazargan government shot five Arab prisoners on July 27. This was the first time since the overthrow of the Shah that anti-Shah fighters were executed.

Two weeks earlier there were the first reported clashes between government troops and Azerbaijani armed committees in the town of Mishkinahahr.

The oppressed minorities had been in the forefront of the anti-Shah movement. The government crackdown on them reflected a fear that the movements for national rights by these oppressed peoples could link up with increasing workers’ struggles throughout Iran, including among the Persian majority.

One Iranian banker told a *Washington Post* reporter that the labor force “was in a state of rebellion” and that industrialists “spend all their time trying placate rebellious workers who have unrealistic

expectations under the new regime.” He said that “workers want housing, more meal allowances, longer vacations, profit sharing and say they want to run the company.” Armed revolutionary committees have prevented many companies from laying workers off, and in some cases have forced the rehiring of fired workers, the reporter said.¹⁹

Under this pressure, Bazargan announced the nationalization of some major industries on July 5 — a victory for the workers.

But at the same time, the repression became more generalized. “Confronted with rapidly mounting struggles by the Iranian masses to defend and extend the gains of their revolution,” Gerry Foley wrote, “the Khomeini-Bazargan government has launched a major crackdown aimed at smashing all opposition. The crackdown occurs in the context of a sharpening of class battles and a polarization on all fronts in the country — from national and peasant struggles, to protests in factories and the armed forces, to deepening opposition to press censorship and curtailment of democratic rights.”²⁰

On August 18, Khomeini announced his intention to turn Iran into a one-party state. He launched a furious campaign to whip up chauvinism against the Kurds, calling for a “holy war” against them. Leftist newspapers were banned, including *Kargar*. Twenty-six papers in all were shut down, including some pro-capitalist publications. Public meetings and demonstrations were banned. The central leaders of left groups all went underground.

On August 26, twelve of the imprisoned HKS members were sentenced to death after a secret trial, and two others, women, to life imprisonment. The accused were denied any legal representation and the right to call witnesses or even to speak in their own defense.

The HKS went on a campaign to stop the executions. In the United States we mobilized the party and YSA, based on our pre-existing campaign, to reach out to wider forces. Our co-thinkers around the world did likewise. Telegrams poured into the government, there were demonstrations at Iranian embassies, and other forms of protest from Britain to Japan, from Canada to Argentina, and countries in between. Many were reported in the major Tehran dailies.

The powerful campaign blocked the government from immediately carrying out the executions. The Iranian embassy in Washington, where we had helped organize demonstrations, even denied that any verdict had been reached against the 14, reflecting the impact of the world-wide protests. The embassy’s press release included absurd

charges against the HKS prisoners such as “carrying out anti-people activities; the blowing up of an oil pipeline; creating chaos and disorder; instigating and encouraging people to participate in armed warfare against the central government, and so on.” A pipeline *had* been blown up — when the 14 were in prison. The HKS was well known for its opposition to acts of terrorism. The charges, when not ridiculously vague, were transparent lies.

The US SWP launched a “Committee to Save the Iranian 14,” which immediately garnered broad support among trade union officials, figures in the Black and Chicano movements, prominent writers such as Noam Chomsky, human rights fighters, and many more.

Revolution deepens

Despite the repression, the Iranian revolution continued to deepen, as workers, peasants and oppressed nationalities mounted increased struggles in the latter part of 1979. Khomeini’s “holy war” against the Kurds was met with increasing resistance. “A new popular uprising is taking place in the cities and villages of Kurdistan, which were occupied by government troops and Pasdaran (Islamic Revolutionary Guards),” Fred Feldman wrote in *The Militant*. “As of October 21, fighters were reported to be in control of most of Mehabad,” the capital of Kurdistan, “including the army barracks.

The regime failed to maintain the chauvinist fervor it tried to whip up against the Kurds. Slogans have appeared and meetings in solidarity with the Kurds’ just demands have taken place at some universities.

A representative of the “Imam’s office” in Qum, who was sent to Kurdistan to investigate the situation, has publicly denounced the massacres perpetrated against the Kurdish people.... He pointed to the slaughter of the entire population of the village of Gharna — more than eighty people — as an example.

Land seizures in southern Kurdistan — which Khomeini sought to crush with his anti-Kurdish drive — have continued and spread to the southern districts of neighboring Azerbaijan.²¹

Popular resistance to repressive measures was reflected in a conference of Islamic judges held in Qum in October. Many of them expressed opposition to arrests without charges, executions for vio-

lations of “morality,” and right-wing hooliganism.

The government backed down on some of its repressive measures. On October 10, Khomeini declared a moratorium on executions. The outlawing of newspapers was lifted, and publications of the left wing organizations began to reappear, including *Kargar*.

On October 20, the Committee to Defend Political Prisoners, which the HKS had helped to establish, held a news conference to demand the freeing of 1,500 political prisoners, most of them in Kurdistan and Khuzestan.

At a news conference called by the HKS on October 21, Babak Zahraie revealed that the HKS prisoners, twelve of them still under threat of execution, were being brutalized and denied access to radio, newspapers and visitors. Three of them were being denied needed medical treatment. Zahraie demanded an end to this mistreatment and the transfer of the prisoners to Tehran.

The HKS also called for a review of the cases in an open letter to the head of the Islamic Revolutionary courts. Two major dailies reported the conference on their front pages, one under the headline “Socialists Imprisoned for Beliefs.”

There was no attempt by rightist thugs to disrupt either news conference, in contrast to the free rein given to these gangs in the summer. A rally of 10,000 called by the Tudeh Party also took place without any attacks.

In the Caspian sea port of Bandar-e-Enzeli, *The Militant’s* Fred Feldman reported, thousands of fishermen protested a government ban on plying their trade, an attempt by the government to guarantee a monopoly of state-owned fisheries.

Ten people were killed October 16 when the Pasdaran fired on a protest of 5,000 to 10,000 people. Fighting spread throughout the city and demonstrations grew, demanding the punishment of the Pasdaran. The police headquarters was burned to the ground. A demonstration of 10,000 took place in the neighboring city of Rasht.

The government lifted the ban.

Two members of the HKS were arrested during the demonstrations in Bandar-e-Enzeli and questioned by the Pasdaran. One of the socialists had run an election campaign for the local city council, in which the HKS also backed

independent fishermen candidates.

After talking to the guards about their politics, the HKS members were able to win over some of the Pasdaran. The government not only had to release the socialists, but had to order them expelled from the barracks where they were continuing to hold discussions with the Pasdaran.

The nationalization of many industries in July led workers to believe that “if the factories belong to us, then we should be the ones to decide how they are run,” the HKS reported to *The Militant*.

Shoras, or factory committees, began to be set up. The late Ayatollah Teleghani, the highest ranking clergyman in Tehran, was said to have called for such *shoras* shortly before his death. The *shoras* varied from plant to plant. In some, pro-government employees and more conservative technicians had the upper hand, while in others production workers were increasingly playing a dominant role. The *shoras* spread to cities outside Tehran and to privately owned companies.

In General Motors, the *shora* ordered cuts in the salaries of over-paid administrators, while tripling the wages of the lowest paid workers. Company files were opened. Workers began to demand control of the GM plants when their contracts with their US owners expired in late 1979. Oil workers resisted a decree that they had to work six days a week.

Divisions among Iran’s new rulers about what to do in the face of these renewed struggles of the masses came sharply to the fore, along fault lines that had been there all along. It was later learned that the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Committee was initially composed of four “hats” and four “turbans” — the “hats” from the Bazargan wing of the old National Front, and the “turbans” obviously from the clergy. While others from each side were subsequently added, the divisions remained. Bazargan sought to maintain the old army in alliance with the US. In fact, he had proposed that US military advisors be brought back, against opposition from Khomeini. Divisions arose over the imposition of the chador on women, which the clergy pushed.

Bazargan came from a tendency that wanted an Islamic government without the clergy; Khomeini wanted to safeguard the clergy as the leading power in the Islamic Republic. The stage was set for provocations, assassinations, bombings and executions at the

top. One example early on was the assassination on May 1, 1979 of Khomeini acolyte Motahari, a young theologian on the original Islamic Revolutionary Committee, by a former political prisoner under the Shah.

Faced with the new upsurge in struggles, Bazargan and his allies resigned. Khomeini appointed Bani Sadr as the new prime minister.

Thinking that these divisions could mean an opening to attack the revolution, Carter made a provocative move against the Iranian people. He brought the Shah into the United States from his exile in Mexico. When the Shah fled Iran he was under the protection of Washington, but Carter at that time thought it best that the despot be lodged elsewhere to deflect criticism of the US role in installing and maintaining his brutal regime. Now, the Iranian people were outraged, and demanded that Carter turn over the Shah so he could stand trial for his crimes.

On November 4, a group of Islamic students held a sit-in at the US embassy in Tehran, demanding the Shah's return. Initially, they had no intention of trying to occupy the embassy. But thousands of people came down to support the students, who were inspired to go further and occupy what they called the "nest of spies." Embassy personnel were held as hostages against any US attempt to physically re-take the facility. Khomeini came out in support of the students, a move that encouraged massive actions to demand the return of the Shah.

Carter used this event to begin to whip up anti-Iranian sentiment in the US population in preparation for war. This became a crude racist campaign in the press, depicting all Iranians as blood-thirsty religious fanatics. Ugly cartoons appeared. Administration lies about alleged mistreatment of the embassy personnel became screaming headlines in the gutter press, while other media added a more "respectable" veneer to the campaign.

"An American intervention force probably would be drawn from what Secretary of Defense Harold Brown has designated the Rapid Deployment Forces — approximately 110,000 men and women drawn from all four services," a reporter for the *New York Times* wrote in its November 7 issue. "An airdrop to seize the embassy and Tehran's airport would be possible, qualified sources said."

On November 10, Carter ordered all Iranian students to report to the nearest Immigration and Naturalization Service office for possible deportation. On November 12 he ordered a halt to all oil im-

ports from Iran, while the Pentagon mobilized 2,700 soldiers for “readiness maneuvers” at Fort Hood, Texas. On November 13, US and British warships steamed into the Arabian Sea south of Iran and began rehearsals of simulated air-to-air combat, air-to-sea attacks, surveillance by patrol aircraft, and carrier landings.

Carter declared a state of emergency on November 14 and froze all Iranian government assets in the US, seizing some \$12 billion of Iranian property. TV stations showed clips of the Japanese attack on the US military station in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in 1941 — a ridiculous comparison. Democratic and Republican politicians fell over themselves to get on the war bandwagon. Andrew Pulley and Matilde Zimmermann, the SWP candidates for President and Vice-President, immediately issued a press release under the headline “Stop War Threat: Send Back Shah!”

Iran issued a statement on November 13 offering to negotiate, and proposing an international investigation into the crimes of the Shah and the return of billions he stole from the country. This offer was brushed off by the administration.

The SWP did what it could to oppose the threat of war through its election campaigns, forums and sales of *The Militant*. Our task was to tell the truth about the history of US imperialism’s role in Iran and about the revolution. We were fighting against the stream, as Washington’s chauvinist propaganda made headway among the American people. We knew, however, that in the wake of the Vietnam war the US population was very leery of a new war and that if one was launched it would soon become unpopular. Opposition to the war began to appear in public statements.

Many others on the left were disoriented by the ruling class’s campaign and were swept up in its wake. Another factor was that many had turned against the revolution, conflating the Khomeini leadership with the revolution itself in the belief that the Iranian masses were rightist religious fanatics. In this they echoed the propaganda that the Shah’s regime was better than the revolution that overthrew it. They did not share the position of Marx and Lenin, who supported every struggle of the oppressed peoples against their imperialist oppressors unconditionally — that is, no matter what their leadership.

A few in the SWP and YSA were also affected by the jingoist pressure, and dropped out because of our uncompromising stand.

Struggles of the oppressed have often taken on religious garb in

history, including in the United States — for example, among the Black leaders of slave revolts such as Nat Turner; the abolitionists including John Brown; Malcolm X and Martin Luther King. The HKS and the US SWP supported every progressive step Khomeini made, and opposed every regressive thing his government did. Above all, we supported the fight of the Iranian masses against imperialism, including in the belly of the beast.

In Iran, the HKS reported that day after day tens of thousands of jubilant demonstrators assembled in the streets — contingents of construction workers, teachers, air force cadets, university and high school students, army troops, women, old men and children. HKS members were there every day with the masses, selling *Kagar*.

The new upsurge, as in the days of the insurrection, brought back solidarity of all the anti-Shah and anti-imperialist forces. The situation of the HKS prisoners was better, as demands began to be raised for the release of all political prisoners. The HKS 14 themselves sent a letter to the authorities asking for their release so they could join the struggle. On November 27, two of the prisoners were released. By mid-April 1980, all the prisoners had been released, including the two women.

On November 21, the day after Carter announced that the US naval force in the Arabian Sea was on its way to the Iranian coast in the Persian Gulf, two million people massed in the streets of Tehran. Two days later, thousands of oil workers traveled to Tehran to express their support.

On November 26, Khomeini called on every young Iranian to take up arms to defend the country from a US attack. Arms began to be distributed and training in their use began.

Kurdish leaders, who had defeated the government assault against the Kurdish people, called for a united stand against Washington. The other oppressed nationalities also joined the growing united front of resistance, while intensifying their struggle for their rights at the same time. *Kagar* carried a front page headline calling for “unity in the trenches against imperialism.”

The students occupying the US embassy began to release documents they found proving their charge that the embassy was indeed a “nest of spies,” and was plotting against the revolution. These documents were reprinted and widely circulated, deepening mass anti-imperialist sentiment, but were suppressed or given short shrift in the US capitalist press.

The US SWP, together with the National Emergency Civil Liberties Committee, filed a lawsuit on November 21 to stop the mass deportations of Iranian students rounded up by the Immigration authorities. The American Civil Liberties Union filed a separate lawsuit, which was merged with the SWP-ECLC suit. On December 11 a federal district judge ruled in favor of the suit. This was a big blow to the war drive.

We sent Cindy Jaquith back to Iran to report first-hand. She wrote:

You can tell we are approaching the U.S. embassy as we drive along Ayatollah Taleghani Avenue as the walls are increasingly covered with banners, posters, and spray-painted slogans. As we get to the corner of the embassy compound a giant banner hangs from a pole, depicting U.S. imperialism as an octopus with its tentacles reaching out all over the world....

The students are anxious to let the American people know they are fighting the US war machine, not U.S. citizens. Thus another big sign reads: "Our enemy is the Americans' government, not their nation."...

Through a translator I introduce myself to a woman running [the students' information] table and show her a *Militant*. She looks at the front-page story on growing US opposition to Carter's war threats.

"I am very pleased to meet you," she says, shaking my hand. "As the Imam has said we are not against the American people."

The woman goes behind the table into a tent and returns with a new set of embassy files the students have just released. She gives me these and copies of all the students' statements to the media.

We walk further down the street to look at the banners that workers, soldiers, peasants, and students have hung from the walls and trees to show solidarity with the fight against US imperialism....²²

The Militant published an article by an HKS member in Tabriz, the largest city in Azerbaijan. On December 13 the largest demonstration the city of 1.3 million had ever seen drew people from all over Azerbaijan. The demonstrators' demands centered on their

national rights, but also against government slanders that the Azerbaijanis did not support the anti-imperialist struggle. In fact, the US consulate in Tabriz was occupied by students and renamed the Palestinian Consulate. The slanders stopped.

The government began to make conciliatory moves with the Azerbaijanis and the Kurds. Negotiations with the Kurdish leaders began in a quest to end the hostilities.

In November, I attended the World Congress of the Fourth International in Belgium. Some time earlier, a Swiss leader of the FI, Charles-André Udry, had traveled to Iran with me. We were joined by Gerry Foley. In consultation with the HKS, we had written a resolution on the Iranian revolution for submission to the sections of the FI in preparation for the World Congress. The resolution was adopted by a large majority. The Congress also issued a statement in solidarity with Iran against Washington's war threats.

The huge mobilizations continued as 1979 drew to a close.

Footnotes

- 1 Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran* (Columbia University Press, 1997), pp 29-49.
- 2 Quoted in *The Militant*, November 17, 1978.
- 3 *The Militant*, November 24, 1978.
- 4 *Pravda*, quoted in translation in *The Militant*, December 15, 1978.
- 5 *The Militant*, December 22, 1978.
- 6 *The Militant* February 9, 1979.
- 7 *The Militant*, March 9, 1979.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 *The Militant*, March 16, 1979.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Kate Millett, *Going to Iran*, (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1982), p. 165.
- 12 *The Militant*, March 16 and 22, 1979.
- 13 *The Militant*, April 6, 1979.
- 14 *The Militant*, April 27, 1979.
- 15 *The Militant*, May 18, 1979.
- 16 *The Militant*, June 15, 1979.
- 17 *The Militant*, June 29, 1979.
- 18 *The Militant*, September 14, 1979.
- 19 Quoted in *The Militant*, July 27, 1979.
- 20 *The Militant*, August 31, 1979.
- 21 *The Militant*, November 2, 1979.
- 22 *The Militant* December 28, 1979.

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