

## BRIEF HISTORY OF THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN IRAN (1900-1977)

During the early twentieth century, many Iranian revolutionaries struggling against the absolutism of the Qajar dynasty were influenced by the socialist movement in Russia. Those Iranians who worked in the Caucasian oil fields and were involved in the Russian class struggle helped transfer socialist ideas to Iran, where capitalism was in its infancy while Tsarist Russian and British colonialism had turned Iran into a semi-colony.

Iranian socialists such as Asadalloh Ghaffarzadeh Ardebili had close contact with Russian Social Democrats. They were involved in transferring Iskra from northern Iran into Russia. In 1904, the Hemmat social democratic group was formed in Baku (Caucasia) by Iranian socialists with the participation of workers working in Baku oil fields. During the anti-imperialist and democratic movement in Iran, Iranian socialists played a major role in its persistence and radicalization. Great revolutionaries such as Heidar Amoghli, who had taken part in the Russian struggle and had close ties with the Bolsheviks, were popular and important figures in the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1908) in Iran.

Many factors led to the suppression of the revolutionary movement in 1912. There was, of course, British and Russian interference and powerful internal reaction. In addition, the lack of a united leadership, the weakness of social democrats and the lack of meaningful contact with the peasantry were other important factors. Following this set-back and before the 1921 coup d'etat of Reza Khan, efforts to continue and revitalize the democratic and anti-imperialist movement, such as the struggle led by Khiabani in Azerbaijan and Pesian in Khorasan also met with failure and were suppressed. The democratic anti-imperialist struggle of Jangal led by Kouчек Khan, a petit bourgeois democrat, lasted longer than the other struggles due to the support of the peasantry in Gilan province. Iranian communists joined Kouчек Khan and this resulted in the formation of the Soviet Republic of Gilan.

In 1917, the Edalat Party was founded with the participation of social democrats such as Ghaffarzadeh. This party which later became the Communist Party of Iran enjoyed the support and active participation of revolutionary Marxists such as Haider Amoghli and Soltanzadeh who took part in its first Congress.

The Soviet Republic of Gilan did not last long for various reasons including mistakes made by the Marxists, the weakness of the Iranian working class at the time and the contradictions within the coalition. A change in the policy of the Soviet Union also significantly demoralized the movement. Initially, the young revolutionary Soviet government supported the anti-imperialist and progressive movement in Gilan. After the 1921 coup by Reza Khan [the present Shah's father], however, Soviet policy suddenly changed. Whereas Reza Khan was installed by the British to help contain the Russian revolution and to suppress the growing anti-imperialist and democratic movements of the Iranian people through a strong central government, the Soviet Union urged Iranian

revolutionaries to support this government suggesting that it represented the "national bourgeoisie" of Iran. Soon after these developments, Reza Khan was able to crush the Republic of Gilan.

Several years later, in the second Congress of Rezaieh in 1926, Iranian communists denounced the reactionary nature of Reza Khan's government. By helping to form worker's unions, communists led the struggle of the nascent working class of Iran and were able to successfully mobilize workers until Reza Shah, increasingly assuming dictatorial powers, enacted the anti-socialist law of 1931.

In the years following, the communist movement was harshly suppressed. Fifty-three intellectuals led by Dr. Taghi Arani, a Marxist, were arrested under this anti-socialist law in the spring of 1937. Arani had studied in Europe and had been publishing the progressive periodical "Donya" (World) since 1933. He was tortured and finally murdered in jail in 1940.

During the Second World War, as Reza Shah was showing sympathy toward Nazi Germany, Iran was occupied by the allied forces and Reza Shah was exiled to the Mauritius Islands. The exile of the dictator and the circumstances of the anti-fascist alliance of this period resulted in the collapse of the twenty year old dictatorship and establishment of some bourgeois democratic rights in Iran. Under these circumstances, there was a mushrooming of political parties and organisations.

The Tudeh Party was one of the larger and more significant organisations formed during this period. Among its founders were some of the intellectuals jailed with Arani who were released in 1941.

With a reformist line and petit-bourgeois leadership, the Tudeh Party mobilized intellectuals and other sections of the petit-bourgeoisie as well as many workers who at this time still lacked their own revolutionary organization. This party eventually claimed to be a worker's party. Internationally, it blindly followed the Soviet Union, never establishing an independent position that would have allowed it to support the Soviet Union while criticizing positions it deemed incorrect. The Party participated in the reactionary government of Prime Minister Ghavam in 1946. After the attempted assassination of the Shah in 1949, however, the Tudeh Party was declared illegal and its leaders arrested along with other opposition leaders. The Tudeh leadership later escaped to Eastern Europe.

During the anti-imperialist democratic movement of 1949-1953 led by Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh, the Tudeh Party opposed the nationalization of the oil industry and helped sabotage Mossadegh's National Front government. Instead of nationalization, the Party called for the termination of the oil treaty with Britain, a position which left open the possibility of a concession of oil in the north of Iran to Russia. At the end of this period, under pressure from rank and file members after the July 1952 insurrection, the Tudeh Party finally gave some support to Mossadegh.

A more determined and genuine Marxist leadership by the Tudeh Party and its affiliated military organizations might have prevented the reign of terror that began with the C.I.A. coup d'etat of 1953. Even after the coup, a significant part of the Tudeh Party remained intact including army

officers in strategic posts. While many courageous and progressive members of the party waited for the call to action, the leadership vacillated, giving the Shah's regime time to ferret out the officers' organization and underground units of the party. Even though the leadership called for members to write letters of repentance once arrested, many resisted savage torture and chose execution by firing squad rather than surrender. With the betrayal of the leadership, many party members lost hope and some joined the regime while others sought new alternatives for continuing the struggle. The end result was the total destruction of the Tudeh Party within Iran and a growing distrust by the masses generated by these events.

The following years (mid-late '50s) witnessed a lull in the anti-imperialist and communist movements in Iran. There were isolated episodes of spontaneous struggles during this period, including workers' struggles such as a strike at the Brick-Works factory in Tehran in 1957, where many workers were murdered.

The socio-economic crisis in Iran during the late 1950's and early sixties weakened the regime and brought a resurgence of the democratic and anti-imperialist struggles in 1960-1963. Associates of Mossadegh and small liberal bourgeois and petit-bourgeois groups that had been inactive or underground since the 1953 coup d'etat felt that the time was right to revitalize the National Front. Although Mossadegh was under house arrest, he was still quite popular among the Iranian people, especially the urban masses, who associated the National Front with Mossadegh. Thus, the Front was able to draw renewed support from many in and around the major cities. In May 1961, a demonstration called by the National Front in Jalalieh Square, Teheran, attracted over 100,000 demonstrators. Due to inept leadership, the inadequacy of the old methods and slogans and internal conflicts between the different sections however, this struggle also soon failed.

With the initiation of U.S. directed reforms, ("the White Revolution") and with the economic crisis subsiding, the Shah could once again flex his muscles against a movement which lacked a strong disciplined organization and a timely, progressive anti-imperialist program. This chapter of reformist struggle was violently closed with the massacre of June 5, 1963. Following the arrest of the respected religious leader Ayatollah Khomeini, a spontaneous uprising of the masses occurred in Teheran and other major cities on this date. The Shah ordered his troops to attack and shoot the demonstrators. Fifteen thousand unarmed civilians are estimated to have been murdered in these confrontations.

June 5, 1963 was a turning point in the struggle of the Iranian people. Anti-imperialist elements with differing class ideologies, including communist elements came to recognize that revolutionary violence was necessary to achieve their goals. A new path of struggle was sought. Early in this period, different groups with views ranging from Islamic to progressive nationalist took up arms in Teheran and other major cities as well as in the provinces, for example Fars and Kurdistan. They were quickly suppressed however before they could have any lasting effect on the political atmosphere.

At the same time, young revolutionaries from different reformist

backgrounds were organizing anew. Some who had participated in the anti-imperialist and democratic movement of 1960-1963 under the leadership of the National Front, including those who had once had links or sympathies with the Tudeh Party, formed their own Marxist groups on the belief that the past defeats resulted from the lack of a revolutionary Marxist organisation. Others, again including former sympathizers of the National Front, with religious beliefs but influenced by Marxism, eventually formed a progressive Islamic organisation (the Organization of the Mojahedin of the People of Iran, O.M.P.I., known as the Mojahedin) in 1965.

Regardless of ideology, these different groups held a common belief that revolutionary violence in the form of armed action was necessary to defeat the regime. The question was when and how to begin armed struggle.

One Marxist group which believed in armed struggle (Jazani's Group) was organized in 1965 and was discovered by the regime in 1968. Jazani, Zarifi and several others were arrested, tortured, tried and sentenced to long prison terms. Some of the group escaped before being arrested. Safai Farahani and Saffari Ashtiani went to Palestine and took part in the Palestinian people's struggle before returning to Iran in 1970. With others from Jazani's Group, they formed the Jangal Group. By the summer of 1970, several Marxist groups were thus arguing for the initiation of armed struggle. Farahani, in a pamphlet called "What Every Revolutionary Must Know" and M. Ahmadzadeh and A.P. Pouyan from another group came to the same conclusions.\*

In his essay, "On the Necessity of Armed Struggle and Refutation of the Theory of Survival", Pouyan attempts to show that armed struggle is the only way to break the grip of hopelessness strangling the masses and create a political atmosphere in which the working class will find its historical role. He also argues against the notion that Marxists must remain hidden and avoid any but the most limited actions by arguing that Marxists must take the offensive in order to survive and grow.

The following essay by Ahmadzadeh was also written in the summer of 1970 (and corrected and annotated that fall). As Ahmadzadeh explains, the main question facing Marxist groups and circles at this time was whether the proletarian party should be formed first and the armed struggle started afterwards or whether the objective conditions in Iran (as in other countries such as Cuba) required that the armed struggle precede and actually aid in the formation of the party. Ahmadzadeh's group initially believed in the "formation of the party first" but eventually, they came to the second conclusion.

Ahmadzadeh's group and Safai Farahani's group came into contact and began a dialogue. In spite of some tactical differences, they finally agreed that urban guerrilla war and guerrilla war in the mountains should begin at the same time. Thus, the Organization of the Iranian People's Fedayee Guerrillas (O.I.P.F.G.) was formed.

\*Interestingly, an Iranian group active in the Middle East had come to many of these same conclusions without any prior contact with the revolutionaries or knowledge of their views at that time. (see Bakhter Emrooz, Fall of 1970.)

In February, 1971, the Jangal group, under the command of Safai Farahani attacked the gendarmery's headquarters in Siahkal (in the northern province of Gilan, on the slopes of the forest covered Alborz Mountains). This battle, though militarily a defeat, was an important political victory for the guerrillas. Many revolutionary groups and elements joined the armed struggle after Siahkal. Since then hundreds of revolutionaries have been executed or killed in armed clashes with the regime. Tens of thousands of progressives and revolutionaries have been jailed.

The anti-imperialist and communist movement in Iran is at a very important stage in its development. Serious attempts at organizing the Iranian masses and developing revolutionary theory and practice are being carried out under the most difficult conditions of repression and changing socio-economic conditions.

The communist movement, revitalized by the theoretical and practical impact of the armed struggle, is attracting more and more of the conscious elements. Despite its history of struggle and sacrifice, it is, however, yet in its infancy, with Marxist revolutionaries having embarked on a path of armed struggle to prepare the conditions for the direct participation of the working class in the struggle against capital with its own leadership and revolutionary organization.