

On some problems of orientation of the Worker Communist Party of Iraq:

"Left communism" turns from the class struggle to seeking "democratic" coalitions with reactionaries

by Mark Williams
([*Communist Voice* #37](#), Feb. 2006)

. The Iraqi masses face a difficult situation. The tyranny of Hussein has been replaced by a bloody imperialist occupation. Under the occupation, different factions of the Iraqi bourgeoisie are feuding over who will be the most powerful in the new Iraqi government. The Islamic fundamentalists and the secular groups of the Iraqi elite are all hostile to the masses, and the conflicts among them have already led to sectarian violence. Meanwhile ex-Baathists and reactionary clerics are the dominant leadership of the anti-occupation resistance. They are playing on the just hatred of the masses for the occupation in order to establish another repressive dictatorship.

. The only way out for the masses is the class struggle. To the extent that they develop their own class organization, they will be able to put their stamp on events in Iraq. In this way they can press their struggle against the US occupation and for their immediate democratic and social demands. As well the workers and poor can gather their strength for the time when they are able to topple their oppressors in a revolution. Unfortunately, the level of class organization is relatively weak today. The breakdown of the economy plus the repression of the occupation and the Iraqi government, along with the terror tactics of the anti-occupation ex-Baathist and fundamentalist thugs, have created harsh conditions for workers and activists to organize. Yet, there are hopeful signs. Some militant trade unions and unemployed organizations have sprung up. So have some women's rights organizations. And there are political activists who have dedicated themselves to the class struggle. Though the struggle is scattered and halting at present, and lacking a clear revolutionary leadership, activists here in the US should offer what support they can to efforts of the Iraqi masses to organize themselves. Class struggle in Iraq is the alternative to both the occupation and the ex-Baathists and clerical thugs.

. Real solidarity with the Iraqi masses also means looking carefully at the stands of the Iraqi groups organizing among the masses. To find their way forward in these difficult times, the Iraqi masses need the leadership of a party of the most class-conscious

section of the workers, a true communist party. The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) has long ago given up the independent class struggle for chasing after this or that section of the Iraqi bourgeoisie. At one time or another, this has led them to join the government of Hussein's Baath Party or the puppet regimes rigged up by the occupation. A group formed in the early 90s, the Worker Communist Party of Iraq (WCP of Iraq) has carried out important organizing efforts among the masses and has aspired to putting forward a revolutionary Marxist outlook. But the "left communist" views of this trend have failed to provide a real revolutionary orientation and it has slid into class collaborationist schemes reminiscent of the ICP. We respect revolutionary activists in Iraq who have endured the horrors of the occupation, the Iraqi regime and the ex-Baathist and fundamentalist gangs. Because we do not want to see these efforts undermined, we also are obliged to call attention to political problems in the Iraqi workers' movement.

. In this article we will look at some problems with the stand of WCP of Iraq. Their "left communist" theories assume that the revolutionary conquest of political power by workers' councils is always imminent. This was supposed to be an antidote to left groups who gave up on revolution and wound up relying on one or another section of the bourgeoisie. But this assumption of an imminent workers' revolution proved false. Workers' councils have not flourished as expected, and WCP of Iraq's theory left them ill-equipped to deal with the task of organizing the workers in a period of slow growth of the class struggle. Moreover, their theory views the class struggle in a narrow and schematic way. For instance, while it holds that extending freedom is good, it is upset about democratic demands because they don't go beyond capitalism. This dilemma is "solved" in practice by obscuring the class nature and limitations of democratic reforms that they support. Or they simply condemn democratic demands. They find the right of oppressed nations to self-determination even more suspect than other democratic demands. As well, their theory means the WCP of Iraq has a hard time understanding the need for varied organizational forms corresponding to different levels of class-consciousness within the masses, even during revolutionary times. Thus, their theory is ill-suited for slow periods and revolutionary periods alike. Faced with the failure of the class struggle to grow as they imagined, and with conditions which make organizing very hard, the WCP of Iraq's leadership has begun to look outside the class struggle for salvation. This has led them to promote schemes in which various bourgeois and imperialist forces save the day. Thus, the "left communist" views of the WCP of Iraq have not provided immunity from the reformist stands they were suppose to avoid.

. In Iraq today, the workers' revolution is not imminent, yet the masses are clamoring for democratic changes. The theoretical problems of "left communism" regarding the relationship between democracy and the class struggle have hurt the WCP of Iraq's

ability to deal with the burning issues. Seeing that there wasn't going to be a workers' revolution that would soon put them in power, they imagined a political reform that would guarantee the masses would be in power, regardless of the low level of the class struggle. They floated the idea of quickly taking power in a coalition with other forces, but obscured that it is only various trends of the bourgeois exploiters which are presently in a position to assume power. Indeed, the powerful bourgeois forces are stomping on the rights of the masses and make use of the occupation forces when it suits them. Thus, in order to support a democratic reform, the WCP of Iraq pushed class issues to the side. The vehicle of this new coalition is the Iraqi Freedom Congress(IFC), which the WCP of Iraq launched in 2005. Support for a UN occupation as an alternative to the US/British occupation was also part of this scheme. Turning a blind eye to the UN's imperialist nature, they imagined the UN would create favorable conditions for forces representing the masses to take power.

. The WCP of Iraq literature we have seen is vague about what particular groups they expect to rapidly take power with. But the IFC scheme pushes the WCP of Iraq toward daydreaming about democracy in Iraq through unity with the bourgeoisie. The danger of this becomes more apparent when we examine the views of the WCP of Iraq's closest political allies, the Worker Communist Party of Iran--Hekmatist. Leaders of this group openly theorize about replacing the Islamic regime in Iran with a government including such forces as elements of the present Islamic dictatorship and monarchist forces of the former Shah. Such a stand eliminates the notion of an independent workers' trend and encourages the masses to trust in another section of tyrannical exploiters.

. The WCP of Iran--Hekmatist considers itself as upholding the banner of Mansoor Hekmat, the late leader of the WCP of Iran. Hekmat promoted his views as "worker-communism". The term itself isn't a problem, but Hekmat's "worker-communism" was heavily influenced by "left-communist" thinking. The WCP of Iran--Hekmatist split from the WCP of Iran in 2004, after Hekmat's death. The WCP of Iraq, which had been closely tied to the WCP of Iran, quickly allied itself with the WCP of Iran--Hekmatist. This provoked a split in the WCP of Iraq, with the WCP of Iraq--Left forming its own faction and allying itself with the WCP of Iran. Thus, on one side are the WCP of Iraq and the WCP of Iran--Hekmatist. And on the other side are the WCP of Iraq--Left, and the WCP of Iran. Although each side attacks the others' views, both sides in the split consider themselves as upholding Mansoor Hekmat's views.

. What's notable is that both sides look to their parties coming to power in short order even without substantial mass support or a revolutionary upsurge. The idea that one can seize power at any time with just the right scheme is typical of "left communism." But such schemes, though decked out as the seizing of power, would in practice mean that the WCP of Iraq (and the other factions) would become a fringe of this or that

bourgeois coalition. This would mean returning to the bankrupt policy of the revisionist Iranian Communist Party of jumping from supporting one bourgeois government to another.

"Left communism" vs. a realistic perspective for the class struggle

. The "left communism" of the WCP of Iraq has made it hard for them to come to grips with the present state of the class struggle. Following the collapse of the Hussein regime, there was a certain political opening. The WCP of Iraq was right to use this opening to spread their political activity. They expected that workers' councils would flourish, creating a situation where they could seize power and establish socialism. And they attempted to build up mass organizations including their trade union and unemployed organization, their women's organization, etc.

. But despite some initial successes, overall their efforts did not produce the huge leaps in organization they seemed to expect. The workers' councils did not spread across the country. It appears that here and there workers were attracted to meetings to organize for a particular demand, but durable workers' councils, operating as centers for the organization of a revolutionary struggle, did not develop. Thus, the workers' councils did not become the vehicle for a revolution and workers' rule. Likewise the trade union and unemployed organizing only went so far. The massive unemployment due to the destruction of the economy by the occupation provided a wide field for organization. Initially, the WCP of Iraq reported spectacular organizing gains among the unemployed, drawing tens of thousands of unemployed workers around their mass organization. But it appears the numbers around them also dropped rapidly for various reasons, including that certain religious groups and possibly other trends, also began to raise the demands of the unemployed.

. The failure of the class struggle to grow rapidly and in a revolutionary direction was not simply due to some political errors by the WCP of Iraq. There were many objective factors that could not be easily overcome. These include such things as the dislocation of the workers, the repression by the occupation and the sections of the Iraqi elite allied with them, the strong influence of Islamic trends in society, and the usurpation of much of the anti-occupation leadership by fundamentalists and ex-Baathists. With the downfall of the Baathist dictatorship and the opening for other trends, the clerical, tribal and bourgeois nationalist forces were better positioned to immediately dominate the political scene. By comparison, revolutionary working-class political groups had to start from scratch. All together, such factors made a rapid growth of the class struggle and organization highly unlikely no matter what policy was followed.

. The problem is not that if the WCP of Iraq had a better plan a massive revolutionary movement would have sprung up, but that when reality contradicted their vision of how the class struggle develops and gets organized, they did not reevaluate their principles, but became skeptical about the class struggle. And they retained a series of problematic views on the class struggle including, but not limited to,

- that seizure of political power is always an immediate issue;
- schematic views on what forms of class organization are appropriate instead of testing their organizational expectations against practical experience;
- that advances in organization only take place during major class explosions;
- that democratic demands and the right to self-determination of oppressed nations are suspect;
- generally blurring the distinction between the just class sentiments of the masses in various struggles and bankrupt leadership, e.g, denouncing armed struggle against the occupation because of the dominance of reactionary ex-Baathists and fundamentalist trends, or holding that any recognition of nationality is tantamount to bourgeois nationalism;
- that clerical influence among the masses can be stamped out by decree rather than their experience in the class struggle, the elimination of social circumstances which feed religious belief, and protracted ideological work.

. At least judging from their English-language press, it appears that there is not even much discussion of how their expectations for various forms of organization fared. For instance, what happened with the workers' councils? Why didn't they develop and what does this say about the level of class conflict necessary to sustain them? What function did they have in the absence of a mass revolutionary movement? What forms of organization are workers willing to take up at present? The old notions have been crashing against the rocks of reality, but there doesn't seem to be any serious questioning of their previous views. True, new ventures are attempted when old plans are blocked. But without a real overhaul of their old conception of the class struggle, the new plans will be no more realistic than the previous ones.

. The lack of interest in correcting its mistaken orientation is a setback for the Iraqi workers' movement. The building of the proletarian trend is on the agenda. The workers and poor in Iraq are the only force capable of resolutely pressing their immediate democratic and social demands. These include such things as democratic freedoms, social relief, jobs, union rights, women's rights, the right to self-determination for the Kurds and the ending of discrimination against any ethnic or religious groupings. Therefore, even humble steps toward class organization are of the utmost importance. They are important despite the fact that they will not quickly change the overall balance of class forces. They are important despite the fact that a

revolution to overthrow the exploiters isn't around the corner. They will be the building blocks for the mighty class organizations and class battles of the future.

. Unfortunately, it seems the WCP of Iraq has soured on the class struggle as it has not conformed to its formulas. Yes, today too they talk about an imminent seizure of power. But this is not because they are such a strong force among the workers. Rather, it is as a scheme to get around the problems faced by the class struggle. The WCP of Iraq wants the horrible conditions facing the masses to be alleviated, but because they despair of the class struggle, they are looking to some powerful force to step in and rescue the masses. And since the already powerful forces involved in Iraq are imperialist or bourgeois, this search undermines the task of building an independent class trend.

The WCP of Iraq opposes "representative democracy" but supports elections under UN occupation

. An example of their search for forces they hope will accomplish what the class struggle hasn't been strong enough to is the stand they took in favor of a UN occupation to replace the US occupation. According to the WCP of Iraq, elections held under the UN would lead to fundamentally different results than the elections under the US occupation. They campaigned against elections held under the US occupation as "Islamist elections", i.e., no more than a plot hatched up between the US and Islamic clerics. In fact, they went so far as to denounce elections in general, saying "Elections and representative democracy have very little to do with freedom, mass participation and control in the political process. They are the political framework through which the bourgeoisie legitimizes its control of the society." But they described elections under the UN in glowing terms. Such elections would mean "the transition to a government chosen freely by the people."

. Such statements show how "left communism" substitutes wishful thinking for sober analysis. First of all, while the elections held under the US occupation had many serious shortcomings, it isn't true that the electoral victory of clerical forces in the Shiite regions and the bourgeois nationalist KDP and PUK forces was due to fraud. Such forces would almost certainly have won more normal elections. It's the unfortunate situation today that such forces have great influence among the masses. (Incidentally, far from elections being a US-Islamist plot, one of the reasons the US tried to avoid elections for so long was precisely because they were worried about Islamist forces gaining power, and these same Islamic forces threatened to turn on the US if elections weren't held.)

. Secondly, their general condemnation of "representative democracy" shows the inability of "left communism" to correctly deal with democratic demands. It's correct to say that elections and representative democracy in themselves don't go beyond bourgeois society, and that no-good bourgeois governments have come to power in elections under capitalism. But it's wrong to conclude from this that it's irrelevant to the Iraqi masses whether they live under an outright dictatorship or a country where there is a certain amount of freedom. And for the Iraqi people, who have lived under Hussein's authoritarian rule for decades, followed by US-appointed regimes, the demand for representative democratic institutions was both just and inevitable.

. While the WCP of Iraq claims to base itself on Marxism, in fact such theorizing is anti-Marxist. Marxism recognizes that while democratic reforms do not take society beyond bourgeois socio-economic conditions, the struggle for democratic rights is of vital interest to the workers and other oppressed classes. The struggle for democratic rights can lead to better conditions for organizing the class struggle. It can help break down national oppression that divides the workers. And the more thoroughly a country has been democratized, the more the class contradictions within it tend to come to the fore. That's why it's important for the workers to be the most uncompromising fighters for the democratic demands of the masses. This is why Lenin argued in his famous work, *Two tactics of social-democracy in the democratic revolution*, as follows:

"... The demand for liberty expresses primarily the interests of the bourgeoisie. Its representatives were the first to raise this demand. Its supporters have everywhere used the liberty they acquired like masters, reducing it to moderate and meticulous doses, combining it with the most subtle methods of suppressing the revolutionary proletariat in peaceful times and with brutally cruel methods in stormy times.

"But only the rebel Narodniks, the anarchists and the 'Economists' could deduce from this that the struggle for liberty should be rejected or disparaged. These intellectual-philistine doctrines could be foisted on the proletariat only for a time and against its will. The proletariat always realized instinctively that it needed political liberty, needed it more than anyone else, despite the fact that its immediate effect would be to strengthen and to organize the bourgeoisie. The proletariat expects to find its salvation not by avoiding the class struggle but by developing it, by widening it, increasing its consciousness, its organization and determination." (Section 13: "Conclusion. Dare we win?")

True, when Lenin wrote, Russia was in the throes of a democratic revolution, while today in Iraq today, democratic demands should be fought for as part of the working-class struggle against capitalism. But that doesn't change the basic relationship between democratic demands and the class struggle.

. Thus, the way to overcome the forces that win electoral victories is not to condemn representative institutions. The masses must learn from their own experience just what class interests are served by the various forces running for office and how even immaculate elections under capitalism don't guarantee that forces representing the masses come to power. And the class-conscious activists must assist the masses by giving a realistic picture of the outcome of the elections. This is what will help the masses learn the limitations of elections, learn that elections can only reflect the strength of various class forces at a given moment, and prepare the masses to take on the bourgeoisie. General condemnation of elections sounds very "left", but actually makes it harder to win the masses to a class-conscious position. Moreover, while the workers' revolution will lead to an expansion of democracy for the masses unimaginable under the most democratic capitalist order, it will hardly be able to do this without also making use of representative democratic institutions.

. Despite all the very "left" phrases against elections, however, it turns out that the WCP of Iraq was forced to recognize that there was something to the demand for elections after all. Thus, they turned to a UN occupation as the alternative to Islamic-US elections. They had to ignore that the UN is an agency of international capitalism, dominated by the big imperialist states. They had to ignore that despite some initial concerns about the US occupation of Iraq, the UN wound up supporting it, not to mention UN support for Gulf War I and sanctions. And since according to "left communist" dogma elections under capitalism are simply to be opposed by the masses, they had to portray elections under the UN as something beyond what they actually are under capitalist society. Rather than merely being a means to measure the strength of different class political trends, the elections had to be portrayed as something guaranteeing a favorable outcome for the masses. The WCP of Iraq's "left communism" thus led them to not only giving a backhanded recognition of bourgeois elections, but to making elections into a panacea. The WCP of Iraq wound up looking for a shortcut way to undermine the power of the occupation and the influence of the Islamic clerics. It wound up relying on international capitalism. (1)

Hailing French imperialism's anti-Muslim discrimination

. The WCP of Iraq has also turned to the conservative French president Chirac for a quick and easy way of countering the influence of Islamic clerics. They cheered Chirac's banning of the wearing of the *hijab* head scarves by Muslim women attending French public schools. They wrote: "Although under the leadership of a Right-Wing government, any degree of setback of political Islam will ease the struggle of women under Islamic states and groups around the world." When the WCP of Iraq refers to "political Islam" they lump together everything from the tyrannical Islamic regimes to ordinary Muslims wearing a symbol of their faith. This is hardly a

way of convincing the masses of the backwardness of religion. That can only be done by highlighting the opposing class interests between the Islamic clergy and the Muslim masses. Rather it is support for the secular tyranny of the Chirac government. The French bourgeoisie is racist and imperialist. The recent riots in France showed the world the discrimination that Chirac and the French bourgeoisie has imposed on the Muslim and North and sub-Saharan African communities in France. It was evidence that Chirac's measure against the *hijab* was part of a racist campaign, not a campaign of enlightenment.

. But the WCP of Iraq believes the struggle against religious backwardness can be won by banning religious expression. Such calls show a belief that they believe that the state is the force that can overcome whatever negative trends they see among the masses. They don't recognize that the masses will only give up their religious prejudices if it is voluntary, or that certain conditions must be created in order for religious views to cease to have mass influence. Decrees banning personal expression of religion will only drive the Muslim masses into the arms of the clerics who will then be able to pose as liberators of the Muslims from secular oppression. Rather than state repression, what is needed to draw the masses into the class movement, arm them with revolutionary ideas, and thereby overcome the despair that has driven them to seek salvation in religion. Unfortunately, the WCP of Iraq's leadership is also suffering despair about the class struggle, though it's turned to a different "higher power", the state.

The Iraqi Freedom Congress

. The effort to find some powerful force as a way around the present limitations of the class struggle can also be seen in the WCP of Iraq's expectations for the Iraqi Freedom Congress, which they founded in March 2005. The IFC is supposed to bring about a democratic, independent and secular Iraq by quickly seizing state power. The democratic demands of the IFC correspond to some of the immediate goals of the working masses. But how does the IFC think this transformation will take place? The IFC talks about organizing workers, youth, women and progressive intellectuals. But it tacitly recognizes the masses themselves are not strong enough to seize power and carry out various measures the IFC is promising, such as disarming all the armed groups in Iraq. Thus, certain founding members of the IFC are speculating on a UN military force bringing democracy to Iraq.

. One of these people is Felah Alwan, president of the WCP of Iraq's trade union federation, the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI). In an interview with US activist David Bacon on April 18, 2005, Alwan states:

. "Iraq is now in a state of anarchy. There are no civil institutions. There's nothing except the occupation forces and the government. The structure of the government imposed by the occupation forces has been divided along lines of ethnicity and religion. That makes some people believe that there is popular support for it. Our society may be headed for civil war between religious groups. We call for the organization of a Congress of Liberation [the IFC--ed.], including all political powers in Iraq, to end the occupation and rebuild civil society. This Congress would include all groups, and would have the power to end the rule of the occupation. One way to end the occupation itself would be for the forces of the United Nations to keep the peace. "

. In response to Bacon's question "So you think UN troops should replace the US military forces?" Alwan says:

. "If the current troops withdraw, there may be a need for another military force, especially from countries that haven't participated in the occupation. They would supervise new elections, to help the Iraqi people elect their government, instead of the election that just happened. . . ." [\(2\)](#)

. So according to Alwan, a UN occupation will save the Iraqi people from disaster. Really? But no matter what countries supply the troops, putting the UN in charge means handing things over to a committee of big capitalist powers who dominate the UN. The UN has repeatedly stabbed the Iraqi masses in the back. The very elections that Alwan considers a fraud were supported by the UN. It blessed the now defunct Iraqi Governing Council which was hand-picked by the US. While some big powers were upset at certain features of the US occupation, the European imperialists also want to impose a neo-liberal agenda in Iraq so as to pave the way for their own multinationals to make inroads there. Clearly, a UN occupation force would also work against the masses. And, as pointed out above, the results of elections under UN auspices would be similar to those under the US occupation. Nor will this do much to alleviate civil war. Sectarian violence picked up after the last elections and the same forces instigating this would still be doing so. There's simply no getting around the fact that conditions will remain terrible for the masses until the class struggle gathers more strength.

. As with the UN, Alwan's statement above indicates the IFC is also speculating on some "political powers" in Iraq who will "have the power to end the occupation." We have not seen statements from the IFC that specify just what powerful political groups they are talking about. But what forces are now in a position to take power in Iraq? They are not groups representing the masses, but the Islamist and bourgeois nationalist forces that the WCP of Iraq historically condemned. The clerical forces are sworn enemies of the secular left, and the IFC was supposedly formed to avoid them

coming to power. An alliance with the anti-occupation Baathist forces would be suicidal. That leaves certain secular bourgeois groups like the Kurdish bourgeois nationalists, the KDP and the PUK. These groups are secular, but they are supporting the occupation and carrying out bloody military campaigns with US forces.

. Given the nature of these forces, it's hard to see why the masses should trust their fate to an alliance with them. And it's hard to imagine these forces are interested in joining the IFC. Indeed, we have no evidence that any major force in Iraq has joined the IFC. But for the IFC to attract such forces it would have to allow the bourgeoisie to interpret democratic demands in a way which suits them and not the masses. In this regard, it's notable that the IFC program has few social demands, demands the bourgeois forces would be particularly hostile to. In principle, it is possible to have certain types of temporary alliances with other class forces that are useful. But an alliance to allegedly jointly rule Iraq with much stronger bourgeois forces would not really mean the working masses are really in charge, but the bourgeois forces. In such an alliance, the WCP of Iraq would mainly be window-dressing that helps certain sections of the bourgeoisie clamp down on the masses.

Has the WCP of Iraq given up opposition to the Kurdish bourgeois nationalists?

. To date, we have not seen the IFC explicitly say it expects an alliance with this or that bourgeois trend. But this is itself a problem because for an alliance to be useful to the working masses, they must at least have a clear picture of what forces they are to unite with and what to expect from them. Moreover, as we go to press there are reports that the WCP of Iraq has made a public declaration that it wishes to reconcile with the PUK, a force that has for years carried out repressive measures against the WCP of Iraq. According to the rival WCP of Iraq--Left's web site, WCP of Iraq leader Ribwar Ahmed issued an "open letter to the public" on October 20, 2005. The WCP of Iraq--Left quotes the document as calling for "the ending of convulsing atmospheres and political conflicts" so as to "purify the political atmospheres of the society in Kurdistan." [\(3\)](#) It isn't apparent that there was an actual agreement reached or if there's been a response from the PUK. Deal or not, if this report is true, the WCP of Iraq is abandoning the struggle against Kurdish bourgeois nationalism.

WCP of Iran--Hekmatist seeks an alternative to the class struggle

. To get more of an understanding of the problems with the WCP of Iraq's conception of the IFC, it is useful to look at the stand of their closest fraternal party, the WCP of Iran--Hekmatist. Koorosh Modarresi, a top leader of this group, has been putting

forward a scheme similar to the Iraqi Freedom Congress for several years and spells out a good deal of the thinking behind it. Modarresi, though Iranian, is also a founding member of the IFC.

. Modarresi first developed his views as a criticism of the Worker Communist Party of Iran when he was a leader in that organization. Later he helped lead the split from this party and continued to elaborate his criticism. In his opinion the WCP of Iran became "elitist" and "some kind of a cult and a sect" because it hasn't figured out a way to quickly topple the Islamic regime ruling Iran and take power. (4) From this, one might think that Modarresi believes a working-class revolution is imminent and that he is upset that the WCP of Iran underestimates the level of class struggle in Iran. But this isn't the case. Modarresi actually believes the WCP of Iran overestimates the level of class struggle. For instance, Modarresi denounces his opponents in the WCP of Iran alleging "Against our focus on the party, they put forward a new slogan 'long live the councils'. No councils did exist at the time; in fact no mass organization did exist at all. "(5)

. In fact, Modarresi is despondent about the possibilities of the masses developing their own organizations to fight the Islamic regime. He emphasizes that the ruling class won't allow it. He even goes so far as to warn against overthrowing the Iranian regime. Addressing an Iraqi interviewing him, Modarresi states:

. "You have lived in Iraq; you know how difficult it is in these days to form a mass organization. They will simply blow up the whole building. Overthrowing the Iranian regime in some circumstances may cause some kind of dark scenario happening in Iran just like Iraq. Islamic regime will not melt. They will have people who will fight for them and become suicide bombers, they can form some enclaves; and start fighting. "(6)

No doubt there is harsh repression against revolutionary forces in Iran and Iraq. But, difficult as it may be, the workers and poor have no choice but to build their organizations in the teeth of this repression. This will require establishing illegal, underground organization among the masses, as well as using whatever opportunities there are for legal, open work. However, it should be noted that even in repressive conditions, trade unions and other mass organizations have begun to spring up in Iraq. And in Iran, a mass revolutionary movement rose up and toppled the Shah, though that regime tried to brutally crush all opposition. But Modarresi promotes that building up class organization is futile.

. Although Modarresi acknowledges that the workers are presently not ready to topple the Islamic regime, he insists the issue is for his party to take power even if there is little class organization and revolutionary motion among the masses. Thus, he argues:

. "What is the meaning of this statement that the working class should seize the political power? We, the Hekmatists, have believed that seizing the political power by the working class is nothing but seizing the political power by its party. Working class itself cannot seize the power. This is a kind of illusion that the working class will come together and organize and becomes a mass organization that grows and grows, forms trade unions and councils and then in a revolutionary period the mass of working class will go and take the power. The Leninist point of view, and the Hekmatist point of view, is that the political party will take political power on behalf of the working class. A communist and working class party can not wait to become a majority and then seize the power. Bourgeoisie will not let you." [\(7\)](#)

. Modarresi's views may be a variant of Hekmatism, but they have nothing to do with Leninism. Lenin, like Marx and Engels, considered the revolution to be the work of the working class. The party is made up of the most class-conscious workers. And it grows and strengthens itself by linking itself by a thousand threads to the class, drawing broader masses of workers into activity in various facets of the party's work. The party is not ready to take power until it has done this. It follows from this that the party's ability to grow depends on the growth of the class struggle.

. Lenin recognized that the seizure of political power rested on a revolutionary movement and on the extent of revolutionary working-class organization. He saw the soviets, or workers' councils, as a product of the periods of revolutionary upsurge in Russia. Lenin considered the extent to which his party had influence within the soviets to be a gauge as to whether the workers were ready to seize power. And Lenin considered the Bolsheviks winning a majority in the soviets as a sign that the time for the workers' seizing power was imminent. Besides that, Lenin never posed the question of the revolutionary workers' rule as *either* the soviets *or* the party rules. He held that the leading role of the party was expressed in bringing the working masses into the running of the country through soviets and other mass organizations. Likewise, Lenin saw the growth of trade unions and the economic struggle as an essential part of the class struggle and the organization of the working class.

. While Lenin emphasized that the ascension to power of the workers' party depends on the support of a revolutionary mass movement, Modarresi emphasizes says that the October Revolution in Russia "... was a revolution done by whom? By a couple thousand people in a hundred-million society... The revolution was done by **one** city... by a small faction of the social democrats." "So," he says, "in our opinion the political party should take the power in the society when it is still a minority." [\(8\)](#)

. Modarresi's account is fantasy, however. The supposed small faction had the support of the majority of politically active workers. This revolution, which began in Petrograd, spread to all the major cities, which is why it didn't quickly collapse. The holding of power, and more so, the transformation of Russia's social and economic conditions, required the action of the masses of the working class and also the working class finding allies among the peasant masses. But the way Modarresi presents matters, the Bolshevik revolution was a mere coup.

. True, Modarresi is careful to say it was not a coup and acknowledges that the Bolshevik seizure of power was during a "revolutionary period" and that actually they could count on the support of the majority shortly after seizing power. And he even says you need a revolution to establish socialism. But these are precisely the conditions that don't exist in Iran according to Modarresi, who says worker organization is virtually non-existent. Indeed, while Lenin argued that the success of the revolution depended upon the masses being unable to tolerate the old system, Modarresi argues "it is not possible to convince the majority of people that all this system is upside down."⁽⁹⁾ Thus, when Modarresi talks about a minority taking power, he is defining this as coming to power by any means, regardless of whether there's a revolutionary movement, regardless of the low level of class organization, and regardless of the political allegiances of the masses.

WCP of Iran -Hekmatist calls for a coalition government with dictators and despots

. t the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Modarresi's isn't talking about the exact way to evaluate whether the revolutionary situation has matured. He is looking to bypass the class struggle by, proposing an alliance with reactionary dregs of all kinds, provided they are not the most extreme elements of the Islamic regime. For example, in an interview, he says there's a need to "create a civilized platform which everyone can sign up for, even if it is the right-wing bourgeoisie." When the interviewer asks "What do you mean by that?", Modarresi says:

. "Bourgeoisie or conservatives, if you call them, do not have interest in the disintegration of the society. Bourgeoisie has an interest in 'integrity' and 'stability' in order to have a labor force going to the factories or doing things and creating profit for them. They do not have an interest in the disintegration of the society. They are pro-dictatorship, pro-despotism, but they are not pro-disintegration and anarchism, the whole idea of nationalism and the sacredness of borders are raised by them. Society, after all, is a market place for them. They do not want to break up the market. So if you exert enough pressure you may push them to sign up to some kind of deal according to which they will accept not to solve political differences by means of

arms, or sign up for some kind of bill of rights for people which secures the civil structure of the society. . ." [\(10\)](#)

. Modarresi's platform completely destroys any notion of class independence. He calls for unity with dictators and despots who, he tells the workers, are working on behalf of the right-wing bourgeoisie to bleed the workers dry. Lest there be any doubt about who these forces are, Modarresi makes clear that the right-wing bourgeoisie is led by the monarchist forces, that is, the son of the Shah of Iran, Reza Pahlavi. [\(11\)](#) Once the dictators and despots sign up for the "civilized platform", Modarresi wants us to believe that they wouldn't dare use the force of arms to put down the workers, rebellions by the oppressed Kurdish nationality in Iran, etc.! After all, he argues, because they merely want to exploit at will, they will behave themselves! Modarresi argues that this is better than the "dark scenario" of society disintegrating because of armed gangs. He forgets that the government he supports, the government of dictators and despots, is also an armed gang. Essentially Modarresi is entrusting them to crush the rival armed gangs. Using such logic, one may as well support the Taliban on the grounds that they ended the warlord conflicts in Afghanistan. And it might be added that if the Iranian bourgeoisie considers their national market sacred, they feel free to deny national self-determination for the Kurdish nation and butcher them to forcibly retain the Kurdish nation within their borders.

. Modarresi also paints his unity with bourgeois despots as an alternative to the religious extremists in the Islamic regime. But in an August 24, 2002 letter to the Executive Committee of the WCP of Iran, which Modarresi still supports, he argued that if the Islamic regime fell, a faction of the regime is likely to come to power and that the party should consider joining such a government. [\(12\)](#) He is referring to the so-called 2nd of Khordad movement whose leader has been the ex-Iranian president Mohammed Khatami. This faction is also for Islamic rule, but a slightly looser version than the dominant fanatical clerics. The 2nd of Khordad clerics first gained prominence in 1997 when they promised to stand for democratic rights, but in power they offered little opposition to the extreme clerics. Moreover, the "reform" clerics have a sordid history of crushing the secular and progressive forces following the revolution that toppled the Shah. In his letter, Modarresi proposed that "our relationship with this government (as indicated above) is based on the commitment and implementation of a series of political demands . . ." He then lists a series of democratic demands such as the abrogation of all laws with religious roots, freedom of expression, organization and protest, equality for women. Then, in point 18 of his letter, Modarresi states the party should "announce that in case such a platform is guaranteed, it will participate in the government or it will itself establish such a government . . ." This is what he calls "a plan for a peaceful and civilized transition process."

. If getting these right-wingers to declare themselves for democratic rights is supposed to be a great victory for the masses, it is hard to see why this "victory" has not already been won. The "reform clerics" of the 2nd of Khordad movement years ago promised to fight for democracy, even including women's rights. And Reza Pahlavi says he is for "freedom and civility" and has declared that "suppression and tyranny, in the name of God and Religion must come to an end!"[\(13\)](#) Modarresi's call for a coalition government amounts to telling the masses to put their faith in the empty declarations of tyrants.

. Thus, Modarresi promotes trust in a section of the Islamic regime and the royal family to be the vehicle of the democratization of Iran. He recognizes that possibly the "reform" clerics may not really take up democratic reform. But he also considers it realistic to imagine marching hand-in-hand with the clerical tyrants. One may think that since it is highly unlikely that the royal family and the 2nd of Khordad clerics will form an alliance with Modarresi's party, little harm could come of his speculations. But this is wrong. For if one promotes hopes in the "reform" Islamic fundamentalists behaving nicely toward the working masses, than one can lull the workers to sleep with fairytales about a peaceful and civilized period where the need for militant class action is replaced by peaceful negotiations with the oppressors. Ostensibly, Modarresi holds that the party may have to take power on its own if no agreement is reached. But in point #19 of his letter to the Executive Committee, he declares:

. "This plan if implemented does not directly mean the kind of government the WP Iran has in mind. For example, declaring councils as government is wrong from two perspectives. First, such councils do not exist, and in case they take shape, it is not certain which political and social currents will have influence in them."

. It may well be the case that workers are not ready to take power. But if there is nothing but doubts about workers' councils arising or the party having their support, then how is it that the working masses are to take power on their own? Modarresi doesn't suggest other means for a revolutionary ascension to power. So his promise to take power alone if the reactionaries don't agree to a democratic coalition government is hot air. Either the workers are strong enough to topple the reactionary regime, or the reactionaries will rule. If the "reform" clerics, or some group of other strong bourgeois forces, come to power they will certainly try to crush the workers, something that should be especially obvious should they reject the unity appeals of Modarresi.

. The problem is not that Modarresi talks of the danger of the "dark scenario" of reactionary armed gangs or the present fundamentalist dictatorship. Nor is it that he puts forward some immediate democratic demands, rather than insist that workers' councils will soon bring about socialism. It's quite likely that the workers' revolution

isn't going to take place soon. The problem is that Modarresi believes there's an immediate way out through hopping into bed with just about any reactionary force. The Iranian workers movement is faced with the prospect of a protracted period of building up its forces under very repressive conditions, and this is a reality that Modarresi can't come to grips with.

. These views not only jeopardize progress for the Iranian workers. The leadership of the WCP of Iraq has embraced Koorosh Modarresi's faction in its struggle against, and separation from, the WCP of Iran, a party they had long worked closely with. This reinforces our concern that the WCP of Iraq's Iraqi Freedom Congress plans to undermine establishing an independent class trend.

The WCP of Iran seeks refuge in the state in general

. The WCP of Iran has criticized Modarresi's views. And they have gained the support of a splinter group opposed to the leadership of the WCP of Iraq calling itself the Worker Communist Party of Iraq--Left. They raise just criticisms of Modarresi's vision of peaceful change by courting "reform" Islamic officials and other right-wing elements. But it seems the leadership of the WCP of Iran also shares a certain framework with Modarresi. For example, there are echoes of Modarresi's views in certain writings of the leader of the WCP of Iran, Hamid Taqvaei. In his article, "Worker-communism in Iraq, the dark scenario and the question of political power", Taqvaei advocates that his comrades in Iraq ascend to power quickly, even though the class struggle is relatively weak and there is no chance of revolution. [\(14\)](#)

. In this article Taqvaei states that "there exists no state in Iraq in the regular sense of the word" and thus "the direct target of protest and struggle is absent from the scene." As well, "the USA has removed the Baathist regime via military intervention without the direct intervention of revolutionary people". From this, he draws the conclusion:

. "...Consequently, in Iraq there is none of the general characteristics of a revolutionary society, including radical and maximalist demands and expectations, and the expansion of revolutionary culture and a revolutionary system resulting from the power of organized people."

. But while there's no chance of revolution, Taqvaei insists that the immediate issue for the Worker Communist Party of Iraq is to take power. According to Taqvaei, the reason for taking power regardless of the level of the class struggle is

. "... In today's dark scenario in Iraq, the continuity of civil society and the existence of the state as a pre-condition for this, has become the main battleground for the class

struggle. The question is still state and political power, not because workers and the revolutionary sections of the society have challenged the bourgeoisie and are fighting for a state that deals with the main questions of a revolution such as freedom, equality, prosperity, and so on, but rather because it sees its survival dependent on the filling of the power vacuum and bringing an end to the chaos and disarray. "

. Taqvaei adds that

. "...The bourgeoisie is not able to form a secular, non-religious and non-tribal government in Iraq. This is our task, the communists and the working class. "

. Taqvaei suggests that there's some kind of wonderful state that will develop in Iraq independent of both the bourgeoisie and of the class struggle of the working masses. He dismisses the possibility that the bourgeoisie can form a state on the grounds that it won't be secular, non-religious and non-tribal. But in fact that process is going on in Iraq. Yes, the state being formed is based on unstable compromises between rotten tribal and religious (and secular) forces. Yes, the state is not on the side of the masses. But it is a state, nonetheless. Under US auspices, a repressive state machinery is being set up in Iraq, and this apparatus is already torturing and murdering the masses on its own volition. Was not Saddam Hussein running a state? Or was that not a real state because there were special favors for the Sunnis or the tribal leaders of Tikrit and deals with other tribal, national and religious forces?

. As for the workers taking power, how can such a state exist in Iraq if the working class is weak and disorganized? The logic of this position leads one to imagine a "peaceful and civilized" path to power, though Taqvaei doesn't acknowledge this. It creates pressure to wheel and deal with forces who already have the power to be forces in the government. Indeed, Taqvaei's own description of what the party would do in power betray that it would not go beyond what a normal bourgeois government would do. It's striking how his article stresses that economic and democratic demands of the working class must take a backseat to ending chaos. If the main issue is simply to end chaos and have a normal state, then what can that mean in present-day Iraq except trying to get the warring bourgeois factions to be more accommodating to one another. And that isn't all that different than what the US or the UN has been trying to do, albeit with limited success. Thus, while Taqvaei has not reached the same conclusions as Modarresi, his theorizing fosters those conclusions.

. The Hekmatist trends in Iran and Iraq talked about the revolutionary seizure of power by the working class. But that has morphed into glorification of the state in general. The state measures of imperialism are seen as a way to stop the influence of clericalism among the masses. The UN, a governmental organization of world capitalism, is supposed to organize elections that will bring happy days to Iraq. And

the state, any state, is the answer to the chaos in Iraq and Iran. The state in general has replaced the action of the working masses as the highest priority.

"Left communism" in crisis

. In Iran and Iraq, "left communism" has come full circle. From opposition to the revisionist parties, they have begun to mimic them in their pursuit of forming a left fringe of any regime that will have them. They arrived at this point because the failure of their plans in practice for a quick and massive leap in proletarian organization lead them to despair about the class struggle. They got there ideologically through the idea of seizing power no matter whether or not there was a socialist revolution or whether the majority of the masses backed them. They got there by negating the Marxist teachings on the different types of revolutions and movements -- socialist and bourgeois-democratic. They believed it was opportunism to take part in a mere democratic movement, i.e., a movement that doesn't go beyond bourgeois conditions. Now they believe taking power trumps the question of the class character of the regime they wish to join. The Hekmatist trends started their existence by proclaiming themselves worker-communist parties. This was to show how they based themselves on the interests and activities of the masses, unlike the revisionist bureaucrats who lorded over the masses in the pseudo-communist regimes. Now they speculate on taking power as a tiny minority without support of the masses.

. If these parties do not reverse this course, there will be little to distinguish them from the revisionist parties. No doubt the Hekmatist trends in Iran and Iraq have stood up bravely in the past. And even today they face terrible repression. But the same can be said about forces like the revisionist Iraqi Communist Party at one time.

. We are obliged to raise our objections because we don't want the damage to the workers' movement caused by the stand of the revisionists repeated in new garb.

Notes:

(1) While the Hekmatist theory denounces democracy, they imagine that if they call a political reform part of "the cause of freedom", the reform somehow transcends bourgeois social conditions. Thus, Mansoor Hekmat explains that he is for political reforms but not democracy because

"Democracy is not a synonym for freedom in general, but a particular interpretation of freedom put forth by a certain section of society -- the bourgeoisie. The worker wants freedom, but why should he/she accept the bourgeoisie's interpretation of it and join the bourgeoisie's movement? Democracy is not socialism turned concrete; it is not a

two-dimensional and political image of the worker's three-dimensional and socio-economic ideal. It is a general social state of affairs, with its own economic and social presuppositions. " (From a 1989 interview with Mansoor Hekmat called "Our differences" which can be found on the web site of the WCP of Iran, www.wpiran.org, or directly at www.m-hekmat.com/en/1240en.html.)

Hekmat correctly notes that democratic reforms don't undermine capitalist economic exploitation. It would also be correct to say that the workers must not limit their struggle to democratic reforms and that the workers must fight the bourgeoisie's efforts to limit democratic rights. But Hekmat ignores that even the best political reforms, no matter what name they are called, do not overcome the limitations imposed on the workers by the "general state of affairs" of bourgeois socio-economic conditions.

(2) The interview can be found at www.truthout.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi/36/10484.

(3) See <http://www.socialismnow.org/html/party281205.htm>.

(4) For instance, in a transcribed interview with Koorosh Modarresi that can be found on the Worker Communist Party of Iran--Hekmatist web site entitled "Split in Worker Communist Party of Iran and the formation of Worker Communist Party of Iran--Hekmatist", Modarresi wrote that the WCP of Iran has been taken over by a faction of the party. He writes of that faction:

"This tradition considers itself Marxist. They believe in some sort of socialism and they advocate for that socialism. But in reality, they have not been able to make socialism happen. They have not been able to organize a socialist revolution. And this has been the tradition of this kind of socialism all over the place for the last 100 years; in Iran, in Europe, in America and in Canada. The left has turned into some kind of ideological formations, and without being too harsh on them, they have turned into some kind of a cult and a sect. "

(The English pages of the WCP of Iran--Hekmatist web site are at www.hekmatist.com/english-index.htm.)

(5) "Split in worker Communist Party of Iran and the formation of Worker Communist Party of Iran--Kehmatist", which is available at www.hekmatist.com/english-index.htm.

(6) Ibid.

(7) *Ibid.*

(8) *Ibid.*, emphasis as in the original.

(9) *Ibid.*

(10) *Ibid.*

(11) For example, Modarresi talks about a faction of the so-called "reformist" fundamentalist clerics in Iran who, he claims, "are going away from the idea of Islamic government, toward right wing or conservative opposition, who for the first time being are loosely organized around Monarchists." (*Ibid.*)

(12) Modarresi writes "Therefore, the collapse of the Islamic Republic, the government will be like a fruit that will fall in the hands of the force that is closest to the government. When the situation disintegrates, the force that has the leftover government institutions in its hands can declare a new government. This opportunity belongs more than anyone else to a section existing in the state apparatus of the Islamic Republic -- sections of the Second Khordad that will for sure try to ride the wave of people's protest (Haijarian and others can play Yeltsin's role in the military coup)." It should be noted that what we are taking issue with is not whether or not this prediction is sound, but Modarresi's attitude toward the government. Modarresi still considers his theses of August 2002 correct. Thus, in his interview "Split in WCP of Iran . . ." he complains that he is unfairly attacked for his August 24, 2002 theses but defends them, saying, "Well, even if those theses have been wrong, **which they are not**, the way the new leadership of the WPI [Worker Communist Party of Iran -- ed.] is arguing is classical political opportunism." (emphasis added) A translation of the August 24, 2002 document can be found on the web page of the WCP of Iraq--Left at www.socialismnow.org/index1.html.

(13) See, for example, "Reza Pahlavi of Iran's Address on the 5th anniversary of the 'Second of Khordad' of May 23, 2002. It can be found at: www.rezapahlavi.org/messages/khordad2-eng.html.

(14) See the WCP of Iran web site at www.wpiran.org/.