

Communist movement of Iran: a short introduction

One of the important characteristics of the present period, in the context of an acute world economic crisis and the dead-end to which world revisionism has been driven, is the beginning of a growth and consolidation in communist ideas and movements throughout the world. Such has been the case in Iran, in particular during the last four years, where a coherent communist current has developed in the course of a purposeful ideological struggle against non-proletarian impurities, and in the context of four years of intense class struggles. The period of the growth of this current has at the same time been the period of the decline and virtual collapse of petty-bourgeois ideas which had infested the workers' movement of Iran for a long time. In this article we shall briefly describe the developments in the communist movement of Iran in the last four years. The understanding of this history is of vital importance for the communists and workers outside Iran.

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After the February Uprising in 1979, workers in Iran found themselves confronted with scores of political organisations which were calling themselves communist. But the theories and actions of these organisations were different from one another and in many cases completely against the workers' interests. These conditions had also allowed many forces of the bourgeoisie and other classes to work more extensively in the name of "communism" and as "supporters" of the working class, and thus draw the workers into submission and conciliation in the service of their aims, and to also bar the workers from attaining communism.

The existence of so much confusion in the ideas and beliefs of the forces who were speaking in the name of "communism", was making the agitation and propaganda of communism amongst the ranks of a young working class, which had the least historical knowledge of its independent interests and struggle, extremely difficult. To carry out their tasks amongst the workers, the genuine communists had to solve, on top of the problems which the accomplishment of the above tasks presented, numerous problems which the activities of the assorted "communists" had created in the mind of every worker; and in order to introduce communism, they had to first rescue it from beneath the rubbles; they had to expose the terrorist and guerrilla policy of this or that organisation pretending to be communist, the approval and conditional support of other so-called communist organisations towards the Islamic Republic and Khomeini and their coalition with the Mojahedin ... as well as explaining the innumerable treacheries of the Tudeh Party in the past and at present, the support of half of these so-called communists for Bani Sadr, and hundreds of questions of this kind.

But the belief in this reality that communism is the ideology of the working class and the science of

the conditions of emancipation of the working class, allows us to see that the majority of the organisations which were calling themselves communist, and working in the name of communism, were not communist. The loyal servility of organisations such as the Tudeh Party, Aksarriat (Fedaiien-Majority) and Ranjbaran, to the bourgeoisie is clear and disgraced enough to dispense us with a proof of their anti-working class nature. But the point is that many seemingly communist revolutionary organisations, despite their probable good intentions, were not communist either and even from the standpoint of the nature of their agitation, they did not belong to the working class.

All of these organisations were identifying themselves with the "people" and defending the "people"'s interests. Although they considered the working class too as part of the people, but they did not regard any distinct and independent aim and interests for the working class. Furthermore, by various justifications like, for example, "the stage of the revolution is democratic", "the main contradiction is that between the people and imperialism", etc., they repeatedly tried to prevent the workers from insisting on their independent class interests. What they were asking the workers to do was, not to intensify the "contradictions within the people" and sacrifice themselves for the sake of the "common interests of the people".

These populist organisations usually used to call the communists, deviationist and extreme left. This mis-propaganda, since it was being heard from old organisations, was itself preventing the communists from easily attracting the conscious and advanced sections of the workers towards themselves. Thus the "populist" nature of the so-called communist organisations not only explains their unpopularity amongst the workers and toilers but also the slowness of the advance of the real communists at the time of the domination of these organisations in the communist movement of Iran.

The emergence and development of populism in Iran, as the main obstacle in the path of the independent advance of the Iranian proletariat towards its independent aims, had definite objective bases:

Communism in Iran emerged and developed at a time when this country, as a capitalist country dominated by imperialism, was going through national-democratic movements. The defeat of the Constitutional movement in the early 20th century and the consolidation of the domination of imperialism over Iran, on the one hand, and the influence of the democratic movements in countries like China, Cuba and Vietnam, which were led by petty-bourgeois radical forces claiming to be communist, on the other hand, forced the petty-bourgeois democrats to take up "Marxism" as the only ideology capable of the victorious leadership of the revolutions of the epoch of imperialism. Thus Marxism in Iran was adopted from the outset by the revolutionary democrats and in connection with the needs of the democratic movement.

The Iranian proletariat, whose birth as the main exploited class dates back to the expropriations of the 60's (the Land Reforms), while going through the most intense periods of early competitions within its own ranks under the rule of savage imperialist reaction and violence, was not able to have an active presence in the arena of open class struggles. The workers' movement of Iran, before being a movement "for itself" was a movement "in itself". The absence of a developed workers' movement, and a movement "for itself", which would secure the active presence of the proletariat in the arena of the class struggle and ensure its continuation, allowed the class struggle in Iran to be completely overshadowed by the democratic movement. It was on the basis of these objective conditions that Marxism in Iran developed.

On the other hand, in the theoretical field too, Marxism in Iran did not find itself confronted with a revolutionary and coherent bourgeois ideology so that in the course of struggle against it, it would reveal its distinct class nature. The lack of presentation of

coherent and, in particular, revolutionary ideology on the part of the bourgeoisie, is in general the result of the doomed fate of this class, as a reactionary class in the epoch of imperialism. The bourgeoisie of Iran which in particular was not a consistent critic of feudalism, was unable to present a coherent and revolutionary ideology against feudalist ideology, such that in the course of its inconsistent struggle against feudalism, it was finally under the politico-ideological leadership of the monopoly bourgeoisie that it became victorious. And hence Iran entered the era of imperialist reaction directly from feudalist reaction, without going through a period of bourgeois-democratic transformation.

Thus, if Marxism in Europe, after the victory of bourgeois-democratic revolutions, was born in the critique of bourgeois ideology and succeeded in revealing its class nature in struggle against Proudhonism and anarchism (petty-bourgeois socialism); if Russian Marxism was able, before the democratic revolution in this country, to raise the independent banner of the Russian proletariat in the ideological field and thus complete the victory of Marxist theory in Europe; Marxism in Iran, without carrying out a serious theoretical struggle, without being able to reveal its distinct class nature in such a struggle, developed as a cover for petty-bourgeois democratism. Tudeh Party, as the left-wing of Iranian bourgeois-democracy, took up "Marxism" at the time of its formation in August 1941, and finally trivialized it to the point of a full-fledged liberalism. The democrats inside the National Front after 1963 once again adopted Marxism for the needs of the democratic struggle. Fedaiism emerged and became dominant as the "Marxist" expression of "consistent" bourgeois democratism. Even the People's Mojahedin, in their futile attempts to prepare a coherent and revolutionary ideology which would meet the needs of the democratic struggle, were forced into a clear confounding of Marxism, as the only "science of struggle", with the religion of the "Freedom Movement". Thus Marxism in Iran developed from the beginning together with spontaneous opportunism.

The degeneration of the Communist Party of Russia and its transformation into a bourgeois party which was advocating class conciliation in the name of united political fronts, and the later completion of this opportunist outlook, with the aid of the ruling party in China - claiming to be communist - as far as the popular fronts and popular states; the Stalinism and Trotskyism which caused the complete plunge of the communist parties of Europe into social-chauvinism under the guise of anti-fascist fronts - which pushed the proletariat in Europe and other countries to refrain from struggling against their "own" bourgeoisie, making them the cannon fodders of the world bourgeoisie in the Second World War (with the exception of the revolutionary minorities which detached themselves from the degenerating International, most notably the Italian Left) and the influence of populist guerrilla movements in Latin America; all played their roles in allowing "Marxism" to be taken up as a cover for petty-bourgeois democratism. *but already in Russia!*

Restrictive attitude towards socialist ideology and its reduction to petty-bourgeois democratism made up the general mentality of the left movement in Iran, which took shape on the objective basis of the class struggle being overshadowed by the democratic movement, and in the specific historical conditions of the decline of the bourgeoisie and its complete poverty of theory.

But after the February Uprising, the workers' movement objectively separated itself from the democratic movement with its mainly economic and independent - though dispersed - demands and, despite the torpor into which the democratic movement had sunk, because of the absence of any kind of revolutionary leadership, it continued its growth and development. Along with this growth of its spontaneous movement, the working class began to understand and put forward its independent interests and the needs of its independent strug-

gle, and realize the importance of unity in its ranks for advancing its independent struggle against other classes. The growth and development of the workers' movement in the realization and presentation of its independent interests and needs, while revealing its effects mainly in the surrender of the left movement to the spontaneous struggles of the class, had also the effect of accelerating the forming of the embryos of revolutionary Marxism against the opportunism dominant over the movement.

With the birth of revolutionary Marxism and its growth on the basis of these objective conditions, the period after the February Uprising has been the period of the confrontation of revolutionary Marxism and populist revisionism. As revolutionary Marxism increasingly consolidated itself, through a purposeful ideological struggle and in the context of an acute economic crisis and of the open confrontation of classes, petty-bourgeois radicalism more and more lost stamina and sunk into crisis. The drafting and publication of a proletarian programme by the Unity of Communist Militants in March 1981 and the simultaneous convening of the Second Congress of Komala*; the disintegration of the organisation of "Revolutionary Unity", with a faction of it upholding proletarian positions and joining the ranks of revolutionary Marxism; a similar break-up of the organisation of Razmandegan, with an effective section of it turning to revolutionary Marxism; more recently, the Kurdistan section of the organisation of Peykar joining the ranks of revolutionary Marxism (the organisation itself having suffered numerous splits); the virtual break-up of many other populist organisations; and the occurrence of a number of splits in the Organisation of Iranian People's Fedaiie Guerrillas, etc., are all moments in the process of the crisis and disintegration of the populist organisations, and the growth and consolidation of revolutionary Marxism, during the post-February period.

In May 1982, the Programme of the Communist Party, adopted by Komala and the UCM, was published. This

* We have dealt with the history of Komala and the UCM and their role in the development of revolutionary Marxism in Iran in separate articles (See BM no. 1 and the article about Komala in the present issue).

programme was the document of the victory of revolutionary Marxism against populist revisionism, and brought to an end a three-year period of the growth, domination and disintegration of populist revisionism in the communist movement of Iran.

The achievement of the fundamentals of the Leninist theory of organisation and communist methods of practice by the First Congress of the UCM, removed the last barrier in the way of the formation of the communist party.

Thus the fundamental development in the communist movement of Iran has been the growth of a party current which is endeavouring for the revival of Bolshevism. This victory of the Iranian proletariat has been achieved in the absence of an international communist authority, like the International, and at the heavy expense of the loss of life of thousands of comrades and the imprisonment of thousands more, by the bourgeois counter-revolution. This victory has not been achieved accidentally but has taken place in the context of four years of intense class struggles and the consistent ideological struggle of revolutionary Marxism. The world proletariat must be acquainted with every moment of these struggles and their achievements; workers of the world and their vanguards - the communists - must be introduced to all that has happened in Iran, to the struggles and achievements of one of their battalions and to the weaknesses and mistakes of this movement. These important gains and the immense growth in the consciousness of the Iranian workers during the last four years, have placed them in extremely favourable conditions for accomplishing their historical tasks and have made the workers' struggles in Iran into an important bulwark of the world revolution. Class solidarity with this movement and its reinforcement is the internationalist task of every communist and conscious worker.

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- 2- Kargar-e-Komonist no. 1, (28th January 1982), the Editorial: "About Kargar-e-Komonist".