

REPORT FROM KURDISTAN



During December and January a medical team of the MLP, USA travelled to Kurdistan in the mountainous, war-torn border region between Iran and Iraq. The team was invited by Komala, the Kurdish organization of the Communist Party of Iran.

Our trip gave us a peek behind the shroud of lies and propaganda that the ruling governments have wrapped around this complex and tortured region.

To justify its own criminal gunboat

A unit of Komala peshmargas (communist fighters) on a winter mission.

policy, the U.S. government has told us something about the crimes of the Khomeini tyranny. We also know something about the tragic Iran-Iraq war.

But there is something we don't hear about. We don't hear about the struggle of the workers and communists against the tyranny of the Islamic regime. Nor about their resistance to the capitalist slaughter on the Iran-Iraq frontier. Nor about their strivings for liberation from capitalist exploitation and for socialism.

We don't hear about these things because of the information blockade of both the U.S. and Iranian rulers. The MLP trip marks a breach in this blockade.

More than that. It's also a big step in building solidarity between the workers and Marxist-Leninist communists of the United States and the workers and communists of Kurdistan and Iran.

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Along the war-torn border mountains

The brutal regimes of both Iran and Iraq continue their war without letup. In recent years, the war has been extended from the southern marshlands into the northern highlands, a region populated by the Kurds. We were shown hilltops where thousands of young men were dispatched to their deaths in meaningless offensives and counteroffensives. And every day we could hear the not-so-distant thud of artillery.

Added to this horror there is another war, the war of the governments against the Kurds. Both sides of the border are militarized to the teeth. However, part of this mountainous border region is no man's land, out of reach of the troops (but not of the artillery and mortar barges) of either Iran or Iraq. Much of this is under the effective control of Kurdish guerrilla forces. This is where the Komala-CPI camps are strung along the rugged border mountains.

Our MLP team spent several weeks



A Komala-CPI camp nestled in the mountains.

Komala-CPI — A political force

In the midst of the Iranian nightmare of war and tyranny, Komala and the CPI represent a new quality, the hope of the workers and downtrodden.

Since the days of the Shah, Komala has been one of the two most important Kurdish political forces. It was the force that fought for the interests of the toilers. In the revolutionary upheaval unleashed with the Shah's downfall, Komala, along with the bourgeois nationalist KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party), was the virtual power in Kurdistan.

The defeat of the revolution was bitter and painful for the Iranian left. But the most clear-sighted of the left drew from the revolutionary experience important lessons. They had seen the Iranian working class rise in revolution, only for the revolution to be strangled because the working class was not sufficiently organized as an independent political force with its own socialist aims. Komala and revolutionary Marxists from other parts of Iran absorbed these lessons, paving the way for the formation of the Communist Party of Iran in September 1983.

The militant Marxist positions of the CPI have placed their mark on everyone

touring these camps. We held extensive discussions with the Komala-CPI com-

rades, from the Central Committee to the rank and file. And much was learned

we met in the camps. Life in the camps is not easy; it's part of a hard, bloody and complex struggle. Nonetheless, the camps are filled with a fiery spirit of revolutionary determination. There is a high level of political consciousness. Naturally, there is bitter hatred for the Khomeini regime. At the same time, there is a clear understanding that this is not simply a fight against a brutal dictator; it's also a fight against the capitalist class whose interests the regime serves. In this class spirit there is a sharp awareness of the need to

safeguard the independence of the working class from the political influence of the bourgeois liberals. The Mojahadeen, the KDP, and all other bourgeois factions are held up to ridicule for their neglect of the workers and for, in different ways, cringing before the Islamic regime.

There is also awareness that the Islamic regime is tied with a thousand threads to world capitalism; this includes the Western imperialist powers as well as the Soviet, Chinese and other state capitalists. The camps are filled

with the internationalist spirit that their struggle is inseparable from the struggle of the workers and oppressed of all countries. This same working class internationalism guides the revolutionary work in Kurdistan. Komala militants don't describe their struggle as merely for autonomy and other rights of the Kurdish nation; in the first place they are fighting for the rights of the workers and toilers as part of the struggle of the whole Iranian working class for socialism.

about the revolutionary movement in Iran and Kurdistan.

These politics are in no way self-contained in the camps. All of the activity in the camps is devoted towards assisting the work of raising the consciousness and mobilization of the working people in the interior. In Kurdistan, Komala is already a major political force. The militant and active workers collaborate with it, and it enjoys the respect of the toilers throughout the region. In the rest of Iran the CPI does not have the same strength. However, it has emerged as the most important left-wing force, with a trend of support among the workers.

The Khomeini regime has done everything in its power to scrub out the gains of the revolution. It has turned the country into a prison for the torture and execution of leftists. It has dispatched the army to pacify Kurdistan. But one gain of the revolution remains that it cannot stamp out: the communist trend of Komala and CPI.



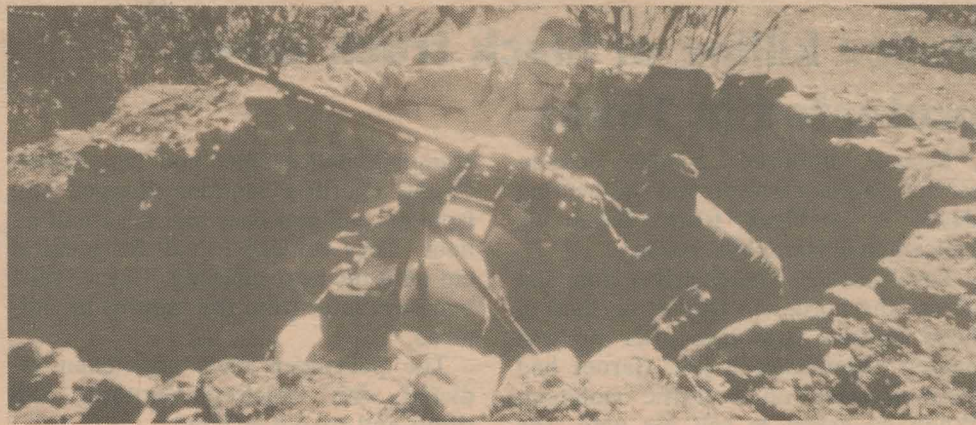
Komala peshmargas interview the MLP team about the conditions and struggles of the workers in the U.S. They are part of the Mahabad battalion, which normally operates in the district of that city. During the months of the deep snow they have been withdrawn to this border camp to rest and guard the Komala and CPI radio station.

Armed contingent of the revolutionary workers

Our team had a lot of contact with

Right: Anti-aircraft gun fires on "enemy" position as part of a military exercise at the Komala training camp. Heavy machine guns are also used to protect the camps from assault from both ground and air. In September, Komala gunners shot down an attacking F-14 Phantom fighter-bomber of the Iranian regime.

Komala's peshmargas, or armed fighters. During the winter snows the camps become home for thousands of



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peshmargas. This is because the larger formations of fighters are withdrawn from the interior of Kurdistan to rest and study after arduous summer-through-fall military campaigns.

We had the opportunity to meet with hundreds of these fighters, from

veteran battalion commanders to new recruits at the training center. These men and women are not your ordinary soldiers. Despite their business of fighting Khomeini's forces, despite living with a kalashnikov automatic rifle on their shoulder and hand grenades on their chest, there is no militarist spirit among them. They carry the spirit of po-

litically enlightened and class conscious workers and toilers. Everywhere, the peshmargas asked us about the situation facing the American workers, as well as about the working class struggle in Nicaragua and other countries.

The peshmargas have countless tales of heroism and bravery in battle. However, the stories that they are most

proud to illustrate their close bonds with the working people. They see their military operations as a means to reinforce the mass struggles and political organization of the villagers and city workers.

The communist workers' underground

Some of our most interesting interviews were with the organizations responsible for the clandestine work. Under Iranian conditions affiliation to a left-wing organization means prison, torture and often the firing squad. By necessity the clandestine work is a pillar of the work of Komala and the CPI.

The clandestine work is most advanced in Kurdistan, where, among other favorable conditions, it has the assistance of the armed peshmargas. However, it is also unfolding in working class centers from Teheran to Isfahan.

We talked to people involved in an extensive underground system to give the workers political guidance and communist education. This includes networks of communications and the production and distribution of special clandestine literature. The clandestine activity lays stress on developing the mass economic and political struggles.

There is the growth of the economic strike movement in the brickyards and other work places. This has given rise to workers' general assemblies, the rudiments of trade unions, and other mainly underground workers' organizations.

There are the protests against the



New recruits meet with the MLP team at the Komala training center. Over 60% of the volunteers at the camp were workers. Despite their youth, many have years of experience with the Komala-CPI underground.

humiliation of women. There is also the resistance to the military draft and the Iran-Iraq war.

The clandestine organization is also

involved in the mobilization of the workers directly for their own revolutionary aims. Such was last year's May First demonstration in the city of Sanandaj —

a bold action that focused the attention of workers across Iran.

The struggle for women's rights

The oppression of women is one of the sharp political issues. The humiliation of being forced under the veil is a public expression of this oppression. But the brutal degradation of women involves a whole apartheid-like system that robs women of the most elementary rights as human beings. Adding insult to injury, especially in the rural villages, the anti-women laws of the Islamic regime come on top of feudal-type social customs — for example, the practice of forced marriages of young girls.

The CPI is the force which consis-



A member of the MLP team with a group of new women volunteers at the Komala training camp.

tently defends women's rights. Not surprisingly, this has gained it much support. A woman member of the MLP team held several meetings with groups of women peshmargas — both veteran fighters and new recruits. She heard stories of the shameless treatment women are subject to. At the same time, she heard how the CPI has trained these women as class conscious militants. The women peshmargas are renowned for their bravery, fighting in the same military units as the men for the common working class cause.

The fight against the war

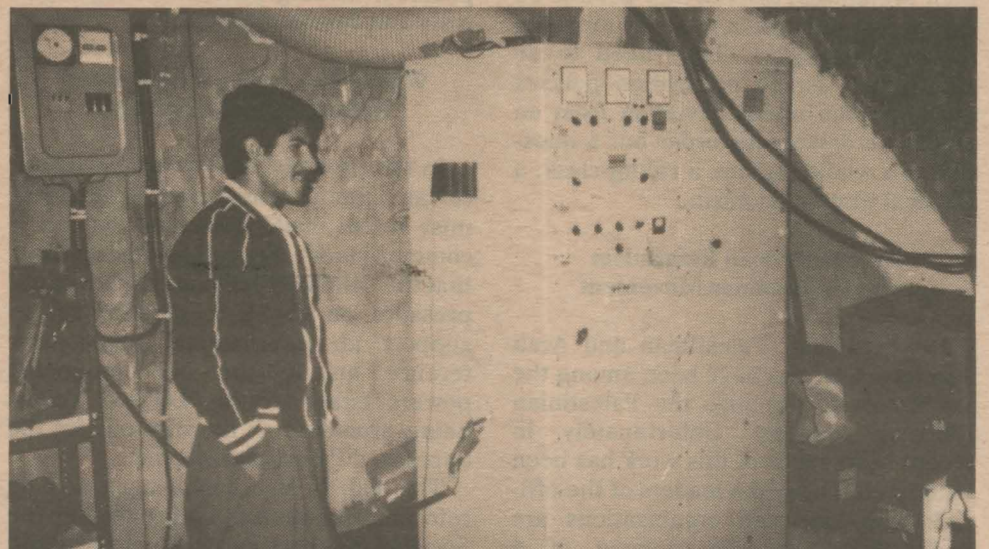
Another sharp political issue is the struggle against military conscription. The Iran-Iraq war is consuming the whole region. Most of all it is consuming young men; they are hunted like animals, beaten, jailed, and dragged away for the slaughter.

The resistance to conscription is particularly sharp in Kurdistan, where the military draft and forced arming is part of the Iranian regime's efforts to pacify the region. This gives rise to a constant struggle by working people to hide potential conscripts and to free them when they are captured.

At the training camp we spoke to a new recruit from the region of Lorestan. He pointed out that the draft and the economic hardships due to the war make it so young people simply cannot breathe; they have no way out but to join the revolutionary struggle. That's why he made his way to Kurdistan and to Komala-CPI.

'Radio Voice of Revolution' and 'Radio Voice of CPI'

Our team spent several days at the



Comrade in charge of the day's transmission oversees the radio broadcast.

camp where the Komala and CPI radio

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programs are produced and broadcast. Combined, the radios provide eight to eleven hours of transmission a day.

Medicine for the revolution

Of course, the MLP team also visited Komala's hospital and medical clinics. Komala's medical service is aimed at treating the wounded and sick peshmargas. But it also has clinics to serve the local villagers.

The conditions are harsh, to say the least. By necessity the hospital and clinics are in primitive buildings. There is the mountain mud and other pressures of nature. There is the pressure of the frequent shellings of the camps. The facilities and supplies are minimal. Nonetheless the medical service does an

They provide hundreds of thousands of loyal listeners with news of the struggles of the working people domestically and around the world. They also popularize the political views

of the CPI and Komala, Marxist theory, and progressive culture.

The radios are also a direct organizing tool. They carry special programs to guide the work of the underground ac-

tivists. As well, after the regular broadcasts they transmit coded messages to the comrades in the underground.

amazing job, from routine dental work to relatively complex surgery.

One of the miracles Komala has created is an elaborate system of battlefield medicine. From where most of the peshmargas' military actions take place, their hospital is a 12-day march by foot or mule over high mountain ridges and through mine fields. So they need a system of treating the wounded on the spot.

Our team visited the medical classes where peshmargas are trained as medics capable of saving lives in the field. We also met a young man in the hospital who had been critically wounded in battle. Right under the hostile fire of the regime's soldiers, his medic comrades performed hours of abdominal surgery, rescuing him from sure death.



Medical personnel at the clinic in Komala's Chenoreh village camp.

More reports to come

All this is by way of introduction to our trip. In future issues of *The Workers' Advocate* we will submit further

reports.

To begin with, we will carry an account of the revolutionary storms over the last decade. Out of this class upheaval Komala and the CPI have grown and become tempered.

We will also start to fill in the outlines of what we've already touched on. As well, we hope to report on other things we observed, including the political and

military education at Komala's training camp, and a revolutionary trial of an accused agent of the regime. We also would like to relay firsthand reports about the situation in Khomeini's prisons, reports given to us by brave and defiant men and women communists.

The courageous struggle of the Iranian communists and workers, from

the factories of Teheran to the mountains of Kurdistan, is a school of revolutionary experience that all class conscious workers and progressive activists can learn from. While their field of battle is on the other side of the world, they are on the front lines of our common struggle. □

Revolutionary Kurdistan—background notes

Kurdistan is one of the most politically important regions of Iran. Although it only contains a small percentage of Iran's 40 million people, it has been a bulwark of the revolutionary movement of the Iranian working people. Despite the terror of the Khomeini regime, there is a strong underground workers' movement linked to the revolutionary Marxists of the Communist Party of Iran and its Kurdish organization Komala. The communist workers have also organized a powerful armed resistance to the Islamic dictatorship.

Below we carry some background notes prepared by a member of the MLP team that recently returned from Kurdistan. It outlines basics about Iranian Kurdistan and the revolutionary struggle there.

Where Is Kurdistan and Who Are the Kurds?

Kurdistan is a large mountainous region spanning the borders of Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Several million Kurds live in each of these countries. There are much smaller concentrations of Kurds in eastern Syria and in the southern tip of the Soviet Caucasus.

Their language is Kurdish, which is neither Arabic, Turkish, nor the Iranian language Farsi. There are also distinct dialects among the Kurds, making it difficult for a Kurd from Turkey to understand the language in the south of Iranian Kurdistan.

The Kurds living in different countries, while sharing a similar language and culture, do not tend to come together as a single political entity. For example, for Iranian Kurds there is a strong economic, political and cultural pull towards amalgamation with the rest of Iran. And they generally consider themselves part of Iran.

The onslaught of the Khomeini regime against Kurdistan rekindled national feelings. However, even when national feelings run high, the general demand of the Kurds is for autonomous rights, not independence and separation from Iran.

What Is the Social Make-Up?

Not so long ago, Iranian Kurdistan was a backward agrarian region. Much of the farming and herding was primitive. Feudalists and tribal chieftains held sway.

But especially over the last 25 years, since the time of the Shah's agrarian reform, there has been a dramatic capitalist transformation. The domination of the feudal chiefs was undercut by the rise of the bourgeois class, both in the cities and towns and also in some rural areas. Many peasants were driven off the land or turned into wage laborers with the introduction of tractors and capitalist farming. Most important was the emergence of the working class.

Presently about 50% of the population live in the cities (Sanandaj, Saqqez, Mahabad, etc.). In the cities there are textile, tobacco, plastic and other factories that hire 30 to 40 workers. There are also many small shops where workers are engaged in carpet weaving, metal work, bakeries, etc. There is also a lot of seasonal work in brickyards and construction projects. (Many of the underemployed and seasonal Kurdish workers regularly travel to the factories and work sites in Tabriz and other industrial centers across Iran.)

This capitalist transformation didn't raise the Kurdish toilers out of their wretched poverty. What it did do, however, is bring about a class polarization. It brought the working class onto the stage as a class to be reckoned with. This has had a major impact on the revolutionary upheaval of the last decade.



A rural village in Iranian Kurdistan.

What Was Its Role in the Iranian Revolution?

In 1978 and early 1979 a mass upsurge swept Iran, toppling the U.S.-backed dictatorship of the Shah. Although not the first to go into action, the Kurdish people played their part in this insurrection. Once the revolution was unleashed, it was carried further and realized a greater freedom for the working masses in Kurdistan than in other regions of the country.

There were a number of reasons for this. There was the historic strength of non-Islamic and left organizations, including the communist organization Komala. There was the religious distinction; the Kurds, being mainly Sunni Moslems, were less vulnerable to the demagoguery of Khomeini and his Shiite mullahs. National feelings also played a part, with the Kurds rightly suspecting that the new government in Teheran would not respect their demands for autonomy.

All this meant that in Kurdistan there was greater distrust in the new Islamic government that came in after the fall of the Shah. This opened the way for a more thorough struggle against the remnants of the old order and a more resolute defense of the gains of the revolution. The working people took up arms and set up their own authority across most of Iranian Kurdistan.

The Khomeini clique came to power in the anti-Shah insurrection. But this didn't make it revolutionary. On the contrary, the Khomeini regime came to power with the aim of turning back the revolution of the workers and toilers and rebuilding the state power of the capitalist exploiters.

Revolutionary Kurdistan was a sharp thorn in its side. In August 1979 the Khomeini regime launched an all-out military offensive to assert its authority in the region. The masses put up a ferocious resistance and the troops of the regime were temporarily thrown back.

After more than five years of bloody warfare, the Islamic regime was able to establish its military control. The army and "revolutionary guards" of the dictatorship have now set up garrisons and forts on top of almost every hill surrounding the villages and towns. Nonetheless, the armed resistance continues. Because of the support of the people, the Kurdish peshmargas (armed fighters) continue to land heavy blows on the regime throughout the region.

What Are the Political Forces?

There are two important political forces in Iranian Kurdistan: there is the bourgeois nationalist KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party), and there is the organization of the workers and toilers known as Komala, which is now the regional organization of the Communist Party of Iran.

At the time of the revolution there were other left organizations with a following in Kurdistan, including the Castroite Fedayee organization. But these left-wing forces had a vacillating, non-working class standpoint and were essentially pushed aside by the wave of acute class conflicts. (Besides the left, at one point there were attempts to create feudalistic, reactionary groupings; however, these were smashed up by the blows of the masses.)

The KDP goes back a long way and had maintained an image of being somewhat left-wing and popular. But in the wake of the revolution, where the working class came out in struggle for its own interests, the KDP slid rightwards, lining up with the wealthy and reactionary elements. (Internationally the KDP has been grooming links with forces like West European social-democracy.)

At the same time, Komala has become more firmly rooted in the working class, both ideologically and in terms of its base of support among the masses.

Both the KDP and Komala fight for the right to self-determination and autonomy. However, the KDP fights within the framework of bourgeois nationalism. It preaches unity with the Kurdish factory owner, and its firmest supporter in the villages is the rich farmer. Komala, on the other hand, says autonomy will mean nothing without defense of the workers' interests. It organizes the workers against the factory owners and agitates for a workers' government. And in the villages it has support among the rural laborers.

This class division between the two Kurdish parties means constant strife. In 1984, the KDP attempted to settle matters by attacking Komala militarily. A savage and bloody war ensued between them. Komala successfully rebuffed the KDP's attacks, essentially teaching the bourgeois nationalist chiefs a costly lesson that the communist forces of the working masses are not to be trifled with.

Over the last year, the war between the KDP and Komala has calmed down for now. Both sides generally refrain from carrying out military actions in the zone of operations of the other (the KDP mainly operates to the north of Komala). This has allowed Komala to once again concentrate its fire on the occupation forces of the Khomeini tyranny. □

