

Statement on the Situation in Iran

by the Line of March Editorial Board

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran three years ago was an event of great consequence for the struggle against imperialism. Of all the agents of U.S. imperialism in the world, the Shah seemed to be one of the most powerful. And Iran, as one of the chief oil-producing nations in the world, had enormous natural wealth which was available to the Shah as the means for buying social peace. In addition, massive U.S. military aid made the Shah's regime appear to be an impregnable fortress.

But all of this might could not circumvent the realities of the class struggle. Iran's great natural wealth in oil was not used for the benefit of the Iranian masses, but rather for the benefit of world imperialism. In fact, Iran's oil-focused economy led to grave distortions in the country's overall economic life, producing great hardships for the laboring masses. Years of intense political repression had in turn given rise to a broad national democratic movement which inevitably took an anti-imperialist character.

For all these reasons, the working class throughout the world viewed the Iranian revolution with great hopes. But this optimism was also laced with great anxieties. It was clear from the beginning that the political leadership of the Iranian revolution was inherently unstable. The Ayatollah Khomeini, representing the class interests of Iran's merchant bourgeoisie and the political and ideological outlook of the reactionary Moslem clergy, succeeded in placing his forces at the head of the broad democratic movement, ultimately utilizing that position to seize power.

For a short period, then, Moslem fundamentalism was able to play an objectively progressive role as the force which could unite the Iranian masses in the particular task of overthrowing the Shah and severing Iran's relationship with U.S. imperialism. But the reactionary outlook of the Khomeini regime left it without the capacity to move the Iranian revolution forward. Instead, the revolution took a decidedly reactionary turn marked by the attempt to impose the moral and ideological norms of religious fundamentalism on Iranian society as the basis on which Iran's economic, political and social life would be established. Repression of the legitimate aspirations of Iran's national minorities, imposition of sexist feudal-clerical standards on the women of Iran, abrogation of the democratic political rights of the working class, hostility to the socialist countries—all

these policies and more reflected the attempt by Khomeini to subordinate the objective interests of Iran's working class to the narrow and unrealizable objectives of a clerical regime.

While all these negative developments were a source of great concern to anti-imperialists everywhere, the hostility by U.S. imperialism against Iran created a situation in which it was necessary to stand with the Khomeini regime against U.S. imperialism.

But the objective contradiction between the Khomeini government and U.S. imperialism should not be used to obscure the fact of the regime's reactionary character which, in the long run, makes it at best an unstable and unreliable force in the struggle against imperialism. From the point of view of both the Iranian revolution and the world proletariat, it is necessary to go beyond the immediate phenomena reflecting the antagonism with U.S. imperialism and to pose a number of other questions. Do the policies and program of the Khomeini regime provide a sound basis for consolidating the break with imperialism? Do the policies and program of the Khomeini regime provide favorable conditions for the proletariat to transform Iranian society in a socialist direction?

It seems overwhelmingly clear that the answer to these two questions is negative. This judgment is confirmed by the marked deterioration of the Iranian revolution in recent months.

Because the economic, political and social policies pursued by the Khomeini regime are based on the reactionary and idealist conceptions of the fundamentalist clergy, and do not even assist in the further economic development of Iran, even along capitalist (let alone socialist) lines, the Iranian revolution has reached a critical turning point. All of its internal contradictions are ripening, inevitably giving rise to political struggle.

The response of the Khomeini regime to this crisis has been to launch a large-scale campaign of terror and repression against all popular opposition forces, most especially popular revolutionary and national democratic elements. More than a thousand people, especially those associated with the People's Mujahadeen and the People's Fedayeen (Minority) have been summarily executed. The pretext for this massacre has been the charge that the opposition are all agents of U.S. imperialism.

That U.S. imperialism is more than a disinterested observer of these events is undoubtedly true. But the real source of satisfaction to U.S. imperialism is the fact that the policies of the Khomeini regime make it impossible for the Iranian revolution to consolidate its gains politically, and can only lead to a situation in which U.S. agents—through the Iranian army and from among those presently in exile—could seize power and bring Iran back into the imperialist orbit.

In Iran itself, some left forces have adopted the mistaken line of supporting the regime's repressive policies. This course is fraught with disaster for the Iranian working class. In the long run, it will work to the interests of the imperialists.

The path ahead for the Iranian revolution requires a sharp break with the policies and program unfolded by Khomeini's reactionary clerical regime. At the very least, the political representatives of the working class should be leading the struggle for democracy in Iran in order to provide the most favorable conditions under which the proletariat could move to the leadership of the Iranian revolution.

But the future of the Iranian revolution is a concern for the international movement against imperialism as well. Unfortunately, the marked reactionary turn of the Khomeini regime—in particular, the wave of terror and repression—has been met by a conspicuous silence in the international anti-imperialist community.

We believe that the political judgment which has given rise to that silence is grievously mistaken, yet another example of that short-sighted pragmatism which in a very material sense does not at all serve the interests of the struggle against imperialism. While the international bourgeoisie gloats over the repressive turn in Iran, the anti-imperialist forces cannot turn away either in embarrassment or benign approval. An international outcry to halt the executions of democratic forces in Iran can be a material force in curbing the Khomeini regime's repressive activities and in providing political guidance to proletarian forces in Iran in unfolding the future tasks of their country's revolution.