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Iran's February Revolution

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'DON'T play at insurrection', Engels used to warn impatient and isolated revolutionaries. The Iranian masses demonstrated last weekend that they were in deadly earnest.

They resisted army attempts to impose law and order, raided arsenals, seized arms and inflicted defeat after defeat on troops loyal to the Shah.

Humiliated and concerned lest the masses follow through their victories by smashing the entire structure of the army, the military leaders sounded the retreat. They ordered the troops to return to the barracks. Some did. Others preferred to join the insurrectionaries.

The generals issued a pathetic statement: 'The army will remain neutral.' The masses laughed in their face. For the last year this 'neutral' army has been massacring thousands of Iranians.

The Shah's flight was the masses' first victory. The removal of his last appointed Prime Minister, Bakhtiar, marks the end of any hope the Shah may have had of saving his throne.

What makes the fall of Bakhtiar all the more important is that he did not withdraw 'gracefully' after negotiations. There was no peaceful transition. He was overthrown by a mass insurrection.

Even more importantly the insurrection achieved its immediate aim because the masses were armed. The guerrilla organisations now came into their own and took the initiative at several key moments.

The masses were politically armed by six months of continuous struggles. This armoury was restricted to the overthrow of the autocracy, but this in itself gave their struggle a revolutionary dynamic.

At the crucial moment their political strength enabled them to take up real weapons and defeat the military offensive. The result was the fall of Bakhtiar and the storming of the Shah's fake parliament. Eleven thousand prisoners liberated themselves.

The radio and television stations were taken over by the workers and news of what was happening was broadcast to the rest of the country and the world. In his Moroccan retreat the once powerful autocrat heard Radio Tehran announcing the end of the monarchy.

Dual power now exists. But dual power does not automatically lead to the seizure of power by the oppressed masses. For the very term denotes that there are two powers in the land.

On the one hand is the Shah's army. It has suffered a serious blow, but it is far from being smashed. It is still under the control of the same officers



SECONDARY picketing — Tehran-style

who have organised large-scale repression.

But it could be crushed if the struggle continues and that is what Iranian revolutionaries will seek to ensure.

On the other side are the masses in motion. They are triumphant and proud of their successes. Rightly so. Their struggle offers hope to the victims of dictatorships throughout the world, starting with neighbouring Pakistan.

But the dual power which undoubtedly exists in Iran has yet to be institutionalised. Its political voice does not emerge as yet from discussions and debates in popular institutions or the base of a popular army. It comes from one man: Khomeini.

If this old man's obduracy and insistence on no compromises with the Shah has proved a major strength for the mass movement, it is his willingness to negotiate with the generals and his eagerness to disarm the masses which now threatens the revolution from within.

The BBC TV news a few weeks ago referred to Bakhtiar as a Kerensky.

The Economist last week compared Khomeini to the fifteenth century Florentine religious demagogue Savanarola.

Both are wrong. If anything he bears a closer resemblance to Kerensky, though analogies by their nature are never exact. That is why Lenin's insistence on 'a concrete analysis of the concrete situation' remains a far superior method.

Dual power will not last for ever. Sooner or later there will be a final test of strength. The mass movement is in an extremely advantageous situation at the moment. Its weakness lies in the fact that revolutionary workers' parties — indeed all working class political and trade union organisations — are very weak.

In our editorial statement on Iran last November we wrote:

'Even the most far-reaching bourgeois democracy is unlikely to satisfy the needs of the masses, who have spent months increasing their experience of independent organisation and independent political action.

'The Shah will fall because he was pushed, not because of any vague death wish. In other words, what

exists in Iran today is an insurrectionary situation in which there is the possibility of the masses developing their own organisations of workers power — not simply to get rid of their present ruler, but to seize their own destiny once and for all.

'None of this is certain of course. The only thing we can predict with scientific accuracy is that everything is possible!

'One major obstacle still stands between the masses and power: an enormous armoury of repression furnished and maintained by imperialism.'

Events have tended to confirm our analysis. What is needed now is the generalisation and institutionalisation of the existing dual power. This will involve a struggle by the masses to retain their arms, the election of soldiers' committees and the establishment of armed workers militias to defend the masses against repression.

At the same time there should be no delay in organising immediate elections to a sovereign constituent assembly. It is only such a body which

can decide who forms a government. No administration appointed from above is acceptable.

If institutions existed which represented the masses more directly, institutions of a soviet type, and workers' or peasants' parties composed the majority, then we would argue for these parties to form a government based on soviet power.

But this power has yet to be created. Given the weakness of working class organisation it will develop out of the contradictions inherent into the struggle for a constituent assembly and democratic rights for the masses.

Such an assembly would be defended by armed sections of the masses. The trial of all generals and officers who participated in the massacres and their replacement by officers elected by the soldiery are both urgent measures. But they can only be carried through if the workers militias are strengthened rather than disarmed.

If elections for an assembly are organised the workers and peasants will need to form their own parties, trade unions and peasants' associations independent of all bourgeois forces. These would stand opposed to all varieties of mysticism, political and religious.

A revolutionary workers' party will fight for thoroughgoing land reforms, political and social rights for women, self-determination for the nationalities, nationalisation of all big capitalist firms under workers' control, and an end to all imperialist alliances. That is what Iranian Trotskyists are fighting for today. It is in the course of these struggles that a revolutionary party will be built.

The Iranian revolution will need to guard itself not just from its internal enemies. The latter have been sustained and backed by the United States and Britain. Imperialist strategy in the Middle East has suffered a serious setback with the fall of the Shah (see page 4) and the Pentagon planners will not give up Iran without a fight.

Their problem is that their only instrument in Iran is now the army. They need politicians and political parties. A concordat with Khomeini cannot be excluded, though the latter must realise that his mass support will diminish if he makes any deals.

Iranian revolutionary Marxists are presently engaged in building a section of the Fourth International. They and other revolutionaries must be aided in developing political instruments that will prevent any regression in the coming months.

Although the fall of the monarchy makes our political tasks more complex, everything is still possible.