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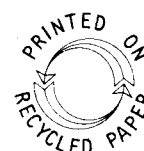
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## ASPECTS OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION

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This paper is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate  
dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Iranian revolution is perhaps the least understood revolution in contemporary history. The main reason for this is that it has not — at least in any apparent way — followed any recognizable conventional patterns. Besides, we are still in the middle of it, lacking the benefit of historic hindsight.

But it is a unique revolution because it is the first time in post-colonial history that popular forces have found a common expression against their combined enemy of imperialism (both cultural and economic) and internal reaction. In doing so they have relied nearly exclusively on internal strength and financing, despite strong support for the Shah's regime from all external quarters. This meant necessarily a return to cultural values, in this case primarily religion.

For this reason we wish to offer the hypothesis that it will only be the first of a series of such uprisings to be followed in the 1980s by many other countries now caught in the trap of international capital.

In an earlier presentation to GPID in October 1978, we analyzed the situation leading up to the crisis, and made predictions, all of which have come to pass. They included the disintegration of the Imperial Iranian Armed Forces from within, and the downfall of both the Shah and his regime by spring 1979. In mid-February the Shah's regime fell and on 1 April the Islamic Republic was proclaimed. The armed forces withered away, offered practically no resistance when the revolution finally took up arms, and many units including the elite Air Force mutinied from within.

We predicted that the likely models to be followed would be Greece, Portugal, Spain, or a "self-reliance" model — with the former three being the preferred solution by the USA. Of course, in the Iranian context, Spain was impossible, as power could not be "handed over" by the dictator to another king, much as the Iranian regime would have preferred this. In fact, the historic mission of Bakhtiar,\* according to the US wish, was to try to carry out the Spanish model (i.e., democratization of the monarchy) and, failing that, to try to bring about the Greco-Portuguese model. That is why in his last week in office he had declared that it was possible to transform the regime into a republic legally, and the channel envisaged was through a joint meeting of the two houses of parliament that were supposed to meet, declare a Republic, and convene a constitutional assembly to draw up a new constitution. To Bakhtiar, a self-proclaimed social-democrat and advocate of the national bourgeoisie, religion was to be kept separate from politics. He had even declared that Qom, the stronghold of Shiite leaders in Iran, could be walled off and declared an autonomous Islamic Vatican.

But the Vaticanization of Qom was hardly what Ayatollah\*\* Khomeini and his followers had in mind. What they sought was a complete merging — a reintegration of religion and politics, and an end to dependence on imperialists of any description. The Ayatollah's list of imperialists included not only the expected USA, Britain, and the USSR but also China, Israel, and South Africa. It should be recalled that Iran had managed to enter into an unwritten unholy alliance with the latter too. What the people wanted, meanwhile, was a radical and revolutionary transformation of the regime, which, at least, had to include the

\* The last prime minister appointed by the Shah's regime. He claimed to be in favour of a social-democratic government and an ardent follower of the late Iranian nationalist prime minister Mossadegh. But he had come too late to carry out his mission, and constantly underestimated the revolutionary momentum of the society.

\*\* Ayatollah is a title meaning the "sign of God," roughly equivalent to "His Holiness." Khomeini's approach was his emphasis on both cultural and class contradictions, giving him a unique approach. The cultural and social-psychologic aspects of the Iranian revolution will be dealt with in a separate paper.

abolishing of the monarchy, elimination of the Shah's dictatorship, and the reversal of the dependency relationship with foreign powers. It can therefore be seen that religious leadership and popular will coincided in large measure.

## II. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Qajar dynasty's\* hegemony over the country coincided with the spread of colonialism. Colonialist powers, particularly tsarist Russia and imperial Britain could not permit an independent Iran, as it would endanger their vital interests. Britain wanted to protect East India, and Russia wanted to carry out Peter the Great's last testament of gaining access to warm waters. Later with the discovery of oil and other resources their interests became even more pronounced. Most Qajar kings were fundamentally corrupt, and easily subjugated the national interest to foreign domination in return for personal gain. One of these gentlemen even gave several monopoly rights to foreign powers in exchange for pleasure trips to Europe.

There were personalities such as Mirza Taghi Khan Amir Kabir, top minister to Nasser-ed-Din Shah Qajar, who, with great foresight, began to steer the country in the direction of modern European capitalism. To this end his first action was to send a number of Iranians to France during the second half of the nineteenth century to study science and engineering. On their return, these young men founded the Tehran Polytechnic (Dar-el-Fonun), which had a profound impact on spreading modern European science in Iran. But through the influence of the Shah's mother, in close touch with colonial powers, he was quickly done in. Recent research on the assassination of Nasser-ed-Din Shah has revealed the clearly political, nationalistic, and intellectual motivations of the assassin.

\* The Qajar dynasty was the last indigenous one to rule over Iran. Ahmad Shah, the last Qajar king, was overthrown by the now-deposed Shah's father in 1921.

Fairly soon after that event, a rise of popular consciousness, motivated by (a) the spread of science and education, (b) the destruction of the traditional society's fabric under the pressure of foreign capital, (c) corruption in the bureaucratic apparatus of the absolute monarchy, (d) the resultant impoverishment of urban dwellers and increasing exploitation of the peasants (through such devices as the tobacco monopoly granted by Nasser-ed-Din Shah to the Russians), and (e) improved literacy and the spread of newspapers, brought about increasing pressure for democratic changes. This movement ultimately resulted in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, which established a constitutional monarchy and held that all legitimate power emanates from the people. The revolutionary fervour was, however, soon diverted through infiltration of the ranks of the revolutionaries by agents of the ruling monarchy and colonial powers, and finally a weakened constitutional monarchy ended up being "granted" to the nation through a royal decree.

Imperial Russia and Britain, although in competition among themselves, managed to reach an agreement under which Iran was divided into two spheres of influence in which the two imperial powers could pursue their interests without bond and without interfering with each other.

It was thus that Britain obtained exclusive rights to exploit the oil in southern Iran, thereby opening a new chapter in the history of foreign domination in the country.

But ever since foreign domination prevented Iran from embarking on its own path of economic and technological evolution, the liberation struggle has been directed against the combined forces of foreign colonialism/imperialism and domestic dictatorship/reaction. By reaction we mean all those forces in Iran whose vested interests have been the prevention of "social evolution without foreign interference."

The Constitutional Revolution, as mentioned above, suffered from an early arrest. First by military force, as when Mohammed-Ali Shah fired cannon-balls on the newly established parliament, and later by adopting



political means such as a parliamentary outlook while elections to the parliament became completely rigged. In all of Iran's electoral history no more than two elections can be called reasonably honest: the first House and the one carried out by Dr. Mossadegh in the early 1950s. The present revolution in Iran can therefore be seen as the culmination of a bourgeois/nationalist revolution that took about three-quarters of a century to succeed.

As long as the Qajar kings played the game of their semi-colonial masters, they were supported on the throne by the latter. But under the young Ahmad Shah, who was a constitutionalist and a principled advocate of Iran's independence, the British realized that he was dangerous to their interests. Therefore they organized the coup d'état of 1921 by Reza Khan — the father of the now ousted Shah of Iran — who had become commander-in-chief of the originally Russian organized Qazakh forces. He then called for a new constitutional assembly which was ordered to end the Qajar dynasty and appoint Reza Khan king.

Unfortunately for the British, Reza Shah soon began to exhibit pro-German tendencies, and thus in 1941 he was deposed by the British after the Allied occupation of Iran, sent into exile in South Africa, and his son, Mohammed-Reza, was installed on the throne.

Mohammed-Reza's reign was marked from the very beginning by a complete subjugation to the semi-colonial masters who had brought him into power and without whose continued support he could not have survived in an aroused, conscientized Iran. This was made amply clear when he was forced into exile in 1953 following the nationalization of oil. His rule, like that of his father was always based on repression of the opposition, and hence he was always supported by the imperialists who found an obedient ally in him.

After his short-lived 1953 exile he was reinstalled on the throne, this time with American support, in return, of course, for a lion's share of the oil and increased penetration by American capital in every aspect of Iranian life.

The main result is that over the past century the drive for national liberation in Iran has always had to contend with the combined forces of internal reactionary dictatorship and their foreign allies. The dominant foreign allies have been, in turn: tsarist Russia (during the Qajar dynasty), imperial Britain (until 1953), and the imperialist United States of America from 1953 to 1979.

Leftist guerrilla forces in Iran (both religious and lay) who started their activities some 15 years ago and entered the armed struggle stage about 10 years ago, finally came to adopt the position that the fundamental contradiction they have to contend with is the one between the interests of the Iranian "people" and those of imperialism, namely, in the Iranian context, the United States of America. Without at once fighting against both imperialism and the Shah, they realized they could not achieve any lasting and meaningful liberation. Meanwhile the last dynasty brutally subjugated Iran to western culture (advertised as "modernization"), and attempted to wipe out any remnants of a mass culture; only to be replaced by what was unashamedly called "the Imperial Culture." This meant that the ultimate source of resistance was cultural, meaning mainly religious in the Iranian context.

### III. THE EVOLUTION OF THE CLASS STRUCTURE OF IRAN

Until the rise of Reza Shah the fundamental character of Iranian society was tribal/feudal. This, of course, suited well the semi-colonial schemes of tsarist Russia, itself still largely feudal. The masses of peasantry were ruled and exploited by a feudal class headed by the Qajar royal family and their close collaborators. A small intelligentsia began to evolve under the impetus of the nationalist premier Amir Kabir, but this was soon limited to what was required to meet the needs of the growing bureaucracy which had to be somewhat "modernized" to cope with the needs of a country in a semi-colonial relationship with foreign masters. The tribes and the religious hierarchy had a particularly important role to play.

#### Tribes

The pre-Pahlavi history of Iran is almost indistinguishable from the history of tribal rivalry for "national" domination. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find a dynasty in Iran which did not emerge from a tribal base of power. The tribes had a sound economic base (animal husbandry, rural industry, and some agriculture), a high degree of mobility because they had horses, and were always in practice of warfare. In time of war each soldier provided by the tribe usually continued to receive his support from his own household or tribe.

Whenever weakness would immobilize the ruling central government, tribal coalitions would be rearranged, and the dominant party in a new inter-tribal coalition would form the new dynasty by overthrowing the authority of the central government.

The new tribe's feudal chiefs — the khans — would then grab the kingdom and move into rule. By so doing the ruling tribe would then be largely urbanized and lose its mobility and war preparedness. The pleasures and corruption of urban regality would soon weaken the tribe's ruling elite. By the time of the seventh generation (a very rough average) the cycle would be complete; weakness and corruption would reach its height; and the country (or what was left of it) would be ready for a new inter-tribal coalition, resulting in a change of dynasties. The last tribe to have succeeded in ruling over Iran was the Qajar tribe.

But British economic interests soon ran into conflict with this way of life. Oil exploitation, for example, required long-term stability and security for huge capital outlays. Reza Khan — who was the first non-tribal king in modern Iran — was assigned the task of wiping out the power base of tribes, particularly in the south, southwest, and southeast of the country — the areas most vital to British interests in oil and East Indian relations.

Reza Shah did a fine job from the British point of view. He inflicted a permanent blow to tribal autonomy by defeating the tribes, hanging most of their chiefs and elite leadership, disarming them, and embarking them on a course of integration within the national economy. To help achieve this, they first had to be ruined. This was best achieved by depriving them of their mobility through forbidding migration. Settling them in one place meant they would lose their livelihood, as the terrain they utilized for grazing their animals consisted of semi-arid regions that could only support seasonal grazing.

Settling the beheaded tribes at gun-point was tantamount to malnutrition, starvation, disease and land ruin through erosion. But most tribes were thus effectively removed from their potential of opposition to central authority, and they could no longer provide much resistance to British colonial schemes in the south. The British could now deal with a "simplified" situation in a "centralized" manner.

### The Religious Hierarchy

Ever since the original Islam of Prophet Mohammed and Imam Ali was corrupted by the regality of the Omavid and Abbasid Caliphates in the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., Iranians have resorted to Shiism, a sect based on Ali's teachings and his path of resistance to injustice, and egalitarianism as an ideology of liberation from social exploitation and foreign domination. This was so until in the Safavid dynasty Shiism itself was corrupted and brought into line to serve the interests of the ruling class headed by the royal family. Many Shiite-inspired uprisings, some like that of Hajjaj with humanistic/materialistic context, were crushed by caliphs and kings alike.

In colonial times people in Iran once again resorted to religion as a source of resistance and liberation. The revival of Shiism as a progressive force was highlighted in the "Tobacco Movement" which involved a popular boycott of tobacco declared by Ayatollah Shirazi at the time of Nasser-ed-Din Shah to protest against the tobacco monopoly granted to imperial Russia. The movement was so successful that in the Shah's own harem his favourite wife refused to serve him the smoking hubble-bubble (qalian or narkile)! In 1891 the Movement culminated in the cancellation of the tobacco monopoly — giving Iranians their first historic decisive victory against imperialism.

Under Reza Shah the clergy's position was severely weakened. Many religious leaders were exiled, jailed, executed, or severely limited in their ability to offer public sermons in mosques. Only those religious leaders willing to go along with pro-colonialist policies (chief among them the petroleum agreement with the British) were permitted to flourish.

Under the son Mohammed-Reza Shah the secularization of the country was completed, especially when the land reform law dealt a severe blow to the vast religious land holdings known as the "Waqf" (real estate in trust offered to religious institutions who then received its income). When the "Owqaf" (Religious Trust) bureau was created and placed under

a deputy prime minister, the control of virtually all religious affairs including the great shrines with their huge income finally fell completely into the regime's hands. Things had reached a point where in the final years of the Shah's rule no Moslem (or for that matter Jewish, Christian, or Zoroastrian) priest could take the pulpit without an advance written agreement from SAVAK.\* Violators were jailed, exiled, or executed.

On the other hand the structure of religious leadership in Shiism is a polycephalic one. A Shiite priest, in order to reach a position of prominence and to receive large religious donations, has to be popular, in addition to being knowledgeable in matters of religion. In fact through many institutional mechanisms including the mosque, the numerous religious observances and mournings, as well as the all important pilgrimage to holy places, the leadership of the Shiite sect is always in close touch with the masses, and they are therefore among the first to respond to popular social and political ailments, and to reflect them in their sermons and public statements. This is why during an important political crisis caused by capitulation to US imperialist interests in June 1963, the passage of a law in parliament depriving the Iranian legal system of jurisdiction over violations of the law by American citizens finally provided the excuse for a mass uprising during the holy month of Moharram.\*\* The war cry of the 1963 uprising was the French word "Capitulation," which had entered Iranian political jargon since the days of tsarist Russian hegemony.

The uprising was crushed by the combined forces of SAVAK and the army, leaving some 10,000 dead, many wounded and resulting in the clandestine arrest and exile of the leader of the movement — Ayatollah Ruhollah

\* SAVAK — Persian initials for the National Security and Information Organization. The secret political police that was the Shah's chief instrument of torture and repression. The American CIA and the Israeli secret police collaborated in training SAVAK officials.

\*\* The highlight of the holy month is Ashura (the tenth day), commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein — a grandson of the Prophet, who staged guerrilla warfare with 72 of his supporters against the unjust Moslem ruler Yazid.

Khomeini — a long-time political opponent of both Reza Shah and his son.

Khomeini, a devoutly fundamentalist Moslem leader, had long been lamenting the separation of religion and the state, the growing restriction of the powers of the clergy, the growing corruption and westernization of culture and morality, and capitulation to the insatiable appetite of the imperialists.

Once in exile, he had a relatively safe base of operations from which to mobilize the popular uprisings in Iran. His adoption of the demand for some democratic liberties and rights — particularly the right of the people to determine their own political regime, and the uncompromising position vis-à-vis imperialism and the Shah as an "imperialist puppet," added greatly to his mass appeal, integrating within his movement — even though on a temporary alignment — even the forces on the left. He combined skilful use of both class and cultural contradictions to get a virtually universal unity of all the popular forces against the Shah. Through the use of his religious authority, he turned every action of the regime into an opposite reaction, and every law passed by the rubber-stamp parliament into an anti-law, and every imperial decree into a divine counter-decree. Against the Shah's pompous pretence of being "the shadow of God," promising an empty "Great Civilization," Khomeini posed as the voice of God, promising liberation in this world and salvation in the hereafter.

#### Peasants and Landlords

The 1953 coup d'état brought the United States into a dominant position in Iran. The Oil Consortium Agreement gave exclusive rights to a few American, British, Dutch, and French companies and opened an unprecedented dollar flow into the economy. International capital began to flow in, in the form of food and beverage industries (Pepsi-Cola, Coca-Cola, biscuit making, . . . ), durable consumer goods (space heaters, refrigerators, . . . ), and banks (credits for construction

and consumer sectors). Military aid and "development" assistance through the US Point Four Administration (the latter two items reached some 1,000 million dollars in three years) all helped to cause a great inflation, resulting in increased imports. This in turn had the following consequences:

- a. a negative balance-of-payments situation (c. 1959-61), thus increase in foreign debts;
- b. enrichment of a handful of real-estate financiers and middlemen; and
- c. impoverishment of the masses, causing discontent, as evidenced by three changes of government in one year.

It was at this stage that the need for land reform was felt. The reasons were:

- a. the necessity for the expansion of markets for credits offered by foreign banks, hence the need to create new markets in the rural sector;
- b. the need for access to the labour of peasants who were tied down in inflexible feudal relations;
- c. need for expanded consumer goods markets;
- d. political instability in Iran and the need for some kind of a reform;
- e. fear of "communism" after the victory of the Chinese and Cuban revolutions and as a result of continued cold war between the USA and the USSR (Kennedy's foreign policy required this sort of reform);
- f. the desire of the government to break down the power of the landlords, who, along with tribal chiefs and priests constituted an important element of traditional opposition; and
- g. the need to transfer the "dead" capital of feudal landlords into active capital for financing joint ventures and other dependent industries which would help to integrate Iran more fully into the network of international capital.

For all these reasons the White Revolution — including particularly the Land Reform programme — was instituted some fifteen years ago, with



the profound impact of turning most of the feudal lords into dependent capitalists. At the same time lack of any viable substitute in the countryside for the feudal lord's capital and managerial abilities meant that the entire rural agricultural system collapsed, with many peasants migrating (often seasonally) to cities in search of construction or office jobs.\* In large measure this contributed to a partial "proletarianization" of the peasants, even though they usually did not work in full-time jobs in the factory.

### The Workers

Before Reza Shah there was little modern industry in Iran. However, traditional crafts were often produced in a semi-manufactured form in large workshops. There are references to workers' strikes in the textile "manufactories" of Kashan and Yazd as far back as the Safavid Dynasty. With the ascendance of Reza Shah to power, many new factories began to spring up for the manufacture of soap, matches, plant oils, textiles, leather, sugar, etc., in addition to the petroleum industry. He was keen on industrialization, but the western countries refused him a much desired steel mill.

His son began a crazy pitch of industrialization; in most cases he and his family had a more or less controlling share of the factories. These factories were usually joint ventures with multi-national corporations such as General Motors, General Electric, Colgate, Gründig, Pepsi-Cola, Union Carbide, and the entire range of other producers of consumer goods. Penetration by international capital dominated every aspect of life. Although in most cases the industries were capital-intensive and labour-saving, nevertheless many workers were employed. The huge basic industries which were not profitable — and no national entrepreneur would lay out the capital required — were all financed and

\* The destruction of the agricultural system, particularly the irrigation system, is described in more detail in M. Taghi Farvar, Qanats Can Make Iran's Agriculture Self-Reliant Again. Report prepared for the UN University STT project. Tehran: CENESTA, 1979 (mimeo).

operated by the government, usually at a loss. These industries thus could be considered a subsidy of government toward the cost of intermediate products used by the private sector.

In this manner Iran acquired a reasonably large labour force which figured very largely during the popular revolution of 1978-79. Workers were denied the freedom of organization, and were kept in control by forced membership in government-sponsored and SAVAK-controlled syndicates. During the revolution, most workers elected strike coordinating committees, and took important strides towards organizing authentic, democratically run workers' unions and syndicates. In some important cases they have succeeded in taking over their plants and running them through elected committees (example: Tabriz Tractor Manufacturing Corporation). But the provisional revolutionary government is adamantly opposed to labour-managed and worker-controlled enterprises. The reasons for this will become clear in the discussion of the class structure of the revolution.

### Intellectuals

We have already described the situation of the clergy in Iran. Other categories of intellectuals include the following.

Professors and students. In the meritocratic system of the national bureaucracy, involving a drive for a literate peasantry, work force and military personnel, which was a part of the need for "better" consumers, workers and soldiers, it was natural that everyone should try to rush to schools in order to assure an education leading to the highest accessible diploma — especially now that the destruction of village life did not offer a tolerable living for the future of young people. The student population and institutions of higher learning have therefore grown at an unusually fast rate, now numbering several hundred thousand in close to 200 institutions of higher learning. This layer has usually played a vanguard role in social movements, especially in the anti-imperialist and anti-dictatorial struggle.

Over the past year the National Organization of Academic Workers was established, followed by the parallel and smaller Society of Islamic Academic Workers. The former played an important role in the critical days before the revolution. Student organizations have also sprung up, chief among them the Progressive Student's Organization and the Moslem Students' Organization. There are other groups sometimes subsumed under the above headings, such as the student sympathizers of the Fedayeen (Independent Marxist-Leninist) and the student sympathizers of the Mujahedin (Progressive Islamic Socialist).

A major demand of academic workers and students has been the democratization of university structures through management by elected officials and/or mixed committees of professors, students, and employees. So far the government has largely ignored these demands, instead appointing "provisional" university rectors, who are often better known for their religious confessions than academic achievement or experience.

Schoolteachers are another group who have had a large share in the revolution, and have taken important steps towards organizing themselves in unions. Their conscientization efforts, no doubt, helped arouse hundreds of thousands of secondary school and even primary school students who participated in revolutionary work. Teaching was of course one of the few professions open to anyone with a modicum of education, given the explosion in the number of schools and students. Here, too, schoolteachers and students have become sharply divided in their political outlook and affiliations, reflecting more than ever class interests and affiliations now that the Shah is gone.

Professionals such as physicians, engineers, and lawyers have played an important role. Before the revolution, the regime had succeeded in preventing effective democratic organization of this group. For example, the Iranian Medical Association, dominated by top-level physicians loyal to the regime, effectively campaigned against innovative people-oriented medical care programmes. During the period of uprising, however, members of professions began to organize them-

selves in line with the popular movement. The Lawyers' Society, together with human rights organizations, academic workers, and writers' and journalists' organizations, had a significant impact on securing freedom for political prisoners, inspecting cities hit by counter-insurgency forces of the previous regime, and reporting to the public. During the military government of General Azhari when newspapers were shut down, these organizations put out a joint news bulletin which helped fill the information gap. Physicians organized effective medical services for the wounded, usually under dangerous conditions and despite government prohibition to do so. In fact, in the last months of the revolutionary uprisings, hospitals fulfilled the important task of communication centres, where notices, announcements, posters, exhibitions, lectures and discussion groups were put up.

Communications-media workers. Under the Shah's regime, communications media were under the strict control of SAVAK, the secret police. This included the newspapers as well as the national radio and television network, which, as the major propaganda machinery for the regime, had in recent years expanded to cover almost the entire country. In the days of the uprising these media groups organized themselves and joined the strike in late summer of 1978, during the "liberal" government of Sharif-Enrami. Subsequently, the newspapers were able to break the censorship and play an important role in disseminating information. With the reintroduction of censorship during the military government of General Azhari they went on strike once again, to reappear with the appointment of Shahpur Bakhtiar as the last prime minister of the old regime, this time completely free of government censorship. The situation was different with the radio and television networks, which continued under military occupation until the total downfall of the regime.

With the coming of the Islamic regime into power new pressure was once again put on the news media, barely able to resist, having been subjected to decades of iron control. This time the pressure for censorship was coming from "right-wing" elements of the new regime,

particularly the new supra-governmental apparatus of the so-called Islamic committees. The new censorship is coated with populism, symbolized by slogans such as "the news media must carry only what the deprived masses want them to say or write," which is not without its appeal to segments of the population, even within the media workers. In this manner the two largest daily newspapers, Ettela'at and Kayhan, have been literally taken over by the new regime, as has the radio and television network, in spite of resistance by their semi-organized professional staff.

In this respect the experience of the third largest daily newspaper, Ayandegan, is interesting. It was the only newspaper the total control of which was taken over by an elected committee of writers and workers within the paper. To date, it has managed to remain an essentially free press in spite of a great moral and physical pressure to destroy its autonomy.

Intellectual societies of minority religions (Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian) have also organized themselves along progressive, anti-imperialist, anti-dictatorship lines and have begun their activities over the past year.

#### The Petty Bourgeoisie

The bazaar is the centre of the traditional petty bourgeoisie. They align themselves for the time being on the side of national capitalism, as many of them are the most likely candidates to form the corps of the coming national bourgeoisie (should it succeed in flourishing in Iran). This social group has provided the main financing for the revolution, particularly through contributing religious tithes, offerings, and taxes. Their strikes (closing down the bazaar) were most influential in fomenting the revolution. In some cities, such as Qom, the shops remained closed for some 15 months straight, as shopkeepers vowed not to reopen until the regime had been overthrown. Over the past year the bazaar's political influence has extended over to

cover most of the independent shops and businesses. They paid substantial sums to the Ayatollah to support his struggle, and made generous financial contributions to workers and university professors on strike during the time their payrolls had been suspended.

### Civil Servants

The civil service apparatus had witnessed an explosive growth under the Pahlavis. The high rate of inflation and the strong social/cultural disintegration of the Iranian society also affected this layer, which then began to organize itself during the uprising. They offered to take over and run their respective ministries and institutions, and in many cases did so. But once again the new government has strongly discouraged this move. Among the decisively revolutionary acts of civil service employees we can cite the following:

- Central Bank employees published a long list of all individuals who had taken out of the country more than \$1,500,000 in foreign currencies, which exposed many highly placed government officials and military chiefs. They also demanded an end to the dependence of Iran's monetary system on the US dollar.
- Ministry of Finance employees refused to receive taxes, thereby helping bring the Shah's regime to bankruptcy.
- Utilities workers (big dams and other power stations) shut down the electricity regularly during peak propaganda hours of the national television network, thus helping to cripple the power of the regime's media.
- Customs officials refused to allow the huge imports to be cleared, thus helping bring the dependent economy to a stand-still.
- Plan and Budget Organization employees went on strike and refused to approve and fund government plans, programmes, and projects.
- TV, radio, and newspaper employees and workers went on strike and crippled the propaganda apparatus. The newspapers gained their freedom both before and after the military cabinet of General Azhari.

### The Ruling Class

The royal family had most of the privileges. They owned much land usurped by their father Reza Shah from peasants and landlords alike. They had a controlling share of most major profit-making enterprises and banks, and headed all major cultural, social, and non-governmental organizations, including universities, and semi-governmental organizations such as the Department of the Environment, which were all used to enhance their personal gains.

Top military commanders. To rise above the level of a colonel, one needed to prove beyond doubt one's loyalty and servility to the royal family and one's adherence to the "imperial culture." In turn the top military brass received huge benefits, free servants, large land-holdings, and a share of many corporations. When they retired, they were imposed, as highly paid consultants and employees, upon governmental and non-governmental organizations. Some even had a share of huge commissions and kick-backs on major military purchases.

Big capitalists (originally from the feudal land-owning class). In most instances they belonged to members of the ten or twelve dozen ruling families of Iran, whose interests have run hand in hand with the royal family's interests, both before and after the Pahlavis came to power. Members of this grouping usually organized themselves in secret "brotherhoods" with foreign ties, particularly the Masonic lodges, which served as political-interest groups having virtual monopoly over top government positions and policies. These were the partners of the multinational corporations and the great traders and contractors, and in most instances pumped their profits straight out of the country as soon as they got their hands on it. Many of these people left Iran in the last months of the revolution, taking their huge cash holdings with them to safe abodes abroad, and leaving their local enterprises at the mercy of events. Most of their former workers and employees are now unemployed.

High technocrats. This stratum was the right arm of the regime. They

were the planners in and out of government, who translated every important theory of dependence into action programmes, input-output tables, and time projections. They strengthened the hand of international capital, brought in scores of thousands of foreign experts to help them in their tasks and share in the boom, destroyed the functioning ganats, irrigation canals, villages, towns, pastures and forests, and tried to bring everything and everyone into neat and controllable equations. They also performed a great service to Iran by unwittingly helping the regime dig its grave faster than it could have by its own limited wits.

The aristocracy. Some were pulled into the arts and philosophy, but most were absorbed in the neo-capitalist class and went their way.

In the end, the whirlpool of almost unlimited corruption seduced all of the ruling class, to the point that they got caught in the conflict between individual unlimited self-interest and their own class interests. Blinded by immediate gain, many neglected their collective class interests, which no doubt lay in a prolongation of the system: in keeping alive the goose-like regime that laid the golden egg.



#### IV. CLASS STRUCTURE OF THE REVOLUTION

The preceding discussion is meant to throw some light on the complex class structure of Iran. When the regime wore itself down, there were two opposite forces facing each other. On the one hand there was international imperialism, headed by the USA, together with its local, dictatorial junior partners. On the other there was the "people." The "people" consisted of a combination of several social strata and classes — namely, all the elements which were exploited by this unholy alliance. They included:

- a. The national bourgeoisie — severely weakened by the pervading dependent growth model. They were represented politically by the National Front — a weak coalition of listless nationalist parties left over from the time of Mossadeq.
- b. The petty bourgeoisie — headed by the bazaar. Seriously affected by monopoly capital and the giant import-export mafia (itself headed by the royal family), they were primarily represented by the leading clergy and, to a lesser extent, also by the National Front.
- c. Workers — exploited, kept from organizing themselves, and fighting a losing battle against growing inflation.
- d. Peasants — in a state of utter and nearly complete ruin. Under debt to government institutions and middlemen, and having to rely on seasonal migration and imported food products for their survival. They were unable to maintain their irrigation infrastructures and could not afford to hire labour at times of peak demand due to migration and high cost of labour. Tribesmen, dispossessed of their pastures, and often forcibly sedentarized, also belonged to this category.
- e. Intellectuals — persecuted, deprived of all means of expression

and caught in the losing battle of rising costs of living. Unable to teach, write or speak about their ideas due to the ever-present censorship and secret police surveillance.

- f. Civil servants — also caught in the spiralling cost of living, and alienated in their work environment due to meaningless work and no participation in decision-making.

The alliance of these popular forces soon took a firm root. They were ready for a change, but lacked the necessary leadership to mobilize their potential of untapped powers. This leadership could not be provided by the left, for three major reasons.

- a. The government clamped down on leftist activity harder than any other. They had no place to meet, and no means to express themselves without risking getting caught in short order.
- b. Negative historic experience. The old left consisted of the Tudeh (Communist) party, which at the time of the late Dr. Mossadeq reached its peak. It had a wide base of support among workers, intellectuals, and the armed forces alike. But, being closely tied to Moscow, it missed the historic chance to rise to the occasion in 1953 when Mossadeq, the vanguard of nationalist and democratic bourgeoisie, was overthrown. Its inaction heavily contributed to the massacre of thousands of communists and their sympathizers, the abandoning of Iran to a quarter of a century of ruthless imperialist exploitation and absolute dictatorship, as well as loss of their mass appeal. Many Iranians have not forgiven this inaction on the part of the Tudeh.
- c. Because of the lack of meaningful contact with the working class for many years, the remaining leftists in Iran have been caught in a vicious circle of in-breeding. Even their terminology is alien and incomprehensible to the masses. With some notable exceptions, Iranian leftists, often caught in western classicism, dogma, and inflexibility, have neglected the adaptation of their models to the cultural reality of Iran. If anything, they have tended to be anti-cultural, in the sense of living and insisting on introducing a lifestyle quite alien to mass culture, and unable to incorporate deep-seated cultural elements into their ideologies and action programmes.

For these reasons the working class have been separated from the ideology that was designed to give them the leadership, and have thus been unable to lead the revolution. The task therefore fell on the petty bourgeoisie, who used the ideology that serves them — that of religion. Meanwhile, in spite of a great deal of torture and persecution, religion had two major elements in its favour: (a) it enjoyed relatively safer and sacred sanctuaries in which to grow and act. And (b) it was pre-adapted to the culture of the masses. Shiism is particularly well endowed with revolutionary ideology and examples. It encourages the exploited and the deprived to rise up against the oppressor and obtain their right. "I hate an oppressed person who holds his oppressor in awe," Ali is reported as having said. The mourning for Hussain, the embodiment of the revolutionary oppressed, was kept alive for 13 centuries to finally be re-enacted on a giant scale. "Life," said Hussain, "is nothing but ideology and struggle."\*

It was thus that the clergy, always responsive to the suffering of the masses, rose to the occasion. With the dual slogan "Down with the Shah and his satanical imperialist masters," Khomeini kept exhorting the masses to lose all fear and rise up to grab what was rightfully theirs. And thus the forces of the "people" won, at least for the time being, after uniting all their forces in an unprecedented gigantic wave of human pressure.

After successfully leading the revolution to victory, the petty bourgeoisie seems to have allied itself with the national bourgeoisie, itself highly weakened and shaky due to a quarter of a century of severe beating. The tactical alliance was symbolized by the agreement reached in Paris between the two leaders, Ayatollah Khomeini and Karim Sanjabi, the leader of the National Front. From their meeting emerged the joint insistence on a republic based on popular elections and Islamic principles.

\* "Kill, if you can, in the defense of Right," said Dr. Ali Shari'ati, usually credited with the revival of modern revolutionary Shiism; "if you cannot, then die [as a martyr]." Both cases would help a believer go to heaven. The task of the Islamic leadership was basically to turn the struggle for national liberation into a Holy War, which was done successfully by utilizing Shiite revolutionary symbolism.

## V. THE CONFLICTING FORCES IN IRAN TODAY

We shall now turn to the role of various forces that are currently at play on the Iranian scene. Among them, we will review briefly the armed revolutionary groups and the various religious groupings.

### Armed Revolutionary Groups

Even though the Iranian revolution was exemplary in being a fundamentally "non-violent" one, a number of armed groups have played an important role in critical periods. There are several major categories of these distinguishable:

1. The Fedayeen-e-Khalgh (Sacrificial Forces of the People). Marxist-Leninist, independent of the USSR, China, and Albania. One of the oldest armed groups, committed to setting up the "true party of the working class." Highly adept in theoretical Marxist-Leninist analysis of contemporary Iran, with fairly strong following among students, workers, intellectuals, and women.\* Beset with serious financial difficulties, and well armed, they have quite close and amicable ties with the Sunni minority tribes in Kurdistan and Turkmanistan, and many sympathizers among Shiite tribal people. They have put out many analytical, historical, and research-oriented publications, as well as descriptions of their wealth of experience with armed struggle. On the first day of the armed uprising in February 1979 they played a crucial

\* When women were protesting against the imposition of the veil, it was primarily the Fedayeen who formed an armed protective barrier around the tens of thousands of demonstrating women who were threatened and beaten by hecklers.

role in rushing to the rescue of air force personnel who had staged a determined armed mutiny in their Tehran air base, and played a critical role in taking over the national radio and television network and many military bases. They fully support the Provisional Government in all their anti-imperialist, nationalist, and anti-dictatorial activities. Still operating partially underground.

Offshoots: An apparently small group who claim affiliation with the Tudeh (Moscow-backed Communist) party.

2. The Mujahedin-e-Khalgh ("Crusaders" of the People). Progressive Islamic socialist, independent. Almost as old as the Fedayeen. Insist on a "true" and "purist" interpretation of the Koran, "liberated from the later superimposed ideology of the ruling classes." Working towards the Unitary (Holistic Islamic) Classless Society (based on the Koranic idea of qist) where the fruits of no one's labour would go to feed others. Socialist and working-class oriented. Also beset with serious financial difficulties. Most Mujahedin accept dialectic materialism as a basic tool of analysis, and regard Marxism as a social science which must be studied and used where possible. Also enjoy a wide base of support among students and workers. With a wealth of revolutionary armed experience, they have much less organized publications programmes, largely due to earlier internal feuds in the organization which nearly decimated it. During the massive popular street demonstrations they were the only leftist group able to march under their own banner, being an Islamic group, and gained wide publicity. Also involved in the February armed uprising. Quite well armed, they, too, support the government in their anti-imperialist, nationalist, and anti-dictatorial actions. Although their armed units have remained underground, they have been able to launch an open national political movement.

Offshoots: Some years ago a severe internal rift took place between those members who had become convinced through their theoretical studies that the organization should go all the way and openly to the Marxist-Leninist side and an apparently smaller number who wanted to

remain as they were, within the framework of Islam. This coincided with SAVAK infiltration of both sides and was a severe blow to the organization. Each side accused the other of betrayal. After re-organizing, the Mujahedin have managed to regain a large following and will no doubt play an important role in the future course of evolution of Iran.

3. Fedayeen-e-Islam and other fundamentalist groups. Largely formed as local responses to local situations, they played an important role in some cities by assassinating those members of the police corps who had been known to have shot and murdered people during the popular street demonstrations. Those who did not join the Mujahedin-e-Khalq have recently merged to form the "Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution" — an obvious attempt to use the popular name "Mujahedin," which may even have a discrediting effect on the Mujahedin-e-Khalq. With notably right-wing anti-intellectual, anti-socialist tendencies, they continue to hold the threat of assassination and persecution over the heads of those who dare walk astray from their interpretation of true Islam, which is vindictive and intolerant rather than compassionate and merciful.

It is not known whether this new organization has any affiliations with any powers outside of Iran. They are highly armed and said to be supported or at least encouraged by certain elements in the still secret Revolutionary Council, the many local Revolutionary Islamic Committees, and possibly even some elements within the provisional government other than Bazargan, who opposes all actions leading to disorder and reduced authority for his coalition revolutionary government.

4. Armed irregulars, now mostly organized in the so-called Islamic Revolutionary Guards (an Islamic militia). These are the armed civilians who obtained their arms mostly in the attack on military bases in February 1979, but who have since gone through a "purge" in their local mosque-based committees. Among them are many supporters of the new extreme rightist group described above. In fact, according to

a television interview with a leader of the aforementioned group, the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution have been commissioned to train the Islamic militia. The latter control the city streets and highways at nights and sometimes also in the daytime. They seem to be responsible for the numerous attacks on leftist exhibits, political meetings, demonstrations by unemployed workers and tribal minorities demanding local autonomy. They were also implicated in the recent kidnapping and torture of the children of Ayatollah Taleghani, leader of the progressive Islamic movement. Although many of these youngsters are serving without remuneration in the public interest, many among them are subject to manipulation by adventurist remnants of the previous regime. In the eyes of an increasing number of people, they constitute a threat to much-needed post-revolutionary stability, unity, calm as well as progressive ideas.

#### The Islamic Forces

Within the Islamic movement, we can already detect two lines: (a) Those who consider Islam a progressive school of thought that can provide a revolutionary ideology of struggle against injustice and oppression. (b) Those who primarily regard it as a religion through whose institutional mechanisms they can be provided with what they consider due to them according to their class interests (religious tithes, taxes, and trusts, mass following and political influence, . . . ). This group, who had succeeded in establishing their hegemony particularly since the Safavid days, have gradually lost their privileges, particularly during the Pahlavi dynasty. They are a sizeable group, and, according to news reports and recent analyses, are using the "Islamic" committees as a basis of power. The Islamic Revolutionary Council is thought to be dominated by these types, who are, in a way, distrustful of leaving things up to the secular government appointed by Khomeini.

Within the progressive line there are also two schools of thought:

(a) Those who advocate a classless society and believe Islam to be a

strong basis for socialist organization of a worker-controlled society in which exploitation of man by man based on surplus value is totally banned in accordance with unambiguous Koranic teachings. They are best exemplified by the armed military political group of Mujahedin-e-Khalq. (b) Those who advocate an Islamic government of justice for all.\* They maintain that a classless society is unattainable, and it is enough to file down the sharper edges of the exploitation of man by man. The government of Bazargan — with its social democratic tendencies — is in line with this.

Many believe that the internal contradiction between the progressive and the fundamentalist Islamic forces is the principal contradiction of post-revolutionary Iran of today, and that the existence of one necessarily denies the existence of the other. This is why all progressive social groups, regardless of whether they are religious or secular, believe it is everyone's duty to do everything possible to strengthen the government's hand in gaining control and installing itself firmly. All other considerations are regarded as being of secondary importance now.

Leaving known external influences aside for a moment, we can arrive at the schematic representation of major political forces at play today shown in figure 1.

The leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, seems to be caught in the middle of all these conflicting forces. To maintain his position as an uncontested leader, he must balance all the forces out and offer each some points in order to keep them from splintering away from the movement. We believe he personally has varying degrees of tendency in all directions shown in the diagram, but he cannot continue to play all sides against the middle indefinitely.

Three possible scenarios are discernible for the outcome (see figure 1):

\* It is interesting that from the Arabic root ʿdl (justice) the word tæ'dil (moderation, reducing of differences) is derived.



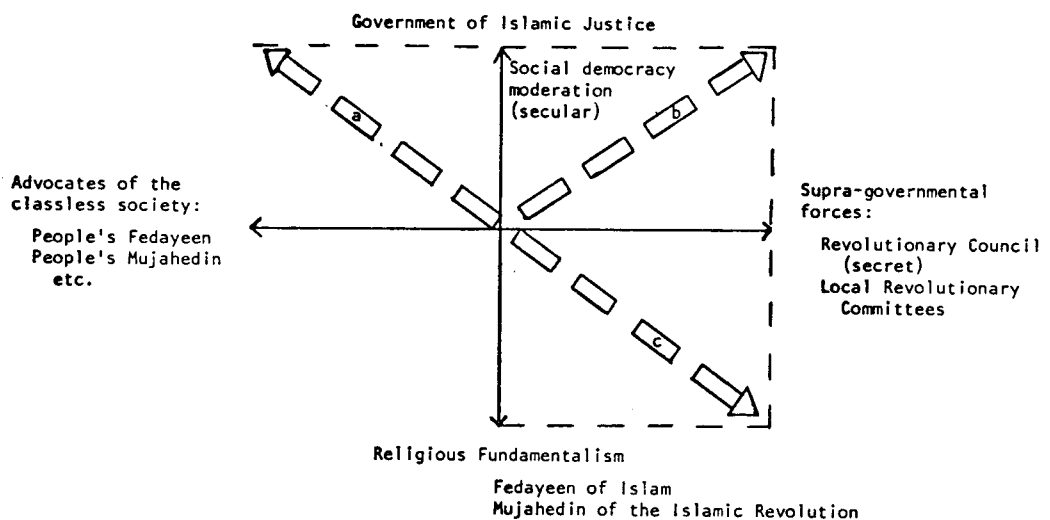


FIG. 1. Major Political Forces at Play in Iran

- a. The government of Bazargan or his successors, who cannot hold out on their own (because the class base they represent has received nearly fatal blows for so long), will align itself with the working class — even though the two may be considered to be potential class enemies. The result will be a progressive government combining the pragmatism of the present government with revolutionary ideas in favour of the working class. This will result in an independent, gradualistic achievement of a socialist society which reserves a fair place for religion as a guiding light but is not overwhelmed by it. Would it survive in the present political atmosphere and future competition of the super-powers? Of course it is impossible to predict. But we believe that without strengthening its support base among the workers this government can neither survive nor resist possible strong attacks from within and without the country.
- b. The present tendency of the government in having to concede its power to the Islamic committees seems to be leading back to some kind of coalition with dependent capitalism and fundamentalist religion — a kind of Shah-like regime without the Shah. It will not be stable, as the two lines are fundamentally at odds with each other.
- c. If alternative a is not followed and b fails, the way to a closer alliance between the component elements of c will be left open. A rightist, dictatorial regime will emerge which will try to

eliminate all forces to its own left.

Alternative a is not happening, and is ruled out at the present time. Alternative b is already almost there. Some signs: continued heavy reliance on oil exports for financing the government's operations; refusal to nationalize foreign capital assets in Iran;\* continued permission for the operation of joint ventures, and local outlets of multinational corporations; continued import of agricultural and meat products to prevent popular dissatisfaction, without any fundamental programme for bolstering the agricultural self-reliance of Iran; huge financial assistance to industrialists; opposition to worker-controlled enterprises; reliance on top-down appointment of directors and managers everywhere instead of taking advantage of the popular thirst for participation and control of decision-making processes; tight control of the news media, especially the radio and television network and the major daily newspapers — particularly concerning news of the left (whether religious or non-religious) and of worker protests — resulting in a one-sided, dull information flow just as before the revolution.

Alternative c would spell disaster, but would not be viable. Nearly complete disintegration of society would follow the right-wing dictatorship.

There are of course other forces at play and the situation is a dynamic one. One of these elements is rivalry among the leading religious factions. Chief among these are Ayatollah Taleghani and Ayatollah Shariat-Madari. The former is usually identified as one of the major leaders of the Mujahedin-e-Khalgh, while the latter, having considerable influence especially in Turkish-speaking regions such as Azerbaijan, has started his own political party, called the People's Islamic Republican Party (PIRP), which can already boast several million followers/members. The party was created immediately after the announcement of the birth of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) shortly after the revolution, which is backed by Ayatollah Khomeini and,

\* With minor exceptions so far being banks and insurance companies.

apparently, some of the members of the secret Revolutionary Council. The PIRP has taken consistently fairly "progressive" stands on issues such as the nationalities rights, democracy, an elected constituent assembly rather than a straight referendum as the present regime would want. However, one major aim of the PIRP seems to be the seizing of an initiative on these matters in order to ensure that popular discontent is contained within the religious hierarchy rather than allowing the left to seize this initiative.

## VI. SUPERPOWER INFLUENCES, AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

Two factors which have been left out of the above scenarios are foreign (superpower) influences and the present economic crisis in Iran.

The superpowers do not intend to leave Iran alone if they can help it. Iran has some 3,000 km of common border with the USSR, in addition to about 1,500 km with Afghanistan. There is also the rapidly revitalizing Tudeh party. Added to this are tens of thousands of Iranian political refugees in the Soviet Union who are now returning to Iran. The USA has all the remnants of the former regime, including many "former" SAVAK officials, still active, and probably acting under its direct control. There are many CIA spies still active in Iran.\* Certain pro-American elements are reported to be very highly placed within the revolution's new leadership apparatus, including an ex-Chief of Staff of the Revolutionary Committees who had to resign after his anti-communist, pro-American ties were exposed. Another example is the now assassinated General Qarani, who was appointed as Commander in Chief of the Islamic Armed Forces of Iran (the former Imperial Armed Forces). He had played a prominent role in the CIA-staged 1953 coup d'état, and was the author of an abortive pro-American coup d'état against the Shah at the time of President John F. Kennedy.

There are newspaper reports of newly arrived naturalized US citizens having very high posts in the revolutionary government, who are organizing apparently "right-wing" Islamic militia forces, and exerting a suspiciously disproportionate influence over the fate of the country. The incomprehensible tendency of both the government and the religious

\* See John Kelly, "CIA In Iran," Counter Spy, April/May 1979.

leadership of the Revolution to maintain an aura of secrecy over the membership and functioning of the supreme Revolutionary Council, the Islamic courts, and the decentralized Islamic Revolutionary Committees (IRC) certainly does not help its image in Iran and prevents popular participation in decisions and in safeguarding against suspicious infiltration by counter-revolutionary or imperialist agents.

The economic crisis is of staggering proportions; with most factories still closed down and construction activity at a standstill, there are now over 4,000,000 unemployed workers. Together with their families and households, this may mean that between half and two-thirds of the total Iranian population have no source of livelihood at present, and the future looks dim. No serious programme is in the offing, other than trying to persuade entrepreneurs to give workers a few more months' salary and giving employers and entrepreneurs huge loans and grants.

The economic crisis will no doubt sharpen the explosive class struggle in Iran, which will in turn produce fundamental changes in the balance of internal forces in Iran. Super-structural issues now dividing many people will tend to disappear, and class interests will come to the fore.

In conclusion, a great deal will depend in the future on the combination of internal forces (political, economic, cultural) and outside (super-power) interests. The United States is still counting on what is left of its once expansive network of influence to preserve its essential interests, which are perhaps above all strategic now rather than economic. It is probably doing all it can to influence the course of events so that an anti-communist, capitalist regime emerges from the ashes of the old regime. The Soviet Union has its friends and allies, too, but its policy seems to be primarily tactical support (perhaps even a coalition) with the dominant pro-Khomeini forces. The alternatives posed by the independent left (i.e., the People's Fedayeen and the People's Mujahedin organizations) would no doubt be undesirable from the Soviet point of view: An independent Marxist-Leninist regime

might turn into a second potential China on the USSR's borders, and a progressive Islamic Socialist regime might be too attractive an alternative for USSR's own tens of millions of Moslems.

Meanwhile a tense border situation exists with Iraq and Afghanistan, and major nationality groups are turning away from the new regime.

Will Iran be able to achieve political, as well as economic, self-reliance? Will she be allowed to evolve her own strategy of liberation and socio-economic development so as to rectify all the ills that brought havoc to the land and the peoples of Iran under the Shah? Or will there be a new dependent capitalist or dependent socialist future — or even a new autocracy which uses the guise of religion and democracy while keeping a paternalistic structure, where, again, a small group has the privilege of dominating the masses and depriving them of their right to shape freely their own future? The former could become a great new example for other dominated societies to use, and the latter would obviously be an excellent lesson of what to avoid.\*

\* This article is the first in a series devoted to an analysis of the Iranian situation. Others will deal with different aspects of the situation, and will be a part of CENESTA's contributions to the United Nations University's Project on Goals, Processes, and Indicators of Development. The intention is to develop them into a book to be published in various languages, particularly to make the information available to the struggling peoples of the Third World.