

ONE REVOLUTION OR TWO? THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

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Introduction

The bicentennial of the French Revolution happens to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Iranian Revolution. While the first has been widely regarded as the quintessential social and transformative revolution, the second is problematical both theoretically and politically. Whereas the October Revolution was in many ways the vanguard revolution par excellence, the Iranian Revolution appears retrograde. In the Marxist view, revolution is an essential part of the forward march of history, a progressive step creating new social-productive relations as well as a new political system, consciousness and values. In this context, how might events in Iran be termed 'revolutionary'? Precisely what kind of a revolution transpired between 1977 and 1979 (and afterward)? Surely clerical rule cannot be regarded as progressive? In what sense, then, can we regard the Iranian Revolution as a step forward in the struggle for emancipation of the Iranian working classes? Clearly the Iranian Revolution presents itself as an anomaly.

The major revolutions that have been observed and theorized are categorized by Marxists as bourgeois or socialist **revolutions**.¹ This is determined by the revolution's ideology, leadership, programme, class base and orientation, and by changes in the social structure following the change of regime. Further, there is a relationship between modernity and revolution, as discussed by Marx and **Engels** in *The Communist Manifesto*, suggested by Marshall **Berman** in his engaging *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, and elaborated by Perry Anderson in a recent essay.² Some academic theorists of revolution and social change (**Barrington Moore**, **Theda Skocpol**, **Charles Tilly**, **Ellen Kay Trimberger**, **Susan Eckstein**, taking their cue from Marx) have stressed the *modernizing* role played by revolutions. But in these respects, too, the Iranian case presents difficulties: a) during much of the anti-Shah uprising there was neither a definitive leadership nor a coherent programme; b) the social structural outcome of the Revolution was neither bourgeois nor socialist; c) the whole experiment is regarded as anti-modern and anti-western. How, then, to approach the Iranian Revolution? .

This essay implicitly takes issue with the perception of the Iranian Revolution as *suigeneris* and unlike any other 'great' or Third World revolution. This

is not to deny its original features and its specificities (to be described below), including its emergence in the context of contemporary 'political Islam' in the region, but rather to contest the prevailing ('orientalist') perspective of the Middle East as the unpredictable and incomprehensible 'Other'. The specific features of the Iranian Revolution and its outcome (indeed, the phenomenon of political Islam in the Middle East) must be understood in terms of the absence of a thorough-going bourgeois revolution in the region. I also dispute the characterization of the Revolution as reactionary.³ My argument is that what transpired in 1977–79 was a political revolution against the Shah, the salient features of which were populist, anti-imperialist, and anti-monarchical, with strong Third Worldist underpinnings. Beginning spontaneously and containing diverse strands, it lacked a clear programme for modernization or democratization but had an overall emancipatory character. It was populist by virtue of its multi- and cross-class composition, petty-bourgeois outlook, and discursive framework (elevation of 'the people'; demands for independence [*esteqlal*], freedom [*azadi*], and republic [*jomhouri*]). The language and organizational resources of the Islamic establishment eventually dominated the anti-shah movement, and Ayatollah Khomeini became the charismatic leader of the Revolution in its final stages, but the question of **class/state/political** power was by no means settled; indeed multiple sovereignty and power contention continued until 1981. It was then that Islamization, a process which had begun at least as early as April 1980 (the advent of the 'Islamic cultural revolution'⁷), was carried out systematically. Islamization was meant to transform existing social structures – the political system, values and property relations – to conform to an ill-defined and contested (amongst Islamicists) Islamic norm. This is the sense in which the question of one revolution (the populist revolution against the Shah, a 'punctual' even, to draw again from **Perry Anderson**)⁴ or two (the second being the attempt to transform society by means of Islamization) becomes salient in the Iranian case.

I shall also argue, however, that while an analytical (and political) distinction is called for between the Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic, the latter is in some measure an extension of the Revolution and therefore contains the modern features demanded by the Revolution (Parliament, constitutional separation of powers, universal suffrage, elections, etc.). This essay will demonstrate that due to its populist nature and the outcome of the power struggle (themselves rooted in pre-revolutionary developments), the Iranian Revolution was followed by a contradictory new social order which is best described as Islamic populism.⁵ Furthermore, and despite itself, the Islamic Republic is not, and cannot be, anti-modern.

The Roots of the Revolution

The character of the Iranian Revolution, the clerical access to resources and organizational facilities, the outcome of the power struggle between clerics,

liberals and leftists, and the Islamic Republic's intractable hostility toward superpowers were shaped and conditioned by events in Iran since the beginning of the century. The overview of recent Iranian political history which follows suggests the salience of what Moore has called 'suppressed historical alternatives.'⁶

Domestic class and political struggles unfolded within the context of uneven socio-economic development and a consistent pattern of foreign domination. The **Constitutional** Revolution (1906–11) was a watershed in modern Iranian political history, and was **carried** out and supported by Iran's intelligentsia, bazaaris, and some clerics. One cleric, however, Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri, was hanged by the constitutionalists for his opposition to constitutional rule and insistence on an Islamic state. (Not surprisingly, he is considered a hero and martyr by today's Islamicist rulers.) Constitutional monarchy and Iranian sovereignty were violated and undermined by British and Czarist Russian intervention and opposed by the Qajar monarchs. Soviet Russia's renunciation in 1917 of Czarist imperialist policies offered some relief, but British intrigue continued apace, mainly to guarantee control over Iran's oil industry. A brief experiment in parliamentarism and republicanism was terminated by the assumption to power of Reza Khan, commander of the British-controlled Cossack Brigade, who crowned himself Shah in 1928. Socialist and communist parties, ethnic-based movements for autonomy, and the incipient trade union movement were repressed as Reza Shah built a centralized state with a modern military, a growing bureaucracy, Iran's first university, and infrastructural projects including roads, railroads and light industries. This process of modernization from above was neither deep nor extensive, and feudal relations remained pervasive. Moreover, Reza Shah appropriated estates, villages, and forests for his personal use, and the Pahlavi family emerged as major landowners.'

Iranian sovereignty was once again violated in 1941, when the Allied powers rejected Iranian claims of neutrality in the Second World War. Iran was occupied by British forces in the south, Soviet forces in the north, and American forces in the centre. Nonetheless, the interregnum (1941–53) afforded yet another experiment in parliamentarism, and the respite from dictatorship encouraged the revival of socialist and communist parties, nationalist politics, militant trade unions, and ethnic-based autonomy movements. The period 1941–46 saw the rise and rapid expansion of the Tudeh ('masses') Party, Iran's pro-soviet communist party. It also witnessed the rise and fall (1945–46) of the **Mahabad** Republic (in Kurdistan) and of the Azarbaijan Autonomous Republic, both remarkable experiments in ethnic self-rule.

Following the withdrawal of Red Army forces in 1946, domestic politics became more contentious. The young Shah (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) sought to strengthen his position; various prime ministers came and went (and one was assassinated); the Tudeh Party agitated for oil concession rights for the Soviet Union; the nationalists, led by Mohammad Mossadegh of the

National Front, sought to legislate Iranian ownership and control of the oil industry. The 16th Majlis (Iran's Parliament) voted to nationalize oil and take over the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and Mossadegh became prime minister in 1951. A Western boycott of Iranian oil, British and American subterfuge, tensions between nationalists, communists, and clerics, intrigue by the Shah and his twin sister Ashraf Pahlavi, and finally, a CIA-sponsored coup d'etat in August 1953, combined to end the interregnum, terminated the process of parliamentarism and democratization, and ushered in the second dictatorship. **Had** the coup not been engineered, a very different kind of Iran would have emerged from the process.

It is important to appreciate the impact on later developments of the nature and principal features of the second Pahlavi regime: highly centralized, anti-democratic, autocratic and personalist, dependent capitalist, pro-American, extremely inegalitarian and violently opposed to political participation by liberals or the Left. The National Front and the Tudeh Party were all but destroyed; subsequently they operated clandestinely and in exile. The Tudeh-leaning Confederation of Trade Unions was dismantled and yellow syndicates organized in its stead. Nationalization was not repealed, but effective control was transferred to a consortium of major international oil companies, which bought, refined and distributed the crude oil extracted from the southern oilfields. (The Abadan refinery was for domestic consumption.) A large and ferocious secret police, SAVAK, was organized in the **mid-1950s**, and formerly militant factories and workplaces were regulated by semi-retired military men and SAVAK agents. This prohibited the rise of autonomous class organizations.

The new Kennedy Administration urged the reluctant Shah to institute social-economic reforms, and the **U.S.-approved** Amini cabinet sponsored an agrarian reform law that was the brainchild of the populist Agriculture Minister, Hassan Arsanjani. Five other reforms – the vote for women, profit-sharing for factory workers, nationalization of forests, literacy corps, and sale of public sector factories to pay compensation to landlords affected by land redistribution – came to be called the White Revolution; this was put to a referendum in January 1963. The White Revolution was strongly opposed by a major cleric, Rouhollah Khomeini, and other clergy; they disliked the land reform (because it would take some property belonging to the religious establishment), votes for women, and the Shah's high-handedness. The National Front, now nominally revived, favoured the reforms but opposed the unconstitutionality of their implementation. Nonetheless, the citizenry approved the reform by an overwhelming majority.

That Spring, tensions mounted as clerics demonstrated against the reforms and the Shah's regime. Khomeini became increasingly vocal and vehement in his criticism of the regime, calling it 'tyrannical'. The protests and demonstrations were joined by other opponents of the 'coup d'etat regime', and an uprising took place in June 1963 involving teachers, students, writers, **bazaaris**

and clerics that has since been called a dress rehearsal for the 1977–79 revolution. It was brutally put down but, like the 1953 coup d'etat, never forgotten.

In 1964 the issue of granting diplomatic immunity to American citizens, military or civilian, engaged in military projects in Iran caught the popular imagination. Public opinion was so strong against this that the otherwise docile Majlis deputies were unwilling to pass the appropriate bill. Once again protests arose, and Khomeini was vocal and visible. As a result, he was exiled from Iran. He spent a year in Turkey before moving on to Najaf, Iraq, where he stayed until 1978. Thereafter the American presence in Iran increased, and the benefits enjoyed by the United States in its 'special relationship' with Iran included an intelligence listening post on the border with the Soviet Union. In return, the Shah could acquire whatever military hardwares his heart desired, paid for by Iranian oil **revenues**.⁸

Notwithstanding Khomeini's exile, the clergy in Iran did not wane but on the contrary enjoyed rights, benefits, and privileges beyond the wildest dreams of liberal and left-wing dissidents. In the first instance, the clerical establishment had a nation-wide network of mosques which actually expanded during the second Pahlavi **rule**.⁹ Moreover, there was the array of theological seminaries, religious charities, endowments, lecture halls, religious journals, periodicals and publications, and access to official and government-controlled print and electronic media. For example, Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, later a leading ideologue of Islamic revolution, appeared on radio and television, and was interviewed by magazines and newspapers. His views on Islamic marriage and his criticism of gender relations in the 'godless societies' of the West and East were well known as they had been serialized in the popular women's magazine, *Zan-e Rouz* (Today's Woman). The Hosseinih Ershad, a religious forum in northern Tehran, was frequented by many of the later leaders of the Islamic Republic, including Ayatollah Beheshti (leader of the Islamic Republican Party after the Revolution) and Hojatoleslam Ali Khamene'i (currently Iran's President). It was here that Dr. **Ali Shariati**, the Paris-educated Islamic sociologist, lectured prior to his imprisonment and exile from **Iran**.¹⁰

In their publications and public speeches, the clerics and their lay associates – many of whom were Western-educated and inspired by Third World anti-imperialism – crafted a radical-populist Islamic discourse which condemned oppression, privileged the poor, called for a 'government of God', sympathized with national liberation movements in the Third World (and Black struggles in the U.S.), and denounced secularism, materialism, communism and westernization. These themes struck a responsive chord among the urban poor, the traditional petty bourgeoisie suffering from anomie, alienated workers, and **passive-aggressive** members of the educated middle class. Contributors to this discourse included **Ali Shariati**, Abolhassan **Bani-Sadr** (a Paris-educated economist), and the Narodnik-like Iranian writer,

Jalal Al-e Ahmad.¹¹ The latter penned an enormously popular tract entitled *Gharbzadegi* (variously translated as Occidentosis, Euromania, West-struckness) which was an extended attack on Iran's westernized intellectuals and bureaucrats. As a concept and as an idea, *gharbzadegi* permanently entered the Iranian lexicon. After the Revolution, this term was used as a pejorative toward certain individuals, organizations and ideas deemed un-Islamic and/or 'alien'.

In contrast to the activities, resources and legal status of the Islamicists, the Tudeh Party remained banned, and the guerrilla organizations (Fedayee and **Mojahedin**), formed in the early 1970s, were hounded and nearly decimated by 1975. Without access to the type of vast organizational resources at the clergy's disposal, the Left was at a decided disadvantage when the revolution erupted. That the Left organizations (particularly the new guerrilla groups) managed to attract followers at all and mobilize public opinion as well as organize workers and peasants is all the more remarkable. It should be noted that this is attributable not only to the tireless organizing efforts of party cadres, the moral example set by the left organizations and expected of a membership that was self-sacrificing, serious, puritanical, and utterly devoted to the people's cause, the positive popular image of the Fedayee and the **Mojahedin** created by their years of armed struggle against the vastly superior army, gendarmerie and police, and the many 'martyrs' that died under torture or in battles with the authorities. It is also testimony to the tenacity and rootedness of the socialist tradition in Iran (and its inevitability, given the development of capitalism and the advent of some modernity) – a fact that the Islamicists would deny.¹²

By the mid-1970s, a number of factors converged to create what has been called the structural origins of the Revolution, a series of events, incidents, and developments that set the scene for revolutionary uprising and socio-political change. Mismanaged agrarian reform had resulted in massive rural-urban migration and the creation of a vast pool of urban poor in the outskirts of Tehran and other major cities. An overheated economy, rife with inflation and speculation, was oppressing the salaried middle class. A shortfall in oil revenues and a recession halted development projects and construction sites, rendering many workers redundant, unemployed, and angry. To fight inflation, the Government launched an anti-profiteering campaign that targeted Bazaar merchants. Government credit policies favouring large capitalists and discriminating against small producers and the Bazaar had already antagonized bazaari merchants. Now there were plans to raze the Bazaar, Tehran's traditional urban market, and replace it with supermarkets. In a spectacularly stupid move, the paranoid and megalomaniacal Shah dissolved the (ineffectual) two-party system and created the single-party Rastakhiz ('renaissance'), declaring that all patriots must join, and that the Bazaar (among others) must contribute financially to the new party. To add insult to injury, he also introduced the royalist calendar in April 1976, creating widespread

confusion and anger. In the midst of all this, the new American president, Jimmy Carter, announced his human rights policy, and cited Iran as one of the problem countries. Feeling secure, and still wanting American weapons, the Shah agreed to some liberalization, and in February 1977 released several hundred political prisoners. This was the beginning of the end of the Pahlavi state.

The Course of the Revolution

The anti-shah revolution went through several distinct stages, each marked by a particular mode of mobilization, dominated by a particular coalition of opposition groups, and distinguished by the use of a particular set of confrontational **strategies**.¹³ The release of political prisoners in February 1977 encouraged intellectuals to express themselves, and a number of open letters on political repression, speeches criticizing human rights violations, and poetry reading sessions by dissident writers were followed by non-violent protests and gatherings in which the intelligentsia played the dominant role. In January 1978 the second stage was precipitated by a newspaper article defaming Ayatollah Khomeini, leading to clashes between theology students and police in the religious city of Qom. Forty days later, the city of Tabriz commemorated the Qom tragedy with a major demonstration in which banks, cinemas and liquor stores were attacked. During this period, the Amouzegar Government's **recessionary** measures of the past 10 months had created favourable conditions for the rise of protest on economic grounds. This drew the industrial and non-industrial working classes into the anti-shah agitation, and a revolution was in the making.

The third stage (**July–Sept. 1978**) is characterized by the cycle of mass demonstrations, prompted in part by a tragic fire in a cinema in the city of Abadan, killing hundreds of working class men, women and children, followed by inflammatory speeches by clerics. 'Black Friday', in which helicopter gunships were used to attack demonstrators on 8 September, ushers in the fourth stage, marked by disruptive and ever-widening cycles of strikes (**Oct.–Nov. 1978**) enveloping factories, banks, and government offices. Here the most impressive development is the strike by oilworkers, steelworkers, railroad workers, and workers in other major productive units. Rosa Luxemburg's famous essay on the characteristics and significance of the mass strike as a mechanism and means of self-education and self-organization of workers remains most pertinent in the Iranian case, as strike committees evolved into workers' councils, which later encountered the centralizing and monopolizing tendency of the new Islamic **regime**.¹⁴ In the final stage of the Revolution (**Dec. 1978–Feb. 1979**), dual sovereignty emerged with the parallel governments of **Shahpour Bakhtiar**, named by the Shah before his departure from Iran, and the provisional government of Mehdi **Bazargān**, named by Ayatollah Khomeini. (In fact, this was tripartite sovereignty, for Khomeini had also organized the secret and clergy-dominated Islamic Revolutionary council, which later

overshadowed the Bazargan cabinet.) For two days (9–11 February) an armed battle pitted dissident airmen, Fedayee and **Mojahedin** guerrillas against the Shah's personal guard, the so-called 'Immortals' (Javidan). Following this, the Military Supreme Council announced its decision to step aside, maintain 'neutrality in the present political crisis', and ordered troops to return to their garrisons. Here the U.S. decision to withhold support for a military coup, following discussions between General Huyser (President Carter's special envoy) and Khomeini associates, was **instrumental**.¹⁵

Thus ended the Pahlavi state, bulwark of American imperialism in the region, always the coup d'etat regime to its citizens, a developing capitalist economy with an outdated and outrageous political system, whose corruption, conspicuous consumption, and secret police reflected and furthered its lack of legitimacy.

It is important to appreciate the multi-class character of the Revolution. This was by no means 'the rising of the Muslim People', as some misguided and popular accounts would have it. (And here Islamicist and orientalist perspectives converge.) A populist revolt does not necessarily represent the absence of class struggle **and/or** class consciousness; these were clearly present in the workers' strikes and demands. However, Pahlavi rule had resulted in a diminished role for the Left and the absence of autonomous working class organizations, while the traditional petty bourgeoisie and the traditional bourgeoisie (mercantile) enjoyed independent organization (in the bazaar and the mosque). The Left's role in the two-day armed insurrection was paradoxical. While it advanced its own cause, the insurrection also paved the way for the assumption of power by the clerics. (This historical irony worked to the Left's disadvantage. Had the armed struggle taken two years rather than two days, the clerics would not have emerged as the predominant group following the collapse of the Pahlavi state.) Nonetheless, anti-communist obsession led outside observers to exaggerate the challenge represented by the Left and minimize the significance of the Islamicists. There was a widespread perception that 'Islamic revolution' was a lesser evil than 'communism'.

Another important point is that despite its efficacy as a mobilizing ideology in the later stages of the revolution, the Islamic discourse was not a single, monolithic and politically coherent ideology. Various Iran scholars have identified at least four versions of Islamic discourse: the 'radical Islam' of the young intelligentsia, Khomeini's 'militant Islam', 'liberal Islam' of people like Bazargan, and the 'traditionalist Islam' of the **ulama**.¹⁶ It is also necessary to note that despite its central importance, the clerical estate under Khomeini's leadership was only one of the social groups in the original revolutionary coalition. The revolutionary coalition of 1978–79 included also the leftist guerrillas, the Westernized bourgeoisie as represented by the National Front, the Bar Association, and the Writers Association, and the traditional bourgeoisie of the Bazaar.

Much has been made of the presumed centrality of ideology (Shi'a Islam)

in the Iranian Revolution. On the contrary, Shia ideology did not cause the Shah's fall. Instead, it was used as a tool for popular mobilization by groups already in conflict with the Shah over an economic policy that discriminated against the bazaar merchants and traditional **manufacture**, and over state corruption and centralization that excluded the professional and middle classes from effective participation in governance. The chronic inability of the Pahlavi state to establish legitimation, and the repression of liberal and socialist thought and organizations meant that the more effective mobilizing ideology would be the one with the longest tradition, established institutions and organizational resources: Shiism, especially the radical-populist variant that had been developing since the 1960s. While socialist and secular thought in Iran can be traced back to the turn of the century, it has been too discontinuous and constantly under siege to have been able to have widespread impact. By contrast, Islamic thought in Iran has enjoyed continuity, institutions, and long-standing legitimacy (though clerics have not always been so well regarded, and there is also a popular tradition of anti-clericalism). Still, to reiterate, ideology is not what caused the Revolution. Rather, a number of social, economic, and political factors converged to create a revolutionary situation in which the dominated classes were unwilling to go on as before and the ruling class was unable to rule as before. A populist collectivity emerged which sought to end the Shah's autocracy and Iran's ties to the U.S., and to establish republican and constitutional rule. As noted by Marx and Engels, revolutions and social processes are above all carried out by people: '*Ideas* can never lead beyond an old world system but only beyond the ideas of the old world system. Ideas cannot carry anything out at all. In order to carry out ideas men [*sic*] are needed who dispose of a certain practical force.'¹⁷

The political revolution that overthrew the Shah was an enormously liberating and rejuvenating phenomenon, and exhilaration was universal – at least in the first year. A feature of the immediate post-Pahlavi period was the explosion of freedom that occurred. For the first time since the 1940s, there was space for socialists and communists. The revolution provided the Left with the opportunity to strengthen itself and expand its forces; headquarters were established by all the large left organizations, and a number of smaller left groups were created. The left-wing press proliferated; the sidewalks were cluttered with books and posters; meetings, rallies and cultural events took place daily; *Kayhan* and *Etelaat*, the official newspapers, operating since the end of 1978 by a left-dominated council, ran features about and interviews with left activists and with relatives of dead guerrillas. A host of new structures were also created during the Revolution, most of which operated autonomously: neighbourhood committees, strike committees, factory councils, student councils, Revolutionary Guards. The anti-Shah movement thus eventuated the phenomenon of 'multiple sovereignty'. This period can be dated from the appointment of Bakhtiar in the last days of December 1978 to the ouster of President Bani-Sadr in June 1981. The 'dawn of freedom'. as

it was called in Spring 1979, was short-lived, however. Multiple power centres and the collapse of the revolutionary populist collectivity led to intense power struggles, and to fierce battles over political, ideological and economic issues.

After the Revolution: Contestation and Islamization

It may be helpful to periodize the twists and turns of post-revolutionary events, so that the discussion below of the most salient developments may be understood within a chronological framework. Thus the period from February to November 1979 constitutes one stage, beginning with the victory of the revolutionary forces and establishment of the Islamic Republic, and ending with the takeover of the American Embassy and the resignation of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. November 1979 to September 1980 is another period, when the embassy issue is at centre-stage; Abdolhassan Bani-Sadr is elected Iran's first president; the Iraqis invade Iran. The period dating from September 1980 to June 1981 is dominated by the increasing conflict between the Islamicists and Bani-Sadr and his associates; it ends with Bani-Sadr's impeachment. From June 1981 to September 1982 a mini civil war takes place between the Mojahedin and the regime; the latter unleashes its terror also on the communist organizations; Iranian forces make major gains on the war front. Following this period (roughly early 1983 to the present), state power rests firmly with the Islamicists, who intensify the programme of Islamization, especially in the areas of culture, ideology, education, law, morality and lifestyle. At the same time, the war with Iraq continues, and the state of the economy worsens.

After the Revolution, the Left organizations, principally the Fedayee, Mojahedin, Tudeh, and Paykar, became major political forces on the campuses, especially after the new government quickly re-asserted control in the oilfields and some major factories. These organizations included substantial groups of people who had gained valuable political experience and insights in exile, while underground, or in prison. Their ranks were swollen by the many dissident students who returned to Iran en masse in the Spring of 1979, as well as by daily recruits to the Left cause.¹⁸ The Left presence was keenly felt all that year, and very quickly a principal tension arose between the Islamicists and the array of Marxist, socialist, and communist organizations and parties.

Things were not easy for the Left. In addition to the sense that they were newcomers or marginals, overshadowed and somewhat overwhelmed by the Islamic rhetoric and the political power and organizational advantages of clerics, the Left had to come to grips with the nature of the new regime, a difficult task. Was the regime progressive or reactionary? It will be recalled that in early 1979, paradoxically (or perversely), world-wide left-wing support was extended to the new, revolutionary, anti-imperialist regime in Iran, but not to the Marxist government of neighbouring Afghanistan. Illustrious European, North American and Arab intellectuals waxed eloquent over the putative post-modern, anti-systemic, spiritual, cultural manifestations

of Iran's revolution, and of the fierce independence and anti-imperialism of the ayatollahs. The revolution and the regime were conflated, and both were regarded as 'Islamic'. Meanwhile, elements within the Left worried that the Islamicists were about to kidnap the revolution and alter its direction. The Left press of that period is replete with articles expressing the concern that the revolution needed to continue and that freedoms had to be extended. An open letter to Khomeini from the Fedayee organisation praised his personal stance but **complained** about harassment from Islamic zealots and noted that the Revolution belonged to all those who had taken part in it, including the guerrilla organizations which had consistently fought the Shah since the early 70's and lost hundreds of worthy **comrades**.¹⁹

For this reason, appeals by Khomeini and Bazargan to armed citizens, air force personnel, and the guerrilla organizations to surrender their weapons yielded poor results. The Fedayee openly rejected the call, saying it was their duty to safeguard the Revolution. In response, Khomeini said, '[Le pays] ne supportera pas ces gens sans culture et [le peuple] va les écraser comme il a écrasé la force diabolique du Shah' (quoted in *Le Figaro*, 23.2.79). While respectful of Khomeini, the Fedayee criticized the repressive ways of the local committees, the *pasdaran*, or revolutionary guards, and the *hezbollahi*, fascistic, self-styled partisans of God. At a huge rally held at Tehran University the Fedayee speakers called on Khomeini to reveal the names of the Islamic Revolutionary Council (IRC) members, and to replace secret trials by the revolutionary courts with open trials by people's courts in order to inform and educate the masses. They also called for a social order based on workers' control and **councils**.²⁰ Along with the **Mojahedin**, the National Democratic Front, and other left and liberal organizations and individuals, the Fedayee stressed (though admittedly not forcefully enough, and without the requisite unity) the people's right to a democratic form of rule. In response, Khomeini declared, 'Democracy is another word for usurpation of God's authority to rule.' When protests were voiced at home and abroad about the secret trials and summary executions, **Hojatoleslam** Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani, the IRC member in charge of the revolutionary committees, said, 'We must purify society in order to renew it.' In its use of moral and religious language, egalitarian and anti-monarchical message, and emphasis on purification, the IRC brings to mind England's revolutionary Puritans and the French Revolution's 'Twelve who ruled'. Iran's Islamicists, however, turned increasingly intolerant and theocratic.

The post-revolutionary regime sought quickly to institutionalize itself, even while in the process the clerical and liberal wings of the new regime clashed over the meaning of 'Islamic **Republic**'.²¹ A series of steps were taken to obtain legitimation and power. First came the referendum on changing the political system of the country. The question on the ballot read 'Should Iran be an Islamic Republic?' There was considerable protest over the wording, and the Fedayee, National Democratic Front (led by a grandson of the late

Premier Mossadegh), and several regional parties boycotted the referendum. On 1 April 1979, however, an overwhelming majority of voters answered in the affirmative. But the question of what the Islamic Republic should look like was still open.

Second, the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) was formed by leading clerics and at least two lay individuals. It was to become the official Islamicist party, and increasingly intolerant of other parties in and around the political elite, notably the Azarbaijan-based Muslim People's Republican Party, led by Ayatollah Shariatmadari, a liberal Muslim cleric opposed to direct rule by the clergy, Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan's Movement for Liberation, and the National Front, the party of several cabinet members. The IRP was of course violently opposed to any of the Marxist parties and organizations, although it tolerated the Tudeh Party (which had become totally supportive of Khomeini's 'anti-imperialist' positions and contemptuous of the 'bourgeois liberals'), until 1982.

Third, revolutionary courts were set up that functioned outside the jurisdiction of the Justice Ministry. At first they concentrated on trying royalists and members of SAVAK. Later they evolved into religious courts guided by the Sharia (Islamic/Koranic law) which co-existed uneasily with civil law and courts of appeal until the latter were abolished in early 1983.

Fourth, a draft constitution was written in April and elections were held in August to select a small Assembly of Experts to study it. The original idea had been that a large, representative and elected constituent assembly would draft the constitution. As a result of the change, and due to the clerical bias of the screening of candidates for the Assembly, there was, again, much left-wing protest. But by now, each time such a protest took place, armed *hezbollahi* or *pasdaran* would harass and break up the gatherings. In the course of their deliberations, the Assembly of Experts, now dominated by the IRP, introduced and adopted the controversial concept of *velayat-e faghih*, or rule by the supreme interpreter of the law – in this case, Khomeini. This met with the opposition of the left, of Shariatmadari, and of the National Democratic Party (but not of the liberals in government). Nonetheless, the Constitution, much of which was a quintessential radical-populist document on economic issues and matters of foreign policy, while also establishing Iran as an Islamic state, was overwhelmingly approved in another referendum in December. The Constitution (of which more below) adopted the system of parliamentary elections, which were held on schedule with large voter turnouts even in the midst of crisis.

Throughout this period, the Left organizations struggled to come to grips with the nature of the Revolution, the character of the new political order, class structure and consciousness, and their own tasks and responsibilities at the stage in question. Was it a democratic revolution (the Tudeh Party)? Was it a national, anti-imperialist revolution that had to be furthered (*Fedayee*)? Should socialists focus on defeating imperialism and its domestic base,

concentrating on preventing royalist sabotage (Mojahedin. Tudeh, Fedayee)? Or was their task to organize and mobilize the working class toward a socialist transition (Peykar, Rah-e Kargar, Organization of Communist Unity)? There were also debates in the left press and in meetings about the clergy and the petty-bourgeoisie: did the clergy constitute a caste, or was it a part of the petty-bourgeoisie? Everyone on the Left welcomed (indeed, took part in) the revolution against the Shah, the expropriation of comprador/monopoly capital, the relinquishing of power by the big bourgeoisie. But was the petty-bourgeoisie up to the task of transforming socio-economic relations, and extending democratic rights? When clerics assumed political power, some socialists argued that what had transpired was not a revolution (enghelab) but a revolt, or uprising (*ghiyam*). Others opined that the clergy were inexperienced at state craft and could not possibly run a dependent capitalist state and economy; the clergy's days were numbered and they were bound to defer to their liberal partners. Still others averred that the clergy (like the petty-bourgeoisie) was 'close to the working class', opposed to imperialism and big capital, and therefore progressive, unlike the liberal bourgeoisie. Another, very different, left theory was that clerical fascism was in the offing, and a counterrevolution in the making (Rah-e Kargar). The Tudeh Party and the Mojahedin had similar views: the regime was petty-bourgeois and therefore fundamentally contradictory, with both progressive and reactionary elements within it. Their role was to support and strengthen the progressive wing, and vigilantly watch and contest the reactionary elements. But the two organizations differed over who was progressive and who reactionary. The Tudeh Party (keen to be Iran's 'legal Marxists') tended always to side with the Islamicists (Khomeini and the IRP), while the Mojahedin gradually defined the IRP as 'internal reaction'. As for the other Left organizations, they determined early on that the Islamic state in its totality was neither benign nor progressive. The regime's increasing repression confirmed this view. But their preoccupation with fighting imperialism and dependent capitalism, as well as their chronic disunity, precluded the construction of an alternative movement and agenda.

The first challenge to creeping Islamization and repression came on March 8, 1979, when thousands of women protested against the new sexual politics and in particular Khomeini's decree that women appear in public in *hejab*, or Islamic dress. As a result of their protests, he backed down – but only temporarily.²² The next major challenge to the new centre was from Iran's periphery, in particular the national and ethnic minorities of Kurdistan and Turkaman Sahra, who were demanding autonomy. There and elsewhere peasants were expropriating large landlords, and in the cities the Left was agitating for a land reform based on the concept of land to the tiller. Meanwhile, the workers' councils were proliferating, in large part due to Left organizing efforts, and were encountering harassment from the IRP-controlled revolutionary guards. The rise of class and ethnic struggles,

competition between various political parties, and the challenge of the Left during that first year (which the regime sought to end by sending pasdaran in September 1979 to close down the offices and headquarters of the Left parties and organizations) was dealt with by the Islamicists in a novel fashion – by deliberately antagonizing the international facet of the populist contradiction.²³ With the takeover of the American Embassy in November 1979, the Islamicists hoped to undermine their rivals, discover (or manufacture) incriminating evidence against them, and impress the populace with their own anti-imperialist credentials.

The seizure of the embassy and of hostages was a drama staged by the Islamicists with the intention of creating a situation of permanent revolution and mass mobilization controlled by the IRP. Its architects must have studied Mao Tse-tung's ideological mobilizations and especially the Cultural Revolution. (The 'students' who occupied the Embassy may be likened to the Red Guard.) This action allowed the Islamicists to practise considerable ideological manipulation as well as violence – in the name of their supreme anti-imperialism. Conspiracies against the revolution were seen everywhere, and the 'students' who had seized shredded embassy records diligently put them together to discover an array of information that could be used against the opponents of the IRP and of Islamization.²⁴ Ayatollah Shariatmadari, President Bani-Sadr (elected in January 1980), members of the National Front and a number of secular government officials were tarnished by this evidence.

In April 1980 the increasingly powerful IRP initiated an 'Islamic cultural revolution' aimed at the universities, which had a pronounced Left presence and were governed by councils. As Khomeini had said: 'Our universities have changed into propaganda battlefields. Many university teachers are at the service of the West. What frightens us is cultural dependence. We fear. . . universities which train our youth to serve the West or serve **communism**.'²⁵ Bani-Sadr endorsed the scheme – which entailed pitched battles with students and closing down the universities for two years – so he could stay on the bandwagon. But his days were numbered, for in the absence of a liberal-left alliance the Islamicists steadily increased their influence and power.

The Left camp too, was by now rather badly divided. The Fedayee organization split in early 1980 into a 'Majority' wing that endorsed the regime as anti-imperialist and progressive, and a 'Minority' wing which regarded it as reactionary and as having fundamentally altered the character and direction of the Revolution. The Tudeh Party was for all practical purposes the party of Khomeini, endorsing his every move and statement, and taking the side of the Islamicists (on the basis of their presumed anti-imperialism and non-alignment) in the intensifying battle with Bani-Sadr in 1981. Peykar had consistently opposed the Islamic regime and was at odds with the organizations that it felt had compromised or wavered on this issue. One of these was the Mojahedin, which had extended qualified support for the Islamic regime (its

meeting halls were always adorned with the portraits of Khomeini and Ayatollah Taleghani, a more tolerant and liberal cleric who died in 1980), but in 1981 cast its lot with the beleaguered Bani-Sadr. Thus with some left organizations (Fedayee, Peykar), ideological purity was paramount and prevented compromise and alliances, while with others (**Mojahedin**, Tudeh), opportunism and the overriding concern for the expansion of their own organizations precluded a broad left-wing alliance and a united movement against the Islamicists. The entire left was preoccupied more with fighting imperialism and excoriating the U.S. than **with** building socialism and a united left front. Had there been unity in the left ranks, and a left-liberal alliance for a democratic and secular republic (rather than liberal collaboration with clerics in government), the trajectory of the Revolution would arguably have been much different.

As it happened, the ideological manipulation and mass mobilization afforded by the U.S. Embassy takeover heightened following the Iraqi invasion of Iran in September 1980. Far from undermining the new regime (the reason behind the Iraqi invasion), the war increased patriotic sentiment, rallied the population around the regime, and allowed the regime, and especially the IRP, to bolster and strengthen its political position and increase its institutional supports. Bani-Sadr's position meanwhile weakened. When the **Mojahedin** decided to support the beleaguered president, and protest demonstrations were staged against the IRP, an angry Khomeini repudiated Bani-Sadr and the government moved to impeach him. What followed for roughly a year after Bani-Sadr and **Mojahedin** leader Massoud **Rajavi** fled to Paris (assisted by supporters within the Air Force), was a cycle of violence marked by spectacular **Mojahedin** assassinations and bombings and exceedingly brutal regime reprisals. This implosion suggested that the Iranian Revolution, like the French Revolution before it, had devoured its young.

In the end the IRP won its domestic war. But its battles continued: the IRP was unified only in its opposition to liberals and Marxists. On issues of economic restructuring, government expenditure, and foreign policy, the Islamicists were deeply divided. These divisions continue to this day; perhaps as a result of the ineffectual and contingent nature of the IRP, the party was dismantled in early 1988. Thus the IRP was fundamentally unlike other revolutionary parties. Guided by a vague philosophy of Islamic populism, it lacked ideological **rigour** and coherence and held together groups of people who differed from each other more than just temperamentally. Among the issues over which serious differences arose: land reform; labour law; urban tenants' rights; industry-first or agriculture-first economic development; heavy industrialization or appropriate technology; private ownership rights; the direction and composition of trade; to export the revolution or to concentrate on 'building the Islamic revolution in one country', as it were. The differences over economic issues have prevented **the** implementation of a comprehensive national development plan; planning has been at best **ad-hoc**.²⁶ Thus, unlike other revolutionary states (for example, Russia, China, Cuba), the Islamic

Republic is notable for its inability to transform socio-productive relations. At the same time, it is unlike non-revolutionary, reformist governments (the so-called democratizing regimes of Argentina, Uruguay, the Philippines), which have not altered the political system, the military, and economic relations. In Iran, social structural changes have occurred, to which we now turn our attention.

Social Structural Changes in the Islamic Republic

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic is an eclectic mix of theocratic, modern, and Third Worldist elements. Its radical populism is expressed in its assertion that 'the Iranian Revolution. . . has been a movement aimed at the triumph of all oppressed and deprived persons over the oppressor.' It then goes on to reject both capitalism and socialism: 'Government does not derive from the interests of a certain class,' and asserts that 'the economy is a means, not an end. This principle contrasts with other economic systems where the aim is concentration and **accumulation** of wealth and maximization of profit. In materialist schools of thought, the economy represents an end in itself.' The Constitution also declares 'economic independence' from foreign domination and elimination of 'poverty and deprivation' to be among the basic goals of the Islamic republic.'*

The two most important and controversial aspects of the constitution are the principle of *velayat-e faghih* (the government of the jurist) and the prescribed economic model. It is worth noting, as Behdad has pointed out, that whereas the former generated heated debates in the Assembly of Experts, the latter was passed without much discussion or disagreement but became controversial in the years that followed. The economic aspects will be discussed presently, but for the moment it is worth pondering the eclectic philosophical content of the Constitution. It ironically included features associated with the West, which is otherwise excoriated by the Islamicists. There is thus a dualism discernible in the Constitution (and in the Islamic Republic itself – as well as in its very **name**).²⁸ On the one hand the Constitution establishes theocratic structures, such as the rule of the *faghih*, a cross between the head of state and the chief justice; a 12-member Council of Guardians overseeing the Majlis (Parliament) to ensure that legislation is in accordance with both the constitution and Islamic law; the Supreme Judicial Council, which must be dominated by *mujtahids* (Islamic jurists). The Constitution also establishes Twelver Shi'a Islam as the official religion, describes the Islamic Republic as 'a system based on the belief in religious leadership and continuous guidance', maintains that sovereignty derives from God, and mandates efforts towards 'unifying the world of Islam.' On the other hand, the constitution describes Iran as an independent state with a foreign policy predicated upon non-alignment. It also firmly establishes Iran as a **republic**; after the *faghih*, the president is the most powerful figure, and his role is described as 'implementing the constitution and organizing the relationship between the

three powers.' Elected directly for a four-year term by an absolute majority of the votes cast, the president is the chief executive who signs and executes the laws passed by the Majlis. In parliamentary style, he nominates a Majlis deputy as the prime minister; and once his nominee has won the endorsement of the Majlis, he administers the oath of office. He approves cabinet ministers proposed by the premier before they are presented to the Majlis for a vote of confidence. Over the past eight years, the president, prime minister, and Majlis speaker have emerged as the key political figures after Khomeini.

The Constitution also describes the Islamic Republic as based on 'sovereignty of the people.' One of the principles states that 'the affairs of the country must be administered on the basis of public opinion expressed by means of elections, including the election of the president, the representatives of the [parliament], and the members of councils, or by means of referendums in [certain] matters'. In theory and in practice, the Majlis is an autonomous organ; since 1980 it has often clashed with the Council of Guardians over bills vetoed by the latter. Gone is the rubber-stamp parliament of the Pahlavi days. Gone too is the obsequious press of the Pahlavi era. For the first time, newspaper editorials question and criticize government policies or the juridical vetoing of bills. The Islamic-populist discursive universe, while limited and intolerant of explicitly Marxist or liberal-democratic perspectives, is larger than the official ideological framework of the Pahlavi era.²⁹

The Constitution also provides for 'the rights of the people', all of which have been violated, mainly because these rights are circumscribed by the explicit qualification that they accord with the laws of Islam. For example, the rights of women are guaranteed, but 'in all areas according to Islamic standards' (Principle 21). And: 'Publications and the press are free to present all matters except those that are detrimental to fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public' (Principle 24). What this has meant in practice, apart from the banning of publications deemed un-Islamic, is that a well-known journal can carry on a debate on the merits or failures of the Stalin era, but articles on historical materialism or critiques of religious intolerance are prohibited. And any discussion of sexuality, apart from what the ayatollahs have already written about the essential natures (and therefore different needs, rights, limitations) of males and females, is strictly verboten.

Nonetheless, the Islamic Republic is striking for the interaction of modern and traditional elements. Charles Tilly has distinguished 'reactive' and 'proactive' forms of collective action. But surely all revolutions have had both 'reactive' and 'proactive', forward-looking and conservative, features? In Iran's case, however, its historical development, pre-revolutionary political features, and Islamic institutions have lent greater weight to conservative and reactionary forces. Yet even clerics are not totally opposed to modern, western forms. They are not opposed to western technology (or instruments of torture), to parliamentarism, or to modernization per se. For example, in criticizing the Shah's 'false modernization', Khomeini said in November

1978: 'Etendre les industries de montage **dépendantes** [par la création] de quelques centaines d'usines, est-ce cela **moderniser**?'³⁰ In 1964 he had argued: 'Comment voulez-vous moderniser l'**Iran** si vous faites emprisonner et tuer les intellectuels? . . . Vous voulez **faire** des Iraniens des instruments dociles et passifs au service du pouvoir et de vos **maitres** Ctrangers, alors que la **véritable** modernisation consiste a former des hommes qui aient le droit de choisir et de critiquer, des combattants qui sachent **résister** á la domination exterieure, a l'injustice et **au pillage**.'³¹ Spoken like a true Third Worldist – though his concern for the rights of intellectuals was a sentiment he largely ignored after 1979. Which goes to show, yet again, that modernization and repression are not incompatible.³²

A major change effected by the new Islamic regime which **greatly** bolstered itself was one which was ironically encouraged by the Left – the transformation of the Shah's military. It will be recalled that in the course of the revolution against the Shah, groups of people armed themselves: among them, the **guerrilla** organizations, Kurdish parties, and local, neighbourhood committees. The latter came to be controlled by the local mosques. The Left groups retained their weapons; the Mojahedin in particular formed an impressive militia which would hold public exercises. The Left agitated for the dismantling of the Shah's military and the establishment of a people's army; the Bazargan government, however, was against this idea. Meanwhile, the Islamicists were organizing their own fighting force: the revolutionary **guard**.³³ Its core consisted of several hundred militants who had received military training in PLO camps in south Lebanon. Fresh recruits came from youths (urban lower middle class) who had been active in the anti-Shah demonstrations. In its discipline, ideological motivation and organization, this was similar to other revolutionary armies. By June 1979 the Islamic Revolutionary Guard (*pasdaran*) constituted a parallel force to that of the military and to the guerrillas. Soon controlled by the IRP, the *pasdaran* monitored the activities of the leftists and liberals, .broke up demonstrations and strikes, kept a watch on army barracks and police stations, and suppressed ethnic revolts in Kurdistan and Turkaman Sahra. This wasn't quite what the Left had in mind by a people's army.

After the dissolution of Bazargan's original cabinet and his own resignation following the U.S. Embassy takeover, the Islamicists undertook a major purge of the military in the summer of 1980. Presumed royalists were targeted, as were those suspected of sympathizing or collaborating with an attempted coup led by former prime minister **Shahpour** Bakhtiar and General Oveissi, formerly of the Shah's military. Executions and purges continued until the Iraqi invasion in September. The Iraqis no doubt thought they would encounter an extremely weakened, demoralized and ill-organized fighting force, as indeed the military was. They did not consider the Pasdaran, one of the major institutional supports of the new regime, and a formidable fighting force, as the Mojahedin were also to discover when they decided

to take on the Islamicists in June **1981**. In time, the paramilitary Pasdaran became a full-fledged fighting force, complete with its own government agency. And the military, in the course of the war with Iraq, has been revived and relegitimized.³⁴

In the economic sphere, many changes have occurred, though not the deep and permanent changes in a democratic and socialist direction that had been aspired to by Iran's Marxists. In the first instance, the dominant class under Pahlavi rule was dispossessed of its industrial, **financial** and commercial holdings. The leaders of the Islamic Republic were not from the dominant economic (landed, commercial or industrial) classes. Political and economic power shifted from the Pahlavi family and the big bourgeoisie (industrialists, financiers, large capitalist landowners) to the petty bourgeoisie: its traditional stratum is favoured economically, while the **new/modern** wing occupies the bureaucracy and military. The mosque remains a powerful institution while the economic independence of the Bazaar is checked by state controls (especially over prices and foreign trade) and the existence of a large public sector. Thus the big **bazaaris** have clashed often with the government, while small producers and distributors have been favoured by the state managers. Constitutional limitations on private property ('private ownership, legitimately acquired, is to be respected. The relevant criteria are determined by law') have been a consistent source of tension between the state and the private sector, and between the pro- and anti-capitalist factions within the regime.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic provides for an economic system consisting of (in order of importance) a state sector, a cooperative sector, and a private sector. A popular revolutionary demand, which was incorporated into the Constitution and implemented by the first government, was sweeping nationalization. According to the Constitution, the state sector includes 'all the large-scale and major industries, foreign trade, major mineral resources, banking, insurance, energy, dams and large irrigation networks, radio and television, post, telegraphic and telephone services, aviation, shipping, roads, railroads, and the like.' In **1979**, all banks were put under government ownership; contracts with multinational corporations were nullified and all major industries taken over by the state; foreign trade was under de facto if not *de jure* control of the government. (The Council of Guardians has rejected parliamentary bills to establish formal state ownership as contrary to Islamic respect for private property and entrepreneurship.) Economic sovereignty was to be achieved by means of a self-reliant strategy (*khodmokhtari*). Attempts focused on reviving agriculture and promoting small-scale productive units by means of various credit and price support policies. A parallel policy of import-substitution industrialization and protectionism was also followed in the hope of stimulating domestic production of certain durable and non-durable consumer products. Most new industrial investments went to production units which used more local **inputs**.³⁵ The nationalization of banks was meant to support the new changes. The mass media was used

to convince the people that national independence could not be achieved without accepting hardship in the short run and making sacrifices in both levels and quality of living standards. The 'Western pattern of consumption' was also denounced as non-Islamic and harmful to the goal of self-sufficiency.

Two crucial institutions created to alter economic relations and effect social justice were the Housing Foundation (created to provide housing for the poor, particularly in urban areas) and the Reconstruction Crusade (established to provide rural areas with electricity, water, feeder roads, schools, health clinics, housing, and other social and infrastructural services). Legislation was passed to reduce the gap among wage rates as a result of which the workers' wages were raised by 60 percent. A policy of price support in the form of subsidies for basic needs items were instituted to protect the poorer groups from the rampant inflation that had followed the economic decline during the revolution. Modifications were proposed in the tax system to make it more progressive and prevent excessive concentration of wealth. Nationalization of major industries, banks, insurance companies, and foreign trade were meant to weaken further possibilities of emerging large-scale private accumulation.³⁶

Most of these policies, which were attempted at different points in the post-revolutionary period up to the end of 1982, had to be subsequently suspended, reversed or modified under enormous domestic and international pressures, and due to the exigencies of the war **economy**.³⁷ The First Social, Economic, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic (1983–88, with a 20-year horizon) had to be shelved because of the factional politics within the state. Support for agriculture, rural and regional development, small-scale productive units, labour-intensive techniques, major economic reforms, and social services were reduced. Wages and employment were frozen in the state sector but price subsidies for basic consumption items continued. Taxes were increased in an attempt to reduce dependency on oil but also to boost the public budget. Under the new policy, deficit spending became acceptable to the government and a more active role was given to the private sector and market mechanisms. A number of nationalized industries were sold to the public or returned to their original owners and the cooperative sector was left to its ambiguous and weak position in the **economy**.³⁸ Modern technology again became acceptable to planners and policy makers. The money saved was not, however, put into building new industrial capacities. Rather, much of it went to the war **effort**.³⁹

The policy of **diversifying** the sources of dependency for exports and imports was only marginally successful. The price of oil continues to be determined within the capitalist world **market**.⁴⁰ The trade with socialist and Third World countries, except for Turkey and Pakistan, did not expand to any significant degree despite frequent policy pronouncements to the contrary. With the failure of the new policy and worsening economic problems the state turned to an Emergency Plan in 1986.

The nationalization of foreign trade is mandated by the Constitution but bitterly opposed by Bazaari interests and has been contested by the conservative and clergy-dominated council of Guardians; the latter argues that it violates Islamic respect for private ownership and freedom of commerce. However, the war economy and declining oil revenues made state control over foreign trade imperative; the government reduced the imports of luxury items and concentrated on importing foodstuff, spare parts, raw materials, and other basic goods, in addition to weapons supplied principally by China and North Korea. Revolutionary ideology – and the **Constitution** – required that Iran reduce its dependence on oil exports, diversify the economy, engage in balanced growth, and favour Third World and Islamic countries in its trade policy. But by 1982 the Islamic Republic was trading mainly with Western countries and capitalist Third World countries (West Germany, Italy, Japan, Turkey, Brazil), while also increasing economic ties with East Europe (but not the USSR). Moreover, its foreign exchange receipts were still derived almost exclusively from oil exports – which the government increasingly sold for cash on the spot market at discounted prices.

Small-scale enterprise remains favoured. By all accounts and indications, domestic craftwork – small-scale and privately-owned enterprises producing Iran's famous gold- and silver-work, as well as its carpets and handicrafts – has prospered. (Unfortunately, it is now prohibited to export these items, or even carry them out of the country as gifts.) The largest sector by far is the state sector, which spans industry and services (education, health, welfare, public utilities, rail and air transportation, communications, major media). Because of the war and the cleavages within the ruling elite, however, the regime has had uneven and limited success in redirecting the course of economic development in various sectors.

Thus since the Revolution, there have been changes in property relations, ownership rights, and class relations. These have not been transformed; rather, Pahlavi-style capitalist relations have been suspended while political power has shifted to the petty bourgeoisie, and the spheres of politics and culture/ideology have predominated over economic **development/accumulation**. In the Islamic Republic populist and redistributive economic measures (widespread distribution of food, allocation of some housing, cheap utilities and oil, which have favoured the urban poor and war veterans and families of war 'martyrs'), has substituted for rational planning and production investment. Whatever else the Islamic regime is, it is not properly speaking a capitalist state: capital accumulation is not (as yet) its *raison d'être* or defining feature. Nor can it be said that the bourgeoisie is the dominant political and economic class, and that its ideas hold sway. What can be said is that the Islamic Republic is following a Third Worldist pattern in which the **petty-bourgeoisie** (military or civilian) comes to power and evolves into a state or bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Nowhere has a clerical caste played as dominant a role in politics and in state power as in Iran (although Israel's rabbinate has an

important, though arguably not dominant, role). However, Iran's clerics do appear to be part of the petty-bourgeoisie. The regime's statist and nationalist ideological orientation also follows a Third Worldist pattern. In July 1988, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran finally accepted UN Resolution 598 and a ceasefire with Iraq. What direction might the Islamic Republic take? It is not at all unlikely that clerical power will wane after Khomeini's death; direct clerical rule has been discredited, and no-one can truly succeed a charismatic leader. Islam might continue to figure prominently in state ideology and policy, while a mixed economy is reconstructed and a non-aligned foreign policy continued. As such, a likely scenario for Iran after the death of Khomeini and the cessation of hostilities with Iraq is a period of normalization and stabilization ('the routinization of the revolution', or its **Thermidor**) in which a social formation similar to Algeria may **evolve**.⁴¹ What programme might be advanced in a situation of budgetary pressures, where the role of state enterprise is now considered to be circumscribed? Two roads seem to be open to Iran. One is to continue and strengthen the statist strategy currently in place. The alternative is to follow a now familiar Third World pattern, where restrictions on domestic private sector activities could be relaxed, especially if private entrepreneurs can be coaxed into becoming more export oriented. Further, the leadership might re-examine previous restrictions on transnational corporations and other sources of private direct investment. In a word, they could effect a re-linking with the world market or world capital. In such a situation, transnationals can be particularly seductive; they can bring in capital that does not add to the foreign debt burden, they provide employment, and they can plug the developing country into an already existing international marketing network, boosting exports. This may yet be tried out in the Islamic Republic.

A conservative period will likely emerge, as well. By all accounts the population is not only war-weary but politically fatigued, and tired of constant ideological exhortation, much like the Chinese were by the time Mao died. As a result, what will emerge following the succession is a programme for reconstruction and development – and a return to the capitalist orbit, albeit under different terms than with the Pahlavi state. Thus 'modernization' will resume, but at a different pace and rhythm than under the *ancien* regime.

Conclusions

The expansion of the state apparatus, the superstructural institutionalization of Islam, changes in the political structure and economic restructuring all represent a qualitative break from the past. Is it a progressive or reactionary break? In this essay I have tried to show the importance of distinguishing between the Revolution and the regime. The first was a popular, populist, political rupture; the second is proof positive that an anti-imperialist, non-aligned petty-bourgeoisie can be profoundly reactionary and wildly at odds with the socialist project. I have focused on the class and political struggles

following the Revolution to underscore the difference and to demonstrate that the outcome of the revolution against the Shah was not predetermined, even though the clerics came to the political scene with considerable advantages over the left and secular forces.⁴²

Was Iran's revolution premature? Perhaps, if one is fixated on the French Revolution (or the Russian Revolution) as the epitome of progressive transformation. But of what utility is the idea of an historic norm, a standard, against which all subsequent revolutions are measured?⁴³ The political trajectory of the 'East' has been very different from that of the 'West'. We must therefore expect revolutions to be in the first instance specific phenomena, motivated by internal and external forces, structural and socio-psychological, that will necessarily differ with each historical epoch as well as in concrete social formations. Beyond this, we must also recognize that the failure of social revolution in the West has placed an enormous burden on progressive forces in the Third World. The bourgeoisie of Third World countries have proven incapable of genuine social modernity (Pahlavi Iran is a good example), while the few attempts at initiating social democratic change have been thwarted by the United States. Political repression and economic brutality, as well as the nationalist impulse, have resulted in numerous political revolts throughout the Third World. But the absence of socialism in the West, the peculiar nature of socialism in Eastern Europe, and the Soviet Union's overriding concern for its own interests have not provided a climate conducive to social transformation in the Third World. Consequently, political revolution has been 'easier' to accomplish than social revolution. In this sense, all Third World revolutions might in fact be 'premature'.

In theory and in real life, there has always been a tension between determinacy (or 'lawfulness') and human agency, between inexorable structural determinants and conscious class action, between the idea of inevitability and the need for deliberate intervention. Revolutions will come about because people will determine that oppressive political or economic conditions must change. These 'people', however, are divided along class and ideological lines; within the class structure and among the political organizations there is a definite hierarchy and differential weights. The outcome is determined as much by historical and international forces as by conscious political struggle. As Marx reminds us in his dialectical formulation, we make history within certain limits. These limits include historical legacies (for example, the absence of a long-standing democratic tradition), international or world-systemic constraints, and the differential resources of contending classes, social groups and political parties. In this essay I have tried to show that the Iranian Revolution was a contradictory phenomenon containing progressive and repressive features which constituted a necessary and positive step forward.⁴⁴ The outcome of the Revolution was not predetermined but was the result of protracted class and political conflict which was won by the Islamicists.

Because of the violent repression and religious dogmatism of the Islamic regime, Marxists will perhaps continue to regard the Iranian revolution with considerable ambivalence. It was indeed a project that went awry.

NOTES

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1. Academic theories of revolution have sought to attribute the **causes/origins** and outcomes of revolution to specific determinants: strains in the social system caused by modernization, leading to socio-psychological tensions (expressed in such propositions as relative deprivation, rising expectations, status inconsistency, downward mobility) that turn frustrations into aggression; structural factors (agrarian crisis, war, military breakdown) leading the state to lose **control** over the means of coercion and therefore to the successful overthrow of the ancien regime; political conflict and multiple sovereignty, in which access to resources, organization and mobilization are key factors in determining the outcome; the nature of the state **and/or** elite structure, which effects states' vulnerability to revolutions and their ability to coopt or to repress uprisings. Some of these factors were present, and the variables valid, in the Iranian case. For a survey of academic theories of revolution see Stan Taylor, *Social Science and Revolution* (NY: St. Martin's, 1984) and J. Goldstone, ed., *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986). Also pertinent is the symposium on the Iranian Revolution in *Theory and Society*, May 1982, organized around **Theda** Skocpol's 'Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution.'
2. Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988).
3. For a discussion of the Revolution as reactionary, refer to Said Amir **Arjomand**, 'Iran's Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective', *World Politics*, April 1986; and Fred Halliday, 'The Iranian Revolution: Uneven Development and Religious Populism', in Fred Halliday and Hamza **Alavi**, eds., *State and Ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan* (NY: Monthly Review, 1988).
4. Anderson, *op. cit.*, especially the discussion that follows his essay.
5. A number of Iranian academics and activists have been theorizing the populism of the Revolution and the Islamic populism of the regime in doctoral dissertations or in Persian-language articles. The dissertations include Manoucher Dorraj (Univ. of Texas, Austin, 1984), Kaveh Afrasiabi (Boston University, 1987), Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi (University of Chicago, 1988). The journals *Nazm-e Novin* and *Kankash* have carried several articles on the social and intellectual bases of Iranian populism.
6. Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M.E. **Sharpe**, 1978), esp. ch. 11.
7. Recommended sources for modern Iranian political and social history include

- Ewand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: Iran's Islamic Revolution* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1981); Nikki Keddie, *Iran: Religion, Politics and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1979); Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran 1926-77* (NY: NYU Press, 1982); Habib Ladjevardi, *Labour Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985).
8. See Robert Graham, *Iran: The Illusion of Power* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1979), for a discussion of the Shah's economic policy and military expenditures as factors in the political crisis and revolutionary uprising.
 9. For an extended discussion of clergy-state relations see Shahrough Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1980); refer also to Michael Fisher, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980).
 10. Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986) discusses the role of the various *hosseiniehs*, and of the impact of the writings of Shariati and Ale-e Ahmad.
 11. For an interesting discussion of the formulation and impact of these ideas, see Hossein Bashiriyyeh, *The State and Revolution in Iran* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1984). See also Ali Ashtiani, 'The Sociology of Three Periods in the Intellectual History of Contemporary Iran,' *Kankash*, 2-3, Spring 1988 (in Persian).
 12. I have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the Left in 'Socialism or Anti-Imperialism? The Left and Revolution in Iran', *New Left Review*, no. 166, Nov.-Dec. 1987. Ali Ashtiani and I have further analyzed their role, significance, social bases and prospects in 'Islam and the Left: The Tragedy of the Iranian Revolution', (mimeo, 1988).
 13. For a detailed and descriptive account of the unfolding of the anti-Shah movement, see Dilip Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1987). Also very useful is Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, 'The State, Classes, and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution', *State, Culture and Society*, Spring 1985.
 14. I have discussed the role of Iranian industrial labour in the following essays: 'Workers' and Peasants' Councils in Iran', *Monthly Review* Oct. 1980 [by Shahzad Azad]; 'Industrialization Strategy and Workers' Response: The Case of the Workers' Councils in Iran', in Roger Southall, ed., *Trade Unions and the New Industrialization of the Third World* (London: Zed, 1988); 'Industrial Policy, Culture, and Working Class Politics: A Case Study of Tabriz Industrial Workers in the Iranian Revolution', *International Sociology*, June 1987. See also Assef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran* (London: Zed, 1986) for a discussion of the councils and of workers' control after the Revolution, based on the author's extensive fieldwork.
 15. Following the neutralisation of the military and the assumption of power by the new revolutionary regime, several top generals were executed (and others removed). General Rabii, head of the Air Force, and General Moghaddam, SAVAK chief, were among those executed. Generals Hossein Fardoust and Abbas Gharabaghi were retained, however, apparently because of their critical part in paving the way for the disintegration of the the Armed Forces. As for why the Shah's vaunted military proved so ineffectual, see General Abbas Gharabaghi, *Verites sur la crise iranienne* (Paris: la pensee universelle, 1985), especially pages 69-94, where he explains: 'Le mecontentement et les points de faiblesse resident essentiellement dans la corruption financiere et la mauvaise administration des lois relatives au status des personnels de Forces Armees Imperieles.' The issue of low

morale and ill-treatment of soldiers (including the *ressentiment* of the *homafar*, the non-commissioned air force personnel who were trained as technicians and could not aspire to officer grades; these were the airmen who rebelled at Lavisan Air Force Base) was also echoed by former Navy Admiral M. Arianpour, in a talk delivered in New York, February 1988. (Arianpour 'was retired' before the Revolution for his criticism of kickbacks, and re-instated by the revolutionary government in 1979 until his own resignation and departure from Iran.) See also Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (NY 1984) for a further discussion of the military.

16. See Ashraf and Banuazizi (op. cit.); see also William Shepard, 'Islam and Ideology: Toward A Typology,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19(3), Aug. 1987, pp. 307-336.
17. K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Holy Family*, quoted in Bogdan Denitch, *The Legitimation of a Revolution: The Yugoslav Case* (Yale, 1976), pp. 205-6.
18. I have referred to the significance of the Confederation(s) of Iranian Students, the student movement abroad, in my essay 'Socialism or Anti-Imperialism. . .' (see note 12 above).
19. One translation of the Fedayee (or Fedaii, or OIPFG) organization's Open Letter to Khomeini was printed in *MERIP Reports* [? 1979].
20. See my 'Workers' and Peasants' Councils in Iran' (note 14). Fedayee concerns were recorded in leaflets, pamphlets, and their weekly paper, *Kar* (Labour). These were translated and distributed by Fedayee supporters, including the present author, in the United States.
21. A good account of post-revolutionary developments is Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (NY 1984). See also Hiro, *Iran Under the Ayatollahs* (London 1987).
22. It must be said that the women's movement was bifurcated: there were pro-Khomeini and anti-Khomeini women's organizations. For documentation of the women's movement(s) of that period, see Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, eds., *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran* (London: Zed, 1982). For a discussion of women's current legal and economic status, see my essay 'Women, Work and Ideology in the Islamic Republic', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, May 1988.
23. This point has also been made by Kaveh Afrasiabi, in his unpublished dissertation *Populism and the State in Iran* (Boston University 1987).
24. These were subsequently published in 40 volumes under the quaint title *Documents from the Den of Spies*, Tehran. Notwithstanding the motivations of the Islamicists, the shredded documents meticulously put together constitute a veritable goldmine of information, including the role of the late Shah in precipitating the Afghan coup.
25. *The Guardian* 23 April 1988.
26. In 1983 the government introduced a 5-year plan with a 20-year horizon. It was eminently unrealistic and unworkable, as it had something in it for everyone, with wildly ambitious and optimistic goals. It was withdrawn after a year. As recently as September 1988 the Minister of Heavy Industries, Behzad Nabavi, reiterated the absence of a development strategy guiding economic policy. See *Iran Times* Sept. 16, 1988, p. 4.
For economic analyses, see H. Razavi and F. Vakil, *The Political Environment of Economic Planning in Iran 1971-1983* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984); Sh. Bakhash (op. cit.); Sohrab Behdad, 'The Political Economy of Islamic Planning in Iran,' ch. 7 of *Post-Revolutionary Iran*, Hooshang Amirahmadi and Manoucher Parvin, editors (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988).
27. Sohrab Behdad, 'The Political Economy of Islamic Planning in Iran' (*ibid.*), p.

113. Behdad, among others, has noted the eclectic nature of the Constitution and the various influences, including **Marxian**, that the document reflects. Refer to *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Hamid Algar, translator (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980).
28. This point is also made by Sami Zubaida, 'An Islamic State? The Case of Iran', *Middle East Report*, no. 153, July/Aug. 1988, pp. 3-7.
29. Several years ago, a view entertained by certain Iranian leftists and published in Persian-language journals was that 'totalitarianism' was being established in the Islamic Republic. Apart from the fact that the totalitarian thesis is conceptually slippery as well as associated with cold warriorism, this view occluded the tensions, contradictions, and countervailing tendencies in post-revolutionary Iran. The book by Cheryl Benard and Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Government of God: Iran's Islamic Republic* (Westview, 1983), also advances the totalitarian thesis quite inappropriately in my view. See my review of their book in *Middle East Studies Bulletin* 19(1), July 1985, pp. 82-84. It should be noted that a number of decidedly non-Islamic journals are published in Iran, notably the literary and cultural magazines *Mofid* and *Adineh*.
30. Y.A. Henry (editor and translator), *Pensees Politiques de l'Ayatollah Khomeini* (Paris: Editions ADPF, 1985), p. 47. This quote comes from the periodical *Majmu'e*, 7 Nov. 1978.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 47. Ayatollah Khomeini's statements and declarations have also been translated into English and annotated by Hamid Algar in *Islam and Revolution* (Berkeley, CA: Mizan Press, 1981). For other examples of Islamicist writings that mix modern and theocratic themes, see Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, *Discourse on the Islamic Republic* (Tehran: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1985), and Ayatollah Yahya Nouri, *Islamic Government and Revolution in Iran* (Glasgow: Royston, 1985).
32. Because the Islamicists are not fundamentally anti-development, and technocrats exist among them (notably the Minister of Heavy Industries, **Behzad** Nabavi), the modern industrial sector was not dismantled after the Revolution. (Also, the workers' councils—and even the Islamic associations that supplanted them—would not have allowed this.) However, the state of permanent revolution, political conflicts, and ideological mobilization subordinated economic development and productive investment. Thus the (now nationalized) modern firms remained intact, but were ill-managed and under-utilized.
33. According to Admiral **Arianpour** (see note 15 above), the new revolutionary government had no plans to re-organize the military or reconstitute a new fighting force and basically got the idea from the Left. Oral communication, New York, February 1988.
34. At this writing (October 1988), the Government has announced plans to combine the Ministry of the Pasdaran and the Defence Ministry. This is part of the post-war reorganization of the state apparatus.
35. Hooshang Amirahmadi, 'Middle Class Revolutions in the Third World, and Iran,' in *Post-Revolutionary Iran*, H. Amirahmadi and M. Parvin, eds. (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988).
36. *Ibid.* See also Sh. Bakhsh, 1984, op. cit.
37. Amirahmadi, 1988; Bakhsh, 1984; Behdad 1988.
38. Amirahmadi, 1988 (op. cit.).
39. V. Moghadam, 'Oil, the State, and Limits of Autonomy: The Iranian Case,' *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Spring 1988.
40. *Ibid.* See also Michael Renner, 'Determinants of the Islamic Republic's Oil Policy: Iranian Revenue Needs, the Gulf War, and the Transformation of the World Oil Market,' in *Post-Revolutionary Iran*, H. Amirahmadi and M. Parvin, eds. (op.

- cit.), and Cyrus Bina, *The Economics of the Oil Crisis* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985).
41. Recently, a number of steps have been taken in the direction of post-war normalization. Parliamentary elections were held in April 1988, and the Third (Islamic) **Majlis** convened in May, with a more homogenous composition than previously. Earlier, in January, Ayatollah Khomeini had clipped the wings of the Council of Guardians (dominated by clerics who abide by the more conservative texts in Islamic jurisprudence which respect private property, the Council had blocked economically radical bills) by creating a new body to settle disputes between the reform-oriented Parliament and the conservative **Council**. He also declared in a *fatva* (religious decree) that 'the interests of the **community**' has precedence over 'even Islamic law'—this has been interpreted to mean that Khomeini has prioritized the government over the clergy. Hojatoleslam **Hashemi Rafsanjani**, Speaker of the Parliament and leader of the **pragmatic/moderate** wing, was made commander of Iran's armed forces; the dual ministries of the Revolutionary Guard (Pasdaran) and Defence are being merged. In the summer of 1988, Iran took steps to revive diplomatic and economic ties with the West, naming an Ambassador to France and welcoming a group of British legislators for talks in Tehran (see *New York Times* 24 June 1988, p. A3). At the same time, a wave of executions of political prisoners took place, which by late October had reached 350, according to Amnesty International. Presidential elections are scheduled for 1989.
 42. In this connection, mention should be made of the persistent pattern of Western (U.K., U.S.) subterfuge. By undermining nationalist, socialist, and democratic movements and governments (whether motivated by economic interest or anti-communism), **Western imperialism** has contributed to the diminution of secular discourse and movements and the rise of **political Islam**. **Examples** are the UK—and US-sponsored coup against Mohammad **Mossadegh** in Iran in 1953; US support for Maronite hegemony in Lebanon and the entry of US troops in 1958; the hysteria over the nationalization of the Suez canal by the late President Nasser; hostility toward the democratic-secular Palestinian nationalist movement; subversion of the Marxist government of Afghanistan and military support for the fundamentalist Mujahideen. This is the sense in which Western powers are complicitous in the rise of anti-democratic religious movements in the Middle East.
 43. See Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* and *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: New Left Books, 1974). While these books are extremely learned and have had an immensely positive impact, Anderson's idea of the French Revolution as the model of a pure bourgeois revolution, and his discussion of the 'paradoxes', 'impurities', 'premativities', and 'singularities' of British political history (earlier criticized by E.P. Thompson and most recently by Michael Barratt Brown in *New Left Review*), have been **problematized** and critiqued by Mary Fulbrook and Theda Skocpol, 'Destined Pathways: The Historical Sociology of Perry Anderson', in *Vision and Method in Historical Sociology*, ed. by Th. Skocpol (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984).
 44. Paul Valery once remarked that all theory is autobiography. Alvin Gouldner put it thus: 'Much of theory-work begins with an effort to make sense of one's experience. Much of it is initiated by an effort to resolve unresolved experience; here the problem is not to validate what has been observed or to produce new observations, but rather to locate and to interpret the meaning of what one has lived' (from *The Coming Crisis of Sociology*, NY: Avon Books, 1970). This paper may be read as one such endeavour.