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Introduction by Alan Woods

The Iranian revolution in 1979 was a workers' revolution that overthrew the hated regime of the Shah. In the process of that revolution the workers built their own independent structures, in particular the workers' councils, which were a genuine expression of workers' power.

Unfortunately, what was a revolution in the making was derailed due to the lack of a genuine Marxist leadership capable of leading the working class and behind it all the oppressed layers of Iranian society. It was this lack of revolutionary leadership that led to a vacuum in the political situation which was filled by the Islamic clergy under Ayatollah Khomeini. This led to the defeat of the workers' revolution and the beginning of a process of counter-revolution that allowed the present regime to be installed in power.

The workers of Iran have paid a very heavy price ever since. Now, however, a new wave of worker and student militancy is beginning to unfold. That is why it is urgent to learn all the mistakes of the past and draw all the necessary conclusions.

The coming Iranian revolution can only be a socialist revolution and at its head must stand the Iranian working class with its own independent and revolutionary leadership, embodied in a party that has to be built with deep roots within the class, which while representing the long-term aims of the revolution must also engage in the daily struggles of the workers and youth. Such a party should have no illusions in any bourgeois or petty-bourgeois movement, particularly the Islamic fundamentalists, who have been in power for 30 years.

The Islamic regime is in no way “progressive”. It serves the interests of capitalism in Iran. The more astute strategists of capital internationally have come to the conclusion that in order to help US imperialism withdraw from Iraq, the help of regimes such as the Syrian and Iranian is required in an attempt to stabilise the situation. At the same time, in spite of the demagogic rhetoric of the present leadership in Iran, the ruling Islamic elite realise they need help from the West as the economy enters deeper and deeper into crisis.

That explains why the EU has recently made a turn towards improving relations with the Iranian regime. The US will eventually - particularly with Obama in power and with US imperialism in need of the IRI’s help in Afghanistan, Iraq and so on - improve relations and attempt to normalise them. Any new ‘president’ that may emerge from the June ‘elections’ – which could even be Khatami himself (or someone else) - will be called on to carry out this rapprochement.

In all this, both the Iranian regime and US imperialism will be concerned not with the fate of Iranian workers, but only in their own economic and strategic interests, founded on maintaining the privileges of the few against the many. The only option Iranian workers will have is to mobilise independently as a class.

That is why I welcome the publication of a new book by Maziar Razi, who I have known now for several years and worked with in building up the genuine forces of revolutionary Marxism. This comrade is a living link to the revolutionary events of 1978-79. He was the first Iranian Trotskyist and together with his comrades at the time attempted to build a Marxist force in Iran based on the ideas of Leon Trotsky. But they were too weak to play the role that was required.

In spite of the terrible defeat of that period, comrade Maziar has struggled for three decades to keep alive the ideas of Marxism in Iran, while many others succumbed to the pressures of the period. We will give him and his comrades every possible help in developing the ideas of Marxism inside Iran, and in building the Marxist Tendency as an instrument to take these ideas into the Iranian labour movement.

Alan Woods, February 2009

The political situation in Iran
and the necessity of forming the
Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

*Opening speech of Comrade Maziar Razi in First Conference of
Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency (IRMT)*

Greetings to all comrades present in the conference!

I want to start my discussion by reminding you of a historic event. In 1898 there was a small congress made up of nine people in the city of Minsk. This small number of people founded a small group called the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party. Although all members of the group were arrested immediately afterwards, the founding of it however, was an important historic event. This group later became known as the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviks). Less than 30 years after this nine-person meeting, the largest workers' revolution in history of humanity was organised by the Bolsheviks in October 1917 in Russia. We are the followers of these organisational traditions.

Comrades! Today's conference is also a historic event. But today we face enormous tasks.

The first question that must be answered is this: why are we organising our first conference in this situation and why **today**? Why was this conference not organised a few years ago or why can't we delay it until a few years from now?

For those who believe in the principles of a Leninist party, and are aware of and understand the party's importance, and are not steeped in pseudo-anarchist, pseudo-Menshevik and centrist deviations, and are also not overcome by despair and exhaustion, the answer is very simple. Answering this question is only possible by reviewing society's objective and subjective situation.

Lenin has always mentioned four important conditions for explaining a pre-revolutionary situation and the organisational preparation necessary for the coming revolution in society. 1- A deep economic and political crisis and divisions inside the ruling clique. 2- The aggravation of the masses' situation. 3- Organisation and continuity of workers' struggles against the capitalist system. 4- A revolutionary leadership for organising social revolution and the establishment of a workers' government.

Of all the objective conditions mentioned above all can more or less to be found in Iranian society. The only thing that is absent is the subjective factor, i.e., the absence of a revolutionary leadership. If this assessment is correct; it is self-evident that preparations for forming a Leninist party should be the main task of revolutionary Marxists. In other words, the fundamental strategy of revolutionary Marxists is to form a revolutionary vanguard party.

So the answer to the above question is: the situation for **preparing** the building of such a party is better today than ever before. Until now, the conditions were not as ready (and we were not as ready as we are today either) and forming it in the future would also be late. Because you can't wait until the period of a revolutionary upsurge (which in a society like Iran comes about once every few decades) and then build a revolutionary vanguard party overnight, and then imagine that with the appearance of an organisation decisive sections of the masses will suddenly join this party! No, such an analysis would be in contradiction with the experience of October 1917 revolution and Bolshevik traditions. Preparations for building a revolutionary vanguard party should begin **years before** its formation.

But since this party should be built with the vanguard workers (the worker-intellectuals), we must build a bridge to fill this gap today. A bridge that can connect today's dispersed situation of revolutionary Marxists to the formation of a revolutionary vanguard party. This bridge is called the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency and today we are holding its first conference.

With brief comments on objective factors in society, we should assess to what extent the conditions mentioned by Lenin are consistent with the current situation of Iranian society.

The crisis of the capitalist state

The economic crisis in society

The way to evaluate the economic situation is through assessing **inflation and unemployment** which are two integral parts of the capitalist system. Capitalists are forced to buy the labour power of workers in the market and to exploit them in order to increase their profit (surplus value). But this simple form of exploitation is

not enough to quench the thirst of capitalists for wealth. In order to achieve more profit, capitalists must lower wages and increase prices as much as possible. In western industrial countries, which have a history of trade unions and labour resistance, this is done by improvements in production technology (new machinery leads to less work hours for advanced industries). But in backward capitalist societies (like Iran) the exploitation of workers is done in a primitive way (just like the late 19th century or early 20th century in Europe). Not only are wages kept low but they are in many cases not paid at all! This leads to a lower purchasing power for people and some products not being sold. Capitalists, in order to solve this problem, enter into fiercer competition with each other and put some out of business. As a result more people become unemployed and society's purchasing power decreases. The economic crisis intensifies. This crisis shows itself as a crisis of over-production. This means that society doesn't have the power to purchase what is produced. This is when inflation also increases quickly because of an increase in bankruptcies. Factories are closed one after another or lower their production capacity. Lowering production capacity means an increase in production costs. There are daily increases in unemployment. In Iran's case there are lots of statistics for this turmoil. For example:

In its July 2008 report the Economist Intelligence Unit has assessed the Iranian labour market up to 2012 and it has predicted that the labour force will increase from last year's 23,700,000 to 24,300,000 in the current year and which is a 2.8 percent increase, this will be more than 25,000,000 in the **coming year**. The EIU expects that the current year's unemployment rate of 12 percent (2,600,000 people) will go up to 12.9 percent in the next year (meaning more than 3,250,000 unemployed people). In 2010 the number of employed people in Iran will be 25,700,000 and the unemployment rate will be 13.2 percent. And in 2011 these will increase to 26,400,000 people and 14.1 percent respectively.

And in 2012 we finally will have a 27 million-strong work force in the country and also a 15 percent unemployment rate that will be bearing down on the government (meaning more than 4,000,000 unemployed people).

The Central Bank's 2008 report shows that in the fifth month of the Iranian calendar [22 July-21 August] the upward trend in the price of commodities is continuing. Government and Central Bank programmes for stopping this have been ineffective. The inflation rate in Iran is determined by calculating the prices of 359 types of commodities and services and the average of these prices in August shows that inflation continues to grow in Iran. The Central Bank of Iran calculates the inflation rate every month but the official inflation rate is usually set based on year-on-year changes. Based on the new report of the Central Bank, in the past 12 months until the end of August, the average inflation rate has been about 22.3 percent. This report proves that the inflation rate has increased about 10 percent in the past year and a half. (Unofficial statistics are actually higher and inflation is probably close to 35 percent).

The price of petrol, which was rationed last summer, is 1000 Rials (10 cents) a litre and non-rationed petrol is sold at 4000 Rials (40 cents). Based on the government's economic plan, in three and a half years the petrol price will no longer be subsidised by the government and petrol will be on sale at the international market price. In addition, international pressures to solve the problem of uranium enrichment and international economic sanctions on Iranian banks have made the economic situation worse.

In recent months the market for consumer goods has seen a lot of changes and prices of consumer goods have been increasing every day. The increase in liquidity is the most important reason

for the rampant growth in the inflation rate and, based on various reports, has exceeded 1,600,000 billion rials (although, from a Marxist point of view, the main root of inflation is the decrease in the mass of total profit in the society). Reports show that in the past three years a significant part of the oil income has been transformed into Rials and liquidity has increased from 700,000 billion Rials to more than 1,600,000 billion Rials (\$160bn). The majority of this huge amount of money was poured into the housing market and increased house prices several times over. Iran's foreign revenue in the past three years has been estimated at around \$250 billion. Economists say that the government, by transforming all these into Rials and injecting them into the economy, has led to a sharp increase in inflation. A part of this income has been used in non-productive sections and for providing current costs of the government and, based on what economists say, this has led to an increase in liquidity and rising inflation.

But the usual method of government administrators is to put all the problems and burdens on the shoulder of workers. Today, more than ever, a majority of workers are under the threat of joining the urban poor. Hundreds of thousands of active and employed workers have become unemployed and homeless due to government policies. The price of basic necessities is increasing every day and not a single substantial step has been taken to control this. The policies of the capitalists have put workers on the brink of financial ruin. Millions of workers are desperately in need of the daily bread for themselves and their families. Those who aren't unemployed yet will join the ranks of the poor with any further increase in prices. According to government statistics, 14 million people live below the poverty line (this is based on the poverty line defined by the government as a monthly income of about 1,200,000 Rials (\$124) but the real poverty line today is about 3,000,000 to 4,000,000 Rials (around

\$300 to \$400). This means that up to 20 million people could be living below the poverty line).

A general picture of the economic prospects shows us that out of a population of 70 million only a third is in the labour market (27 million). Out of this, about 4 to 5 million will be unemployed. With further increases in population we will reach explosive situations. The oil revenue is mostly used to buy arms and aid Hezbollah in the region. The rest is used to provide loans to a few government supporters, without any scrutiny or accounting, and there is no economic programme and clear perspective to solve the problems of the masses. As a result a significant portion of young workers and the educated youth will make a stand against a weakened capitalist system. This huge protesting population is the potential force of the coming revolution.

The political crisis of the capitalist government

At the political level, the "leaders" are in a crisis and continue to take contradictory positions on solving national and international issues. For example:

In recent years the government has always been divided between the "absolutists" and the "reformists". With Ahmadinejad's policies, both national and international, the divisions within the traditional factions has not only increased but deep divisions have also been formed inside each traditional faction; this has become so bad that Khamenei [the Supreme Leader of the Islamic regime], during his Friday prayer speech on September 19th 2008, had to intervene officially to solve divisions among the "principalists" ["principalist" is a relatively new term referring to the right wing of the government. It consists of, but is not exclusive to, Ahmadinejad's faction]! Khamenei declared that the stance of Rahim Mahasyi, Head of the Cultural Heritage and

Tourism Organisation, on friendship with the Israeli people was wrong; the same stance that Ahmadinejad had approved a day before! Khamenei asked both sides (as if they were stubborn children) to end the quarrelling!

The 10th Presidential elections are due in nine months and the number of "principalist" candidates indicates the depth of divisions within the ruling clique. Ahmadinejad now has to compete with his former allies: Ali Larijani (he Speaker of Parliament), Gholamali Hadad Adel (the Speaker of the 7th Parliament and Head of the Cultural Commission) and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf (Tehran's Mayor). The rest are fiercely fighting against each other. Protests against pro-Ahmadinejad ministers and resignations by his followers are continuing. For example, on September 8th Brigadier Alireza Afshar resigned from his post as Political Deputy of the Interior Ministry. Tahmasb Mazaheri, Chairman of the Central Bank, who has held this position for just one year, and is considered to be one of Ahmadinejad's closest allies, will resign in a few days' time because of disagreements with Ahmadinejad's policies.

After three years of Ahmadinejad's presidency, the reformists have started their own "uncompromising" (to quote Rafsanjani) protest against his policies. Rafsanjani has protested about Article 44 of the Constitution and lack of progress with the privatisations (August 11th) and has criticised Ahmadinejad's policies (August 16th) and Khatami has also criticised Ahmadinejad (September 14th) and so on.

At the same time, divisions among the reformists themselves have also intensified. Old allies in the reformists faction are standing against each other in the Presidential elections: Mohammad Khatami (a former two times president), Mehdi Karoobi (former Speaker of Parliament), Abdullah Noori (former

Internal Minister), Ali Akbar Velayati (Adviser to the Supreme Leader), Hassan Rohani (former Secretary for Supreme National Security Council) have entered the race, each with different policies. Karoobi intends to form a political bloc with a section of the anti-Ahmadinejad "principalists" in order to sideline Ahmadinejad and Khatami.

It is obvious that this is a crisis situation; there is no sign of stability, power or unity in the capitalist government of Iran. The first and second objective factors that Lenin mentioned, i.e., 1- a deep economic and political crisis and division in the ruling clique and 2- the deterioration of the situation of the masses, are absolutely true for the Iranian situation.

The situation of the social movements

The persistence of workers' struggles

Despite the repression, harsh treatment and the very grave economic situation, we can really say that the balance of forces is changing in favour of workers and all oppressed layers. This change in the balance of forces in favour of the workers means the working class in Iran has not been defeated and is still resisting and fighting the capitalist system to realise its demands. Not only has the working class not accepted defeat but is continuing its struggles, with few resources, without becoming demoralised. Here are the protests from just the past week:

- The strike and protests of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane workers prove that a section of Iranian workers do have the ability to maintain effective anti-capitalist slogans (like workers' control) and are continuing their resistance boldly and with courage. Recently a 600-strong gathering of Haft

- The strike at Alborz Tyre still continues. They haven't received their wages for five months.
- Khuzestan Pipe Co. organised a gathering in Shohada Square of Ahvaz on September 9th, protesting against six months' unpaid wages.
- The Vahed bus drivers left their buses' lights on demanding the release of Mansour Osanloo.
- The workers of Parris Factory, Gharb Bafte Sanandaj Carpet, Kurdistan Textile Factory, Ramshir Factory and so on continued their demonstrations.

It is obvious that during the past year that capitalist state was determined to maximise its blows against the working class. The arrests of known labour activists like Mahmoud Salehi and Mansour Osanloo, arrests and intimidation of hundreds of honourable workers, teachers, women and students in the society; the flogging of workers and other layers demonstrates this intimidating method. The capitalist state has tried to intimidate progressive workers' and students' and women's activists so that they would stop their activities and submit to the capitalist state. That way the exploitation of workers would be easier and the capitalists' pockets would be fuller.

But has the capitalist state succeeded? Has it changed the balance of forces against the working class? Could we say that the capitalist state is stronger and the working class weaker than they were last year? In my opinion, no!

It is obvious that workers have received some blows during this period. All over the world the struggles of workers against the capitalist state brings about state aggression against workers. And

it is evident that among progressive activists there is an atmosphere of fear from more arrests. Some have temporarily become disillusioned and have lost the continuity of their struggles. The spectre of the police and Intelligence Ministry networks can be sensed on labour activists.

But among the huge mass of workers no defeat has taken place. Not only has the working class not been defeated by the capitalist state but it has actually gained some advantages in the past year's struggles and strikes (Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane strike is the most important sign of this fact). Because the mass of workers in this grave economical situation has no time to accept defeat from the capitalist system! They must either be victorious or accept the annihilation of themselves and their families. In fact workers' struggles have continued. Thus, we can argue that the overall class balance of forces is in favour of workers and against the capitalist state.

The third condition in Lenin's discussion can also obviously be seen in Iran, i.e., organisation and continuity of workers' struggle against the capitalist system.

The crisis of the workers' vanguard

But among the practical leaders (the workers' vanguard), in contradiction to workers themselves, there is a crisis. If this analysis is correct, then shouldn't we seek to find the root of the slowdown or reluctance of the vanguard workers to continue the struggle? Its root is definitely not the strengthening of the economic situation and state power. As we said, divisions inside the government have increased. The economic crisis is deeper than during last year. The limited international economic sanctions have affected the government fundamentally.

Pressures, intimidation and arrests by the weak and crisis-ridden capitalist government can only be effective when the workers' movement **lacks organisation and leadership**. It is evident that mass organisation of workers is hard in times of repression. The mass of workers only fight against the capitalist government when they have had enough. But what is more important is the lack of preparation of the workers' vanguard to resist against the current situation. The workers' vanguard in Iran has paid a heavy price. The struggles of workers' activists during the past two decades are admirable. But the workers' vanguard has gone into crisis because of the lack of co-ordination, the absence of any united organisation and flouting internal democracy and not participating and not intervening continuously within the mass of workers. And this critical situation gives the government a better opportunity to continue the repression.

The centrifugal forces of teachers, women and students

The continuity of struggles and resistance of different social layers in the past period, especially teachers, workers, women and students, has made the state extremely worried. These social layers mainly have centrifugal tendencies within them. In other words, they have until recently been supporters of the reformists in government or have been backing the system in one way or another.

These developments and centrifugal tendencies can be seen inside Daftar-e Tahkim (the Office for Strengthening Unity, a students' association) and even Khaneh-ye Kargar (the Labour House) and even inside the teachers' actions. Actually we can say that the capitalist state is more worried about the collapse of support among its own base. But these centrifugal tendencies have only one way to go and that's towards general socialist ideas and programmes. It is not accidental that many of the students inside

Daftar-e Tahkim have turned to socialist ideas. In the not too distant future these tendencies will be seen in large sections of the teachers, workers and women. There is no doubt that eventually socialist tendencies will have the upper hand in these movements.

The students' movement

Last year's clampdown was mostly meant to terrorise and exhaust the fighters. The period of executions and long-term clampdowns, under the present conditions, is over (this situation has been imposed on the government by the students' own resistance and international pressure). But this doesn't mean that we are entering a period of democratic openings in society. In countries like Iran, as long as a capitalist government holds the power, because of the uneven growth of capitalism, we should not expect political openings like western states, so repression and intimidation will continue (and with the support of the western states), but as opposed to the 1980s, the aim is to make the activists "exhausted" and not to kill them and imprison them for a long time. It is therefore obvious that organisation should be more precise, more specific and more adapted to the current situation.

In the current situation the building of **united action blocs** is on the agenda. The experience of December 3rd last year proved that the balance of forces is not in favour of a specific group or tendency so that they can organise a protest by themselves. Last year's Students' Day commemoration (December 6th) should have been like the year before: by all forces and diverse tendencies so the government couldn't attack a specific tendency in isolation. In this regard, after the attack and arrests, the correctness of holding united protests together with other tendencies and student groups was proven. This method, instead of going it alone, was emphasised because different tendencies and groups all acted together in support of those who were

arrested. Student activists learnt in practice that you can't come to the political arena with only one slogan and one tendency and then ask all tendencies for support and to join the campaign. Most importantly, last year's experience proved once again that you can't organise a mass action openly. Leadership and organisation of a protest must be **clandestine**, so that the organisers can't be arrested beforehand and can lead the protests on the agreed date. Work within the masses doesn't necessarily mean organising openly (student activists should have learnt this lesson from the Vahed bus drivers' strike. The type of clampdown by the government was the same in both protests, just as was the type of organisation by the activists was the same).

The crisis of the traditional organisations

The political crisis of the traditional organisations (Stalinists, Maoists, centrists and so on) in exile is at its height now. Splits, divisions, resignations, leaving politics, expulsions and antagonisms have become commonplace for these petty-bourgeois tendencies. These organisations are not only unable to lead the social layers but they can't even organise themselves (we have written numerous articles on these organisations before and will not go into this matter now because of the lack of time).

Solving the question of the leadership crisis

It is evident that Lenin's fourth condition has not been realised yet. In other words, in Iran we have yet to build a credible Bolshevik party, trusted by the masses of workers and students. None of the existing parties and organisations that have entered the political arena with boastful names like "communist" and "workers" neither present an alternative leadership nor have entered their political campaign with calculated moves and a

correct political line. So they have intensified the crisis inside the workers' movement.

It is in this situation that we, as the Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency, have started our theoretical and practical activities in continuity of our past experiences, so as to build a bridge to reach and build the revolutionary vanguard party and together with the workers and all oppressed people go towards establishing a soviet system and eventually building a socialist society.

In the coming period we must try to build our political credibility inside the workers' movement. This is not an easy task. We can't do it with a few slogans and presenting a few "leaders". Comrades we should stay side-by-side with the working class and present in the struggles of all oppressed people and to be with them during every step of their anti-capitalist struggles. We can only reach our final goals with close participation and direct intervention in the mass movements. Based on our internationalist orientation and the support of the comrades of the International Marxist Tendency across five continents, we are sure that revolutionary Marxist traditions will establish a solid base within these movements.

Comrades, victory will be ours!
Long live the Revolutionary Marxists of Iran!
Long live socialism!

September 22nd, 2008

Why Revolutionary Marxists should not support Islamic fundamentalists*

A critique of the SWP's concept of the permanent revolution

Maziar Razi

Introduction

The question of Islamic fundamentalism has been one of the central tactical issues facing Marxists over the past few decades. In fact the origin of this dilemma and discussion dates back to three decades ago and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) in February 1979.

Those on the "left" who argue the need to support the Islamic fundamentalists, in general, and the IRI regime, in particular, fall into three categories. Firstly, there are confused so-called lefts (anarchists and radical petty bourgeois trends); Secondly, there are governments, that although in their own countries have carried out important radical reforms, such as Venezuela, or have

even carried out radical social transformations, such as Cuba, have established diplomatic and economic ties with the IRI and Hezbollah seeking some kind of third front, an “anti-imperialist” alliance; Thirdly, there some so-called Trotskyists and their allies (e.g., the Socialist Workers Party “SWP” and Respect in Britain) who have a flawed analysis about Islamic fundamentalism.

The first two categories have based their position in regards to the fundamentalists on "the enemy of our enemy is our friend" theory. That is to say, that they are either not sure about the class nature of these Islamic trends, and support them at face value (apparently as they are showing resistance to imperialists policies); or they are well aware of the reactionary nature of fundamentalism but for the sake of diplomacy and strengthening the "anti-imperialist bloc" they pursue a very dubious position by siding with a reactionary and semi-fascist state and its allies (for which they will pay a big price once the essential errors of this diplomacy are exposed internationally).

The purpose of this article is to deal mainly with the third variant, which is best expressed by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) of Britain. This is an organisation that claims to be "internationalist" and “Marxist”. We have to state quite clearly that the position adopted by the British SWP is based on a deep-rooted and theoretical misconception. Therefore their views have to be analysed in more detail. They claim that the defence of a reactionary regime, such as the Iranian, is justified on the basis of “Trotskyism”. In reality they have abandoned genuine Trotskyism and with it the essence of the permanent revolution.

The SWP does the unthinkable

On the basis of a false theoretical justification (which will be dealt with in this article), the SWP is de facto acting as a

"spokesperson" of a reactionary regime in Europe. Their main slogans in anti-war demonstrations have included, "We are all Hezbollah now!" In their newspapers they support the Islamic Republic of Iran without highlighting the level of repression against workers and students which is unprecedented in recent history. Only when forced do they admit that workers are being repressed. Their approach to this has more to do with bourgeois diplomacy than with a genuinely revolutionary Marxist approach. They have watered down their criticisms of the regime for the sake of unity with a whole series of dubious Islamic fundamentalist groups. This process of adaptation became accentuated particularly in the SWP's collaboration with George Galloway in the formation of the Respect party in Britain. We will look into this later.

In 1994 Chris Harman wrote a lengthy document, *The Prophet and the Proletariat*, in which he attempted to defend a Marxist position on the question of Islamic fundamentalism. Harman explained that, "many of the individuals attracted to radical versions of Islamism can be influenced by socialists – provided socialists combine complete political independence from all forms of Islamism with a willingness to seize opportunities to draw individual Islamists into genuinely radical forms of struggle alongside them." So far, so good.

It was in that same document that Harman wrote an oft-quoted piece:

"On some issues we will find ourselves on the same side as the Islamists against imperialism and the state. This was true, for instance, in many countries during the second Gulf War. It should be true in countries like France or Britain when it comes to

combating racism. Where the Islamists are in opposition, our rule should be, 'with the Islamists sometimes, with the state never'."

Here Harman was already on a slippery road to opportunism, for although at the time he attempted to maintain a more balanced approach, it clearly indicated the tendency that was to develop later, as he confused the "Islamists" with the people governed by the Islamists. It is one thing to be with the working people of Iran against imperialism, it is another to side with the regime itself. Instead, more and more, as time has gone by the SWP has in practice played down the reactionary nature of "Islamism".

We have to state clearly that the Islamic regime in Iran is a mortal enemy of the working class and youth. However, this does not just apply to the "Islamists" in Iran. Wherever Islamist regimes have come to power they have installed reactionary anti-working class regimes, and where they are not in power they play a reactionary role within the movement. In the past (see the Tudeh party in Iran at the time of Khomeini's coming to power) it was the Stalinists who depicted the Islamic fundamentalists in a positive light. It is ironic that now a group that claims the mantle of Trotsky should be leaning in the same direction.

On the Iranian regime we can have no doubts about its reactionary and brutal nature. For what has the Iranian regime (this blood-soaked regime!) done to the workers and youth of Iran? In the past 30 years in power it has executed 50 times more socialists, communists and workers' leaders than during the 37-year rule of the Shah and his CIA-trained hangmen and torturers! In 1987, during just two days, the regime executed more than 12,000 left-wing activists in prison. It has recruited 400,000 Basiji thugs from the villages and let them loose on women in Iranian cities. The regime's thugs flog anyone who does not

observe the "Islamic Dress Code" in the streets. They throw acid on women's faces. They forcefully enter people's homes to search for alcoholic drinks and music CDs. They have killed and imprisoned most of the leaders of the labour movement that is demanding the workers' unpaid wages (for anything from 6-12 months) or basic trade union rights. The list is too long. Are these not the real issues that a "revolutionary" organisation should be concerned with?

The SWP in its publications admits that workers are arrested and so on, but it shies away from looking at the overall situation faced by the Iranian workers over a period of years. It allows itself to be sucked into the question of whether Iran has a right to develop Nuclear weapons

"So what is Iran doing wrong? As a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran is well within its right to develop nuclear energy for civilian purposes and has done so under the watchful eye of International Atomic Energy Authority." (11 February 2006, Socialist Worker online)

They publish this as if the nuclear programme of the regime is purely for peaceful reasons, when it is clear that the Iranian regime is preparing to add itself to the list of nuclear powers, as a counterweight to the threats of US imperialism. Nobody should have any illusions about this. Of course, we cannot support the manoeuvres of western imperialism, in particular the USA, when they use Iran's nuclear research as an excuse to lean on the regime and get it to act according to their interests. The task of dealing with the Iranian regime, and its nuclear research, belongs to the Iranian working class and no one else.

In another article we read:

"The Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad's denunciations of Israel have proved popular in the Arab world. The Lebanese Islamist movement Hezbollah, Iran's ally won even greater acclaim when it defeated Israel in last year's war." (21 August 2007, Socialist Worker online). This may be a statement of fact, but surely the role of a "Marxist" critique should be to expose the demagoguery of someone like Ahmadinejad and not to present him in positive light?

This kind of prettifying of the present Iranian regime (i.e. rendering a service to a reactionary regime), may explain why the Iranian authorities have given the green light to the SWP leaders' books being translated and published in Iran! We have to remember that in Iran any independent writer, translator or publisher has to get the permission of Vezarat-e Ershad-e Eslami (the Islamic Guidance Ministry) before any book or magazine sees the light of day. This so-called ministry consists of some influential clergy who act as a censorship body (Mr Khatami, the ex-president of Iran, was a member of this ministry). Any book or article which does not correspond closely with the "Islamic" code of conduct is censored.

To the surprise of many socialists and Marxists in Iran who have witnessed severe censorship and even arrests and closure of their offices for publishing or translating any Marxist work - and in a country that has the highest level of censorship and repression against intellectuals and students in the world(!) - many books written by the SWP leadership have received permission from the Vezarat-e Ershad and have been published by official publishers. The major books by Alex Callinicos that have been translated and published in Iran are: *Social theory: historical introduction*; *Against Postmodernism: a Marxist critique*; *Marxism and the New Imperialism*; *Trotskyism, Marxism and Philosophy*; *The revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx*, and *An anti-Capitalist*

manifesto. Books by Chris Harman include: *A people's history of the world* and *Explaining the crisis: a Marxist re-appraisal*. In addition, official reformist newspapers like *Iran* and *Shargh* have published many articles by these two gentlemen.

What this reflects is the following. While in their articles the SWP leaders continue to pay lip service to the need for socialism, Marxism and so on, in practice they make a whole series of opportunist concessions to the Islamic fundamentalists. Having given such "critical" or "moral" support to the IRI, the least the Iranian regime can do is allow the publication of some of the SWP's works! It is clear that the regime sees no problem in this kind of so-called "Trotskyist" grouping. Meanwhile many genuine militants continue to be arrested, harassed and victimised.

One of the main leaders of the SWP, Alex Callinicos, gave an interview in October 2006 published here <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=241> in which he said the following:

"To the extent to which they [the Islamists] translate words into action, as Hezbollah have against Israel, then, on this central issue they cannot be described as 'ultra-conservative'. Of course, when it comes to social and economic issues the picture is different – the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, supports privatization in Egypt. But even here one has to be careful. Both the Brotherhood and Hezbollah have cultivated a popular base among the urban poor through their welfare programmes, something that one can't imagine American Republicans or British Tories doing."

Thus reactionary parties are presented as being better than the Tories in Britain or Republicans in the USA. Here we see how they are already making concessions to the “Islamists”, but this comes as no surprise if we read the following, by the same Alex Callinicos in April 2002, available at <http://www.socialistreview.org.uk/article.php?articlenumber=7935>:

"...Of necessity, these movements unite a wide range of political forces in common action. The anti-capitalist movement prides itself on its unity in diversity (...)"

"The same pattern is to be found in many different countries. The Movement for Democratic Change in Zimbabwe brings together liberals, trade unionists, civil rights campaigners and revolutionary socialists who are united by their opposition to the Mugabe regime. (...)"

"The best example is the Stop the War Coalition (StWC). As already noted, this brings together people of diverse politics around a very clearly defined set of issues - opposition to the 'war on terrorism' and to the associated attacks on civil liberties and on ethnic minorities. The very success of the StWC is a consequence of this narrowness of focus. Its initiators on both the revolutionary and the reformist left quite rightly resisted attempts to broaden it out or to divert it into other issues - *for example, opposition to Islamist terrorism - that would have divided and paralysed the coalition.*" [Our emphasis]

"The Anti Nazi League is another example of a classic united front. Its enormous success since its inception in 1977 has lain in the ANL's single-minded focus on mass mobilisation against

organised fascists. Attempts to transform it into a broad campaign against racism that, for example, opposes all immigration controls have always been rejected. Such a change would cut the ANL off from the very large numbers of people who believe, wrongly, that non-racist immigration controls are both possible and desirable but who are willing to fight the Nazis. An ANL with a broader anti-racist platform would have a much narrower base. Deprived of its focus on mass action against the Nazis, it would in all likelihood degenerate into yet another talking shop of the type that already litters the anti-racist scene in Britain.”

In the above quote we can see an important element that lies at the heart of the SWP’s opportunism towards Islamic fundamentalism. In order to create the widest possible base for any campaign they water it down to one element, which leads them into alliances with utterly reactionary forces.

Callinicos wrote on the Socialist Alliance in 2002 (when they still had big illusions in the Socialist Alliance, which has since then collapsed!):

"This explains the peculiarly hybrid character of the Socialist Alliance. It is hybrid programmatically in the sense that it leaves open the issue of reform and revolution. To adopt an explicitly revolutionary programme, as some groups within the Alliance argue, would be to slam the door on Labour Party supporters who have rejected Blairism but who have yet to break with reformism. Keeping left social democrats out of the alliance for the sake of revolutionary purity would leave potentially hundreds of thousands of disaffected Labour supporters to drift around waiting for the next revival of the Labour left, or (perhaps more likely) to withdraw into cynical apathy.

Far better to draw them into common activity with revolutionaries within the Socialist Alliance, where they are much more likely to be won away from reformism."

Here their opportunism emerges quite clearly. Callinicos explains how the SWP operate. Since then the Socialist Alliance collapsed but they continued with the same tactics inside Respect later on, making all kinds of concessions to Islamic fundamentalist prejudices. The most blatant example of this was what was later to emerge in Respect (before it split) when its main spokesperson George Galloway even came out against abortion to appease the reactionary religious bigots that were supporting him!

It is clear that the SWP's position on this question degenerated further when they formed Respect together with other political forces, some of them clearly of a reactionary Islamic nature. They bent particularly to the extreme opportunism of George Galloway. What happened with Respect is a good example of where this kind of opportunist position can lead. In the end, when Respect split, the real Islamists stayed with Galloway and broke with the SWP! The SWP were left with very little as a result and in fact lost members to Galloway.

"Respect" appealed to the Muslims as if they were one homogeneous bloc and not as a minority with class divisions within it. Thus they pandered to Islamic prejudices in order not to frighten the more reactionary elements away. Thus the SWP became victims of their own opportunism. The SWP position is clearly that fundamentalist Islam, or political Islam as they call it, is an anti-imperialist movement which should be supported both in the Middle East and in the advanced capitalist countries. The way they present it in their texts reflects the fact that at the back

of their minds they feel a certain embarrassment at adopting such opportunist positions. Their behaviour in practice is another matter.

The method is one whereby very diverse political tendencies, from socialists to reactionary Islamic fundamentalists, are brought together around one single issue, and the “socialists” refrain from raising issues that might disturb the sensitivities of the fundamentalists. Instead of winning Islamists to socialist ideas what we have here is socialists prettifying the fundamentalists and opportunistically adapting to them.

In trying to justify their position the SWP try to use the authority of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. In the December 2003 issue of Socialist Review Dave Crouch wrote an article, ‘Bolsheviks and islam: religious rights’. This is an attempt to depict the present SWP’s opportunist adaptation to Islamic fundamentalism as a continuation of Bolshevik traditions.

Crouch reassures us that “atheism was never included in the Bolsheviks’ programme”, when in actual fact the programme of the Bolsheviks had a special section on religion and also dealt with anti-religious propaganda. The SWP leaders steer very clear of going into the question of religious beliefs and prejudices.

Theory of the permanent revolution

The question which has to be answered is this: what lies behind the justification of the SWP’s deviation or what is at the root of its position towards fundamentalism? The SWP considers itself as a Marxist, Leninist and Trotskyist internationalist organisation: *“Internationalism is at the heart of any genuine socialist politics. Capitalism is a world system, and can only be effectively challenged by an international revolutionary movement. The*

founders of the revolutionary socialist tradition played a leading role in such movements — Marx in the International Working Men's Association, and Lenin and Trotsky in the Communist International.” (The SWP's official web site).

“The central theme of Trotsky's theory remains as valid as ever: the proletariat must continue its revolutionary struggle until it is triumphant the world over. Short of this target it cannot achieve freedom” (*Permanent Revolution* by Tony Cliff. First published in *International Socialism Journal*, first series, number 12, spring, 1963).

Before dealing with the SWP's revision of the theory of permanent revolution and their stance in regard to Islamic fundamentalism, which is directly derived from this revisionist position, the actual concept of the permanent revolution has to be examined.

The theory of permanent revolution was originated by Trotsky based on the experience of the 1905 revolution (written in *The Permanent Revolution* and *Results and Prospects*), and became the basis of the October 1917 revolution in Russia which simultaneously abolished the semi-feudal semi-capitalist regime of the Tsar and expropriated the bourgeoisie and the landlords.

The actual living experience of the Russian revolution contradicted a belief that had been held by many Marxists up till then. Marxists such as Kautsky and Plekhanov believed that only advanced industrial countries were ready for socialist revolution. They argued that countries would achieve workers' power in strict conformity with the stage to which they had advanced as a social formation and technologically. Backward countries could see their future image mirrored in the advanced countries. Only after a long process of industrial development and a transition through

a parliamentary bourgeois regime could the working class mature enough to pose the question of socialist revolution. Lenin also saw the forthcoming revolution as bourgeois, but he went a step further than the others in understanding the reactionary nature of the Russian bourgeoisie before it had even come to power, and hence the need for an independent policy of the working class.

All the Russian Social Democrats – Mensheviks as well as Bolsheviks – believed that Russia was approaching a *bourgeois* revolution, resulting from a conflict between the productive forces of capitalism on the one hand, and autocracy, landlordism, and other surviving feudal structures on the other. However, the Mensheviks concluded that the bourgeoisie would necessarily lead the revolution, and would take political power into their own hands. They thought that the Social Democrats should support the liberal bourgeoisie in the revolution (form the left tendency of it), at the same time defending the special interests of the workers within the framework of capitalism by struggling to achieve social reforms and minimum demands.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks agreed that the revolution would be bourgeois in character and that its aim would not pass the limits of a bourgeois revolution. “*The democratic revolution will not extend beyond the scope of bourgeois social-economic relationships... This democratic revolution in Russia will not weaken but will strengthen the domination of the bourgeoisie.*” (Lenin: Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution, 1905).

However, after the revolution of February 1917 Lenin discarded this view. In September 1914, he was still writing that the Russian revolution must limit itself to three fundamental tasks: “*the establishment of a democratic republic (in which equality of*

rights and full freedom of self-determination would be granted to all nationalities), confiscation of the estates of the big landowners, and application of the eight-hour day.”

Where Lenin fundamentally differed from the Mensheviks was in his insistence on the *independence of the labour movement from the liberal bourgeoisie* and on the need to carry the bourgeois revolution through to victory against their resistance. In opposition to the Menshevik-sponsored alliance between the working class and the liberal bourgeoisie – Lenin called for an alliance of the working class with the peasantry. Where the Mensheviks expected a government composed of liberal bourgeois ministers after the revolution, Lenin envisaged a coalition comprised of the workers' party and a peasant party, a “*democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry*”, in which the peasant party would have the majority. The “democratic dictatorship” would establish a republic, expropriate the large landowners and enforce the eight-hour day. Thereafter the peasantry would cease to be revolutionary, would become upholders of property and of the social *status quo*, and would unite with the bourgeoisie. The industrial proletariat, in alliance with the proletarian and semi-proletarian village population, would then become the revolutionary opposition, and the temporary phase of the “democratic dictatorship” would give way to a conservative bourgeois government within the framework of a bourgeois republic.

Trotsky was as convinced as Lenin that the liberal bourgeoisie could not carry out any revolutionary task consistently, and that the agrarian revolution, a fundamental element in the bourgeois revolution, could only be carried out by an alliance of the working class and peasantry. But he disagreed with Lenin about the possibility of an independent peasant party, arguing that the peasants were too sharply divided amongst themselves between

rich and poor to be able to form a united and independent party of their own.

In *Results and Prospects* in response to Lenin's formulation he wrote: *“For this reason there can be no talk of any sort of special form of proletarian dictatorship in the bourgeois revolution, of democratic proletarian dictatorship (or dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry). The working class cannot preserve the democratic character of its dictatorship without refraining from overstepping the limits of its democratic programme. Any illusions on this point would be fatal. They would compromise Social Democracy from the very start.”*

“...it will be clear how we regard the idea of a ‘proletarian and peasant dictatorship’. It is not really a matter of whether we regard it as admissible in principle, whether ‘we do or do not desire’ such a form of political co-operation. We simply think that it is unrealisable...All the experience of history,...shows that the peasantry is completely incapable of playing an independent role. The proletariat grows and strengthens together with the growth of capitalism. In this sense, the development of capitalism signifies the development of the proletariat toward the dictatorship. But the day and hour when the power passes into the hands of the proletariat depend directly not upon the state or the productive forces, but upon the conditions of the class struggle, upon the international situation, finally, upon a series of subjective factors: tradition, initiative, readiness for struggle ...”

“In an economically backward country, the proletariat can come to power sooner than in the economically advanced countries. In 1871 it had consciously taken into its hands the management of social affairs in petty bourgeois Paris – in truth only for two months – but it did not for one hour take power in the robust capitalist centres of England and the United States. The

conception of some sort of automatic dependence of the proletarian dictatorship upon the technical forces and resources of the country is a prejudice derived from an extremely oversimplified “economic” materialism. This view has nothing in common with Marxism. The Russian revolution, in our opinion, creates such conditions under which the power can pass over to the proletariat (and with a victorious revolution it must) even before the policy of bourgeois liberalism acquires the possibility to bring its state genius to a full unfolding.”

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The 1917 revolution in Russia proved *all* of Trotsky’s assumptions to be correct. The bourgeoisie was counter-revolutionary; the industrial proletariat was the revolutionary class; the peasantry followed the working class; the anti-feudal, democratic revolution grew over immediately into the socialist; the Russian revolution did lead to revolutionary convulsions elsewhere (in Germany, Austria, Hungary, etc.). And finally, alas,

the isolation of the socialist revolution in Russia led to its degeneration and downfall.

But this concept of the permanent revolution, which was previously accepted by SWP, was revised by Tony Cliff.

Theory of the permanent revolution as revised by the Tony Cliff

Tony Cliff, the SWP's main theoretician, summed up the theory of the permanent revolution as follows:

“The basic elements of Trotsky’s theory can be summed up in six points:

1-A bourgeoisie which arrives late on the scene is fundamentally different from its ancestors of a century or two earlier. It is incapable of providing a consistent, democratic, revolutionary solution to the problem posed by feudalism and imperialist oppression. It is incapable of carrying out the thoroughgoing destruction of feudalism, the achievement of real national independence and political democracy. It has ceased to be revolutionary, whether in the advanced or backward countries. It is an absolutely conservative force.

2-The decisive revolutionary role falls to the proletariat, even though it may be very young and small in number.

3-Incapable of independent action, the peasantry will follow the towns, and in view of the first five points, must follow the leadership of the industrial proletariat.

4-A consistent solution of the agrarian question, of the national question, a break-up of the social and imperial fetters preventing speedy economic advance, will necessitate moving beyond the bounds of bourgeois private property. “The democratic revolution grows over immediately into the socialist, and thereby becomes a permanent revolution.”

5-The completion of the socialist revolution “within national limits is unthinkable ... Thus, the socialist revolution becomes a permanent revolution in a newer and broader sense of the word; it attains completion only in the final victory of the new society on our entire planet.” It is a reactionary, narrow dream, to try and achieve “socialism in one country”.

6-As a result, revolution in backward countries would lead to convulsions in the advanced countries.”

He then questions the relevance of the permanent revolution in this way: *“While the conservative, cowardly nature of a late-developing bourgeoisie (Trotsky's first point) is an absolute law, the revolutionary character of the young working class (point 2) is neither absolute nor inevitable...up to now experience has shown both the strength of revolutionary urges amongst industrial workers in the emergent nations, and their fatal weaknesses. An automatic correlation between economic backwardness and revolutionary political militancy does not exist”.*

“Once the constantly revolutionary nature of the working class, the central pillar of Trotsky's theory, becomes suspect, the whole structure falls to pieces. His third point is not realised, as the peasantry cannot follow a non-revolutionary working class, and all the other elements follow suit. But this does not mean that nothing happens...”

“Those forces which should lead to a socialist, workers' revolution according to Trotsky's theory can lead, in the absence of the revolutionary subject, the proletariat, to its opposite, state capitalism. Using what is of universal validity in the theory and what is contingent (upon the subjective activity of the proletariat), one can come to a variant that, for lack of a better

name, might be called the 'Deflected, state capitalist, Permanent Revolution.'"

"In the same way as the 1905 and 1917 revolutions in Russia and that of 1925-27 in China were classic demonstrations of Trotsky's theory, Mao's and Castro's rise to power are classic, the purest, and most extreme, demonstrations of 'Deflected Permanent Revolution'."

It is interesting to note the formulation that, *"Once the constantly revolutionary nature of the working class, the central pillar of Trotsky's theory, becomes suspect, the whole structure falls to pieces."* Here the lack of a revolutionary leadership, a revolutionary party like Lenin's Bolshevik party, is confused with the lack of "revolutionary nature" of the working class. Once one goes down this road utter confusion is the end result.

In conclusion Tony Cliff writes:

"For revolutionary socialists in the advanced countries, the shift in strategy means that while they will have to continue to oppose any national oppression of the colonial people unconditionally, they must cease to argue over the national identity of the future ruling classes of Asia, Africa and Latin America, and instead investigate the class conflicts and future social structures of these continents. The slogan of 'class against class' will become more and more a reality." (*Permanent Revolution* by Tony Cliff. First published in International Socialism journal, first series, number 12, spring, 1963).

In a nutshell, Tony Cliff argues that, Leon Trotsky's Permanent Revolution is outdated because the *"revolutionary character of the working class is neither absolute nor inevitable... Once the*

constantly revolutionary nature of the working class, the central pillar of Trotsky's theory, becomes suspect, the whole structure falls to pieces.” And a new force, the “intelligentsia” will “fill the social and spiritual vacuum”! And the task of “revolutionary socialists in the advanced countries” would be to “cease to argue over the national identity of the future ruling classes of Asia, Africa and Latin America”!

In other words, Tony Cliff very clearly announces the centrality of working class in the anti-capitalist movement as null and void! And shifts towards defending the petty bourgeoisie leadership such as Maoist or Stalinist “intelligentsia” in “Asia, Africa and Latin America”.

This “new” line is not only a break from the traditional Trotskyist position in the permanent revolution, but it is a revision of Marxism as well.

Trotsky's theory was a development, application and expansion of Marx's analysis of the 1848 revolution. Even before that revolution, the Communist Manifesto had predicted that because of the 'advanced conditions' and 'developed proletariat' of Germany, 'The bourgeois revolution in Germany' would be 'but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution'. (Marx, Selected works, Vol 1, London, 1942, p 241). And after the defeat of 1848 Marx stated that, faced with the incapacity of the bourgeoisie to carry out the anti-feudal revolution, the working class had to struggle for the growth of the bourgeois revolution into the proletarian, and of the national revolution into the international revolution. In an address to the Central Council of the Communist League (March 1850) Marx said:

“While the democratic petty bourgeois wish to bring the revolution to a conclusion as quickly as possible and with the achievement at most of the above demands, it is our interest and our task to make the revolution permanent, until all more or less possessing classes have been displaced from domination, until the proletariat has conquered state power, and the association of the proletariat, not only in one country but in all the dominant countries of the world, has advanced so far that competition among the proletarians of these countries has ceased and that at least the decisive productive forces are concentrated in the hands of the proletarians.”

And Marx ended his address with the phrase: 'their (the workers') battle-cry must be: the permanent revolution!' (K Marx, Selected works, London, 1942, Vol III, pp 161-168.

Tony Cliff fails to understand that the struggle of Trotsky and Marx against the petty bourgeoisie in defence of the proletarian revolution was based on a long-term strategy and its objective perspective, and not a tactical issue for a short period. Tony Cliff's interpretation of Trotsky's permanent revolution is totally false.

Trotsky argued that because of the weakness and reactionary nature of the bourgeoisie in Russia, the belated bourgeois democratic tasks of the revolution (such as land reform, democratic rights, the question of forming a republic etc.), as well as the socialist tasks (such as workers' control, planned economy etc.), both fall on the shoulders of the revolutionary proletariat. Indeed, during the Russian October Revolution the bourgeois democratic tasks were completed in a few months. But those socialist tasks related to the revolutionary transition of society into a socialist one (even though they did not eventually materialise) opened up an era of "permanent revolution": not in

the sense of the transition "from the democratic revolution to the socialist", but in the sense of the revolutionary process of transition to socialism itself and the need for the expansion of the revolution internationally (based on two other aspects of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution).

In other words, what Trotsky meant was that the two sets of tasks (bourgeois democratic and socialist) will be achieved with *one* leadership (the proletariat). There is no Chinese wall between the first and second set of tasks. There is no change of leadership in carrying out these combined tasks. Furthermore, the theory of "uneven and combined development" indicates that the two sets of tasks facing underdeveloped countries must in fact themselves be *combined* historically. This means that, one cannot separate out the two types of tasks into two historical sets and then claim that the first set must be resolved completely before history is ready for the second set (as in the Stalinist two stage theory of revolution). In the epoch of imperialism achieving the belated democratic tasks needs the destruction of capitalist property relations.

Furthermore, when Trotsky talks about "bourgeois revolution", what he means is that the tasks of the revolution are "bourgeois" (tasks that were traditionally achieved under the leadership of the bourgeoisie in the 18th and 19th centuries). Trotsky did not mean that this is a "stage" during which the bourgeoisie or an "intelligentsia" wing of it will remain in power (because of the weakness of the proletariat); and that the "communists" should defend it until the proletariat becomes stronger in the next stage! On the contrary, it means that what guarantees the accomplishment of the bourgeois democratic tasks is the establishment of *the dictatorship of the proletariat*. And if for whatever reason the proletariat is weak and not ready to take power the task of the revolutionaries is *not* to follow the dubious

“intelligentsia”! The task of revolutionary Marxists is to patiently work towards strengthening the proletariat by daily intervention amongst them. The “get rich quick” policies, belongs to *petty bourgeois* and opportunist trends within the workers’ movement.

Tony Cliff like any other opportunist *petty bourgeois* tendencies within workers’ movement, instead of helping the working class to achieve their historical and objective tasks, becomes tired of long term and patient class struggle and promotes illusions in the *petty bourgeois* “intelligentsia” leadership. Tony Cliff denies the centrality of the workers' perspective of carrying out a socialist revolution, by revising the theory of the permanent revolution. By doing so he in practice breaks with revolutionary Marxism.

Chris Harman sides with reactionary Islamic Fundamentalists

If Tony Cliff parts from the basic ideas of revolutionary Marxism and revises Trotsky’s permanent revolution, Chris Harman, by extending Tony Cliff’s deviation, sides with counter-revolutionary Islamic fundamentalists. This position potentially places the SWP leadership in a united bloc with reactionaries.

Chris Harman discusses the theoretical root of his support for the Islamic Republic of Iran and fundamentalism: *“As Tony Cliff put it in a major piece of Marxist analysis, if the old ruling class is too weak to hang on to power in the face of economic crisis and insurgency from below, while the working class does not have the independent organisation to allow it to become the head of the movement, then sections of the intelligentsia are able to make a bid for power, feeling that they have a mission to solve the problems of society as a whole”*

'The intelligentsia is sensitive to their countries' technical lag. ...In a crumbling order where the traditional pattern is disintegrating, they feel insecure, rootless, lacking infirm values. Dissolving cultures give rise to a powerful urge for a new integration that must be total and dynamic if it is to fill the social and spiritual vacuum that must combine religious fervour with militant nationalism. They are in search for a dynamic movement which will unify the nation and open up broad vistas for it, but at the same time will give themselves power...'

Chris Harman concludes:

"Although these words (by Tony Cliff) were written about the attraction of Stalinism, Maoism and Castroism in Third World countries, they fit absolutely the Islamist intelligentsia around Khomeini in Iran. They were not, as many left wing commentators have mistakenly believed, merely an expression of 'backward', bazaar-based traditional, 'parasitic', 'merchant capital'. Nor were they simply an expression of classic bourgeois counter-revolution. They undertook a revolutionary reorganisation of ownership and control of capital within Iran even while leaving capitalist relations of production intact, putting large scale capital that had been owned by the group around the Shah into the hands of state and parastate bodies controlled by themselves - in the interests of the 'oppressed', of course, with the corporation that took over the Shah's own economic empire being named the Mustafazin ('Oppressed') Foundation." (emphasis added).

"The interesting thing about the method by which the group around Khomeini ousted their opponents and established a one party regime was that there was nothing specifically Islamist about it. It was not, as many people horrified by the religious intolerance of the regime contend, a result of some 'irrational' or 'medieval' characteristic of 'Islamic fundamentalism'. In fact, it

was very similar to that carried through in different parts of the world by parties based on sections of the petty bourgeoisie. It was the method used, for instance, by the weak Communist Parties of much of Eastern Europe to establish their control after 1945. And a prototype for the petty bourgeois who combines ideological fervour and personal advance is to be found in Balzac's Péré Goriot--the austere Jacobin who makes his fortune out of exploiting the shortages created by the revolutionary upheaval."

"The victory of Khomeini's forces in Iran was not, then, inevitable, and neither does it prove that Islamism is a uniquely reactionary force against which the left must be prepared to unite with the devil (or rather, the Great Satan) of imperialism and its local allies. It merely confirms that, in the absence of independent working class leadership, revolutionary upheaval can give way to more than one form of the restabilisation of bourgeois rule under a repressive, authoritarian, one party state. The secret ingredient in this process was not the allegedly 'medieval' character of Islam, but the vacuum created by the failure of the socialist organisations to give leadership to an inexperienced but very combative working class." (The prophet and the proletariat, Chris Harman, International Socialism Journal, issue 64, Autumn 1994)

Following Tony Cliff's revision of the permanent revolution, Chris Harman absurdly compares Khomeini's regime to "weak communist parties in East Europe" or Jacobins! By doing so, Chris Harman shows that not only is he clueless about the history and class nature of Islamic fundamentalists in Iran, but he also misrepresents Tony Cliff's deviated position.

All this is not at all surprising if one looks briefly at another major error in the ideas developed first by Tony Cliff and later

built on by his followers. Cliff drew the conclusion that the degeneration of the Soviet Union had led to the establishment of “state capitalism”, and later applied this to Eastern Europe and other regimes where capitalism had been abolished and a planned economy had been put in its place.

Having stated that these regimes were just another form of capitalism, it appears clear why they see no fundamental difference between a regime such as that in Cuba and the Islamic fundamentalist regime in Iran. Here one can also begin to see why they develop illusions in the Islamic regimes. Thus they look at the superficial aspects that could lead one to see Castro’s Cuba and Khomeini’s Iran in the same light. As they both have come into conflict at various times with US imperialism then there must be some similarity between them. Instead of looking at the essential aspect of the way the economy works, they look at the outer trappings.

Genuine Trotskyists have always defended the planned economy of the Soviet Union in the past and what still remains of it in Cuba today. They fought the Stalinist degeneration, the bureaucracy with all its monstrous features, while defending the centrally planned state owned economy. In Iran the system cannot be compared to that of the former Soviet Union, but if – as the SWP thinks – the Soviet Union was merely a variant of capitalism one can understand how easy it is to fall into the blunder of seeing in the stabilisation of capitalist relations under Khomeini a similar process to what happened under Stalin. It is like confusing oil with water. The two are very different. Down this road one can see how the process of prettifying Islamic fundamentalism can start.

Reactionary role of clergy ignored by Chris Harman

Unlike Chris Harman's belief, Khomeini's clique has been part and parcel of the ruling class in Iran for decades. Neither the IRI's leaders, nor its social base have been formed by the "*intelligentsia*"! The main bulk of the leadership have been big landlords (like Ali Akbar Rafsanjani – the president of the IRI for two terms, and one of most influential and prominent figures today); and the social base of the regime was formed mainly by discontented shanty towns dwellers, urban petty bourgeois and the peasant migrants, etc. Given the predominance of the urban petty bourgeois and the peasant migrants in the early stages of the mass movement, the call of the clergy for "Islamic Justice", "Islamic economics", "Islamic army", and "Islamic state" could immediately find a willing mass base.

The point Chris Harman should realise is that, if the bourgeoisie is in power and the state is a bourgeois state, then obviously the fundamental question, according to Marx, Lenin and Trotsky is the destruction of that state and replacing it with a workers' state which can carry out the bourgeois democratic tasks. By this logic, any bourgeois state is utterly reactionary and must be toppled by a revolution. But the SWP argues to the contrary and believes that any "enemy" of imperialism in any underdeveloped country, in the absence of revolutionary proletariat, is objectively "progressive" and is potentially a positive step in the process of growing over to the socialist phase.

It is obvious that, if the class character of the state has already become bourgeois (unlike the character of the national bourgeoisie over 100 years ago), then it follows by definition that it has a social base within the bourgeoisie and is therefore also actively supported by at least the upper layers of the petty

bourgeoisie. Today, in any of the underdeveloped capitalist countries, in the event of a revolutionary crisis which could threaten bourgeois class rule, one must expect to find in the camp of counter-revolution not only the entire bourgeoisie, but also the upper layers of the petty bourgeoisie, and some of the so called "intelligentsia" are no exception to this rule.

In the Iranian revolution of 1979 precisely this scenario took place. The entire resources of the international and national bourgeoisie, orchestrated by the CIA, were mobilised to transfer power to Khomeini as the representative of the capitalist clergy, to safeguard and save the bourgeois state. The shock troops of the counterrevolution were made up of this layer, i.e. the petty bourgeoisie.

What Chris Harman misses completely in his analysis of the IRI, is the fact that it is well documented that long before the February 1978 insurrection, important sections of the army, the secret police and the bureaucracy lined up behind Khomeini. US imperialism also intervened directly to bring about a negotiated settlement between the chiefs of the armed forces and the bourgeois-clerical leadership, not to mention many of the biggest bourgeois entrepreneurs who gave Khomeini huge sums of money to organise his "leadership".

Given the broadness of the mass movement and its radicalism, the only way that the bourgeois counter-revolution could have succeeded in defeating the revolution was by "joining" it. This could have been possible only by supporting a faction within the opposition to the Shah that could ensure a degree of control over the masses. This was one of the most (if not the most) important factors in placing Khomeini at the head of the mass movement.

The reasons why the Shiite clergy, especially Khomeini's faction, was well suited for this task should be obvious. The clergy has always been an important institution of the state, well trained in defending class society and private property. After all, the Shiite hierarchy has been the main ideological prop of the state. Khomeini himself had come from a faction which had already proven its loyalty to the ruling class by helping it in the 1953 coup.

It was also the least hated instrument of the state, because it was not a structural part of what it was supporting. Unlike the Catholic Church, it had always kept its distance from the state. Especially because of the post-White Revolution period of capitalist development, the clergy had been relegated to a secondary position. Indeed, because of this, a growing faction within the hierarchy had been forced into a position of opposition to the Shah's regime. This could now be utilised as a passport inside the mass movement.

Given the weakness of the bourgeois political opposition, which was not allowed to operate under the Shah, the clergy, with its nationwide network of mullahs and mosques, provided the strong instrument-cum-party necessary for "organising" and channelling the spontaneous mass movement. It could also provide the type of vague populist ideology needed to blunt the radical demands of the masses and to unite them around a veiled bourgeois programme.

To deny, therefore, even today, as the SWP leadership does, that Khomeini's counter-revolutionary drive coincided with its efforts to place itself at the leadership of the revolution, is to go against all the facts now known to millions of Iranians themselves. To deny also that from the beginning it was helped in these efforts by the ruling classes and their imperialist backers is to

misunderstand the main course of events in the Iranian revolution.

It is, therefore, a total mystification to characterise the Iranian revolution as a popular anti-imperialist revolution led by “*petty bourgeois* “*intelligentsia*” or to state that “*They* [the regime] *undertook a revolutionary reorganisation of ownership and control of capital within Iran*”. This interpretation completely misses out the specific counter-revolutionary role of the bourgeoisie and its political tool within the revolution.

The political and economic crisis of the 1976-78 period, which set the scene for the mass unrest, was made up of different and contradictory factors. Alongside the mass movement of protests against the Shah's dependent capitalist dictatorship, there were also important rifts inside the bourgeoisie as a whole, both within the pro-Shah sections and between the pro and anti-Shah sections.

These bourgeoisie oppositions to the Shah's rule were transformed as the revolutionary crisis grew and deepened: there was, firstly, a movement for the reform of the Shah's state from within the top "modernist" bourgeoisie, which favoured the limitation of the Royal Family's absolute powers and was for a certain degree of rationalisation of the capitalist state. The requirements of further capitalist development themselves necessitated these reforms.

This faction had already formed itself within the Shah's single party (*rastakhiz* - Resurgence) before the revolutionary crisis. It had the support of an important section of the technocrats and bureaucrats inside Iran, and of influential groups within the US establishment. As the crisis deepened, this faction became increasingly vociferous in its opposition to the Shah. It began to use the threat of the mass movement as leverage in its dealings

with the Shah. The ousting of Hoveida's government and the formation of Amouzegar's cabinet was a concession to this faction. The development of the mass movement was, however, pushing other bourgeois oppositionists to the forefront.

This faction knew that, in order to ride the crisis out, it had to hide behind bourgeois politicians less associated with the Shah's dictatorship. In no other way could it hope to enjoy a certain degree of support inside the mass movement. The re-emergence of the corpse called the National Front and the rise of newly created bourgeois liberal groupings, (e.g. the Radical Movement) were linked to this trend.

There was also an opposition to the Shah from within the more traditional sectors of the bourgeoisie (the big bazaar merchants and the small and medium sized capitalists from the more traditional sectors of the industry).

The White Revolution and the type of capitalist growth which followed it had also enriched these layers. Nevertheless, they were more or less pushed out of the main channels of the state-backed capital accumulation and hence out of the ruling class.

The structural crisis of Iranian capitalism in the mid-1970's had resulted in the sharpening of the attacks by the Shah's state on these layers which still had control over a section of the internal market. This hold had to be weakened, to allow the monopolies to resolve their crisis of overproduction. The consumer goods oriented and technologically dependent industrialisation meant a strong tendency for bureaucratic control of the internal market through the state.

To these layers, opposition to the Shah's rule was a matter of a life and death struggle. They could in no way be satisfied with the

type of reforms that were being proposed by the other factions. They demanded a more radical change within the power structures. Whilst the reformist factions vehemently opposed any radical change that could shake up the power of the ruling class as a whole, this faction's interests were in no way harmed by demanding no less than the removal of the Shah's regime.

As the mass movement grew, it became obvious that this faction could decisively outbid the others. Through the traditional channels of the *bazaar* economy, it could draw on the support of the urban petty bourgeoisie and the enormous mass of the urban poor linked to it. This faction had, in addition, many links with the powerful Shiite hierarchy. Ever since the White Revolution, the traditional bourgeoisie and the Shiite clergy had drawn closer and closer together.

An important lesson drawn by a section of the bourgeoisie after its defeat in 1953 was precisely that, without an Islamic ideology and without the backing of the mullahs, it could never ensure enough mass support to enable it to pose as a realistic alternative both to the Shah and to the left. Bazargan's and Taleghani's Freedom Movement represented this trend. This "party" was now offered an opportunity to save the bourgeoisie in its moment of crisis.

The formation of Sharif Emami's cabinet represented a move by the Shah's regime to also include this faction in whatever concessions it had to give. "The government of national conciliation" as it called itself, could, however, neither satisfy the two bourgeois factions, nor quench the mass movement which by now had gathered a new vitality because of the gradually developing general strike.

Throughout this period, Khomeini was popular because he appeared to be consistently calling for the overthrow of the Shah. But at the same time he was preparing to reach an agreement with the regime. In fact it was precisely in this period that, with the help of powerful forces within the regime itself, Khomeini's "leadership" was being established over the mass movement. By September 1978, a certain degree of control was exercised which could have allowed a compromise at the top. What put a stop to this was the developing general strike.

The stage was thus set for the opening of the pre-revolutionary period of September 1978 to February 1979, marked by the further isolation of the Shah's regime, demoralisation of the army and the police, the radicalisation of the masses and the complete paralysis of the entire bourgeois society because of the very effective general strike.

US imperialism and the pro-Shah bourgeoisie were now forced to go a lot further in giving concessions to the mass movement. The removal of the Shah from the scene and the establishment of the Bakhtiar government was in its time and in itself a very radical concession by the dictatorship. It was hoped that in this way the reformist faction, which was already made to look more acceptable, would be strengthened and thus force the more radical faction into a compromise. It was, however, already too late for such compromises. The mass movement was becoming extremely confident of its own strength and the prevailing mood was that of not agreeing to anything less than the complete ousting of the Shah. Furthermore, any politician who tried to reach a compromise with the Shah, immediately lost all support. In fact, even the National Front was forced to renounce Bakhtiar.

This explains the so-called "intransigence" of Khomeini's stand. By denouncing Bakhtiar (with whom his representatives in Iran

were nevertheless holding secret negotiations) and supporting the mass movement, he was strengthening his own hand vis-à-vis both factions of the bourgeois opposition. He was forcing the more popular figures within these factions to accept his "leadership" and preventing them from reaching any compromises without his involvement.

The military circles and the imperialists were also by this time prepared to give up a lot more. There was a growing restlessness within the army. The pro-Shah hard liners were preparing for a coup against Bakhtiar. This would have completely finished off the army and with it the last hope of the bourgeoisie in maintaining class rule.

It was becoming obvious that a compromise had to be reached with Khomeini. And that was exactly what took place. Secret negotiations between Beheshti and Bazargan on the one side and the heads of the army and the secret police on the other side were held in Tehran. The arbiter was the US representative General Huyser, whose job was to ensure that the army would keep its side of the bargain. Major sections of the ruling class had been pushed by the course of events, and the encouragement of the Carter administration, to accept sharing power with the opposition. What was hoped was a smooth transition from the top to a Bazargan government.

Bazargan had emerged as the acceptable alternative because he was the only one who could bring about a coalition involving both major bourgeois factions, whilst at the same time being more associated with the, by now, more powerful Khomeini leadership. Khomeini was also forced to accept such a deal because this provided the best cover for the clergy's own designs for power.

At that time the clergy could not make any open claims to political power. Khomeini, to alleviate the fears of the bourgeoisie, and to keep his own options open within the mass movement, was constantly reassuring everybody that once the Shah was gone he would go back to Qom and continue with his "religious duties". Khomeini was thus allowed to return to Iran from exile and his appointed provisional government was preparing to take over from Bakhtiar.

The February insurrection was, however, not part of the deal. Some of the now staunch supporters of the Shah within the chiefs of the armed forces who opposed the US backed compromise, tried to change the course of events by organising a military coup. This resulted in an immediate mass response and insurrection, which was initially opposed by Khomeini. But his forces had to join in later, because otherwise they would have lost all control over the mass movement and with it any hope of saving the state apparatus.

The only way to divert the insurrection was therefore to "lead" it. The army chiefs and the bureaucracy were prepared to give their allegiance to Khomeini and his Revolutionary Islamic Council, since this alone could save them from the insurrectionary masses. It was thus that the Bazargan's Provisional Revolutionary Government, as it was called, replaced Bakhtiar's. The blessings of Khomeini, therefore, ensured the establishment of a new capitalist government over the head of the masses. In this way, it is obvious that what appeared as "the leadership of the Iranian revolution" basically played, from the beginning, the role of an instrument of bourgeois political counter-revolution, imposed from above in order to roll back the gains of the masses and to save as much of the bourgeois state apparatus as was possible under the given balance of social forces. The ruling class was as yet in no position to resort to further repression.

Khomeini was, however, not offering all these services to play second fiddle. He was simply preparing for the takeover of all power at a more favourable moment. He represented a faction of the clergy that had been bent on establishing a more direct role for the Shiite hierarchy ever since the Mosadegh period. This faction, in cooperation with the then head of the secret police, made a move in the early 1960s for power, but failed. History was now providing it with an opportunity that it could not allow to slip away, especially given the fact that the bourgeois class was extremely weakened and hardly in a position to put up any resistance. The latter, with the approval of the imperialist master, had called on the clergy to save it in its moment of dire need by sharing power. What followed next in the post-revolutionary period can only be understood if the designs of the clergy for power are taken into account.

In the beginning, the clergy did not have the necessary instruments for exercising power. The Khomeini faction did not even have hegemony inside the Shiite hierarchy. Many clerical heads opposed the participation of the clergy in politics. It could not rely on the existing institutions in the state either, since they were entirely unsuitable to clerical domination. Amongst other reasons, the bureaucracy itself was all opposed to clerical rule anyway. Even the Prime Minister designate, who was the most "Islamic" of all the bourgeois politicians, resisted any attempts by the mullahs to dominate the functions of the state. A period of preparation was thus necessary.

With the direct backing of Khomeini, this faction first organised a political party, the Islamic Republican Party. This was simply presented as one newly formed party among others. Later on, however, this party squeezed out all the others and later replaced the Shah's single party. Through the networks of pro-Khomeini mullahs, it established an entire organisation of neighbourhood

committees and Pasdaran units supposedly to help the government to keep law and order and to resist the monarchist counter-revolution.

Revolutionary Islamic Courts were also set up to punish the Shah's henchmen. These courts quickly executed a few of the most hated elements of the old regime, but only in order to save the majority from the anger of the masses. The Imam's committees, the Pasdaran Army and the Islamic Courts, rapidly replaced the Shah's instruments of repression.

All these moves were initially supported by the bourgeoisie, which realised that it was only through these measures that it could hope to finish off the revolution and begin the "period of reconstruction." The newly created "revolutionary institutions" were serving the Bazargan government well, constantly reassuring it of their allegiance to it. Later on, however, they became instruments of the clergy in ousting the bourgeois politicians from the reins of power and indirectly dominating the state apparatus.

Khomeini also forced an early referendum on the nature of the regime to replace the Shah: monarchy or the Islamic Republic? Despite the grumbling of the bourgeois politicians, they had to accept this undemocratic method of determining the fate of the state, because the other alternative was the formation of the promised constituent assembly. The election of such an assembly during that revolutionary period would of course have posed many threats to bourgeois rule.

The referendum was thus held and of course the majority voted for the Islamic Republic. The mullahs knew that the masses could not very well vote for the monarchy! It was later claimed that, since 98 percent of the people had voted for an Islamic Republic,

hence the constituent assembly must be replaced by an assembly of "experts" (*khobregan*) based on Islamic law. The small assembly, which was therefore packed with mullahs, had of course a majority who suddenly brought out a constitution giving dictatorial powers to Khomeini as the chief of the experts.

The clause of *velayat-e faghih* (the rule of the chief mullah) was resisted by the bourgeois politicians, but the clergy pushed it through by a demagogic appeal to the anti-imperialist sentiments of the masses and through the controlled mass mobilisations around the US embassy. The masses were told that now that we face "this major threat from the Great Satan" we must all vote for the Islamic Constitution. With an almost 40% vote, this became nevertheless the new constitution.

Hence, Khomeini's clerical faction co-operated with the various bourgeois groupings in joint efforts by the ruling class to prevent the total destruction of the bourgeois state and in diverting and suppressing the Iranian revolution, whilst at the same time, always strengthening its own hand and trying to subordinate other factions to its own rule. It used its advantageous position within the mass movement to bypass the bourgeois state whenever it suited its own factional interest. But it was also forging a new apparatus of repression that was being gradually integrated into the state as the competition with other factions was being resolved in its favour.

Contrary to the deviated analysis of the SWP leadership, at that time Ted Grant had a clear understanding of the nature of the Khomeini leadership and the role that it played and side with masses of people. This is what he wrote at the time:

“It is probable that Khomeini will come to power. All the pleas of Bakhtiar that the state cannot allow the Church to play a direct and commanding role in politics will be in vain.

“But once having come to power the futility of the reactionary and medieval ideas of abolishing interest while not altering the economic oasis of society will be shown to result in chaos. Maintaining intact commercial and industrial capital while abolishing interest or usury is entirely utopian. Even in medieval times, when the doctrine of both the Christian and Muslim church was against usury, nevertheless it continued to exist in many forms. It would have disastrous consequences while capitalism remained, on the economy of Iran, and inevitably would have to be abandoned.

“Khomeini has declared that he does not wish to establish a reactionary military dictatorship or to establish a semi-feudal dictatorship. It is this element in their programme where the Mullahs have claimed to stand for freedom and democracy, which has been a powerful source of attraction to the mass of the middle class, and of course to sections of the workers as well.

“But the utopian programme of Khomeini can in no way solve the problems that face the Iranian people at the present time.

“Khomeini has made it clear that he will accept nothing less than the abolition of the monarchy. The Regency Council which has been set up by the Bakhtiar government will not be able to maintain control, or to keep the seat warm for the Shah. Even the abdication of the Shah would no longer be sufficient. Now it is a question of the abolition of the monarchy.”

And again:

“Support for Khomeini will melt away after he forms a government. The failure of his programme of a Muslim theocratic republic to solve the problems of the Iranian people will become apparent.

“The masses of the people have their aspirations not only for democratic rights but for higher standards of living. The trade unions in Iran will have an explosive growth. Already they are mushrooming as workers feel the elementary need for organisation. They will attain a mighty scope in the period that lies ahead. Just as in Portugal, where 82% of the working class is now organised in trade unions, so similar results will be achieved in Iran in the coming months and years. Possibly the majority and even the bulk of the working class in Iran will become organised.

“Capitalist democracy under modern conditions with the crisis of capitalism on a world scale cannot establish itself for any length of time in Iran. The workers have already learned and will learn even more in the course of the developing struggle. If the masses are defeated and a capitalist Bonapartist military dictatorship is established it would not be stable, as we have seen with the Latin American capitalist military-police dictatorships, and the dictatorship in Pakistan.

Even in the worst resort, reaction would prepare the way for revenge on the part of the masses, at a not too distant date. It would be 1905 in Russia over again.

But such a denouement is not at all necessary. If the forces of Marxism succeed in gaining support in Iran, then it could result in a brilliant victory on the lines of the revolution in Russia of 1917.” (The Iranian Revolution, Ted Grant, February 9, 1979 <http://www.marxist.com/MiddleEast/iran79.html>)

Unfortunately the Marxists were too weak and could not play the role envisaged by Ted Grant. The Stalinists tail-ended the Khomeini regime, creating illusions in his democratic and progressive credentials rather than exposing him for what he was. Had there existed a powerful Marxist alternative things would have turned out very differently. In 1979 the Iranian workers could have come to power, providing the spark for revolution eastwards across the whole of the Middle East and westwards into Pakistan and India and beyond.

Chris Harman, on the other hand, in his *The prophet and the proletariat* and the rest of the SWP leadership subsequently misrepresent the history of the 1979 revolution in Iran and the class nature of the Khomeini regime. By doing so, they have gone even further than Tony Cliff in revising Trotsky's ideas on permanent revolution. They have also added confusion upon confusion by totally misunderstanding first the nature of the Soviet Union and consequently the nature of such regimes as that created under Khomeini and that still survives today. Thus they mislead their own supporters and anyone who comes under the influence of their theories and thereby betray the interests of Iranian and international working class.

Conclusion

The main political dangers of the SWP's position are as follows:

Firstly, the SWP discredits the fundamental ideas of Trotskyism, Leninism and Marxism by revising the theory of permanent revolution.

Secondly, the SWP will be forced to present the repressiveness of this regime as a secondary issue. Thus, in practice, it will side

with a reactionary regime which has brutally eliminated the leaders of democratic movements of workers, students and women. With such a position any SWP supporters in Iran (fortunately there are none at the moment) would end up collaborating with a semi-fascist regime against the genuinely progressive forces.

Thirdly, the supporters of the SWP in Europe end up by forming united fronts with supporters of Islamic groups such as Hezbollah and this would make it practically impossible for progressive forces in opposition to the present Iranian regime to enter into any activities with them. That is why the SWP is under constant attack by the genuine currents of opposition to the regime in Iran and cannot recruit even one progressive person to its organisation or ideas.

Fourthly, the SWP will be used by Hezbollah activists in Europe and within the Islamic Republic of Iran to their own advantage to undermine the just struggles of the Iranian working class and socialists in Iran. Thus the SWP does a disservice to all genuine socialists struggling against Islamic fundamentalism. Attempts will be made to identify genuine socialists within the opposition to this dictatorial regime with the mistaken positions of the SWP and thus the credibility of all socialists is put at risk.

For these reasons, the SWP leadership (or other organisations with a similar line of intervention in Europe and North America) should be exposed and isolated. So long as they side with or support the most reactionary regimes in modern history (under any pretext) genuine revolutionary Marxists should not enter into any joint activities with them.

December 2008

** This article is based on the interventions of comrade Maziar Razi at the IMT World Congress, in Barcelona, August 2008. The article has been written for Marxist.com.*

Document on
**modern imperialist domination and
Islamic fundamentalism**

For discussion at the 2008 Congress of the IMT

In June 2007 the two Israeli members of the International Marxist Tendency supported Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip going so far as to call it a "victory against imperialism" and a "liberation" (Yehuda Stern, 19 June 2007).

There then followed a month of discussions between the International Centre and the Israeli comrades on the fundamental errors of this position. Despite this, during the IEC meeting in July, Yossi Schwartz not only defended this line but extended it to include the unconditional military defence of the Iranian regime. He said that in the event of a US attack on Iran the Iranian comrades should "join the Iranian army"!

While the barrage of criticism that was aimed at them made the two Israeli members leave the International, it is, however, important for us to draw lessons from this serious theoretical

lapse by them. How can a seemingly 'principled' position lead revolutionary socialists into blindly supporting Islamic fundamentalists? This policy would have had serious consequences had anyone been involved in real activity among the workers in Israel, West Bank or Gaza (although it is doubtful that activists with their feet on the ground would have come up with such a ridiculous position).

While it is recognised that the Israeli members (and many groups) stretched the traditional standard position of revolutionary Marxism on the national and colonial questions beyond breaking point, our view is that even this old tradition has been turned into a formula by many in the 'Trotskyist' and other movements. Although we are dealing with the same mode of production and epoch as that of Lenin and Trotsky, the world long ago entered a period that included important changes in the relationship between the imperialist countries and those they dominate. This theoretical viewpoint therefore needs an overhaul to make it relevant to a changed world.

Furthermore, wherever an alternative and ultimately anti-working class movement has developed we should not merely see its mass base and combativity. We should, first and foremost, acknowledge that it has developed and filled the vacuum of leadership because of the successive betrayals and basic errors of 'communists' and 'socialists'. Our position on these movements should therefore be aimed at broadening, radicalising and ultimately replacing their leadership with Marxists - not admiring them!

We therefore need to reiterate the Bolshevik tradition on this issue and to highlight the principles on which it was based.

The role of Islamic fundamentalism

It may seem curious that although every Marxist in Europe or North America recognises Islam as a thoroughly medieval and reactionary ideology, when faced with the Iranian regime's repeated 'confrontations' with the United States, the Lebanese Hezbollah's military resistance against Israel, or Palestinian Hamas's clashes with the Israeli military, they lose the ability to make a concrete analysis of the situation and the class nature of the forces involved. Or, worse still, they make a fairly good assessment about the reactionaries or religious zealots but use the excuse that "they are oppressed" to justify supporting them!

The role of political Islam in its various fundamentalist and other guises is an important issue that has faced the Trotskyist movement and the left generally for a number of decades. Socialists active in Muslim countries have had to wage a daily struggle against it.

Yet following the backlash against Muslims after 9/11 the left in many countries has capitulated to the leaders of these communities in Europe and elsewhere. The British SWP, for example, has totally prostrated itself in front of the Muslim bigots' prejudices in its 'united front' against imperialism's militarist policies and the attacks on democratic rights. It has further shown how out of touch it is with the best elements of workers and youth by trying to implement this policy in places like Egypt!

It is our duty to explain to workers everywhere that no matter how many out-of-context quotes such people find from the Bolsheviks, there is no theoretical basis for justifying their actions or stance. It is possible to quote the Congress of the

Peoples of the East making glowing remarks about "holy war"* or Lenin saying positive things about bourgeois nationalism or religion.

But the positions of these 'Trotskyists' have nothing to do with a Marxist analysis of the class nature of Islamic fundamentalism and its role in diverting the revolutionary potential of workers and the exploited and oppressed masses into a dead-end.

We would like to begin with a brief look at the peculiarities of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and its 'army' in order to put Schwartz's ridiculous advice to Iranian socialists in its appropriate historical context, to expose it as a clearly class-collaborationist line and then move on to our movement's historical positions.

On joining the 'Iranian Army'

What officially became known as the IRI is a unique regime. The precise form it took was the product of the way that a massive revolutionary wave of workers and other exploited and oppressed masses was smashed by the Iranian bourgeoisie's counter-revolution. This unique regime also has a unique military structure.

For Marxists it is always important to start with the concrete. The Iranian Army, as such, is said to have around 350,000 personnel, with over 60% made up of conscripts. Yet it is the Pasdaran, the so-called Revolutionary Guards, that maintains internal security and was the main military force during the war against Iraq. The Pasdaran number at least 125,000 (slightly less than the

* *Manifesto of the Congress to the Peoples of the East in Baku: Congress of the Peoples of the East*, pp 163-173.

professional core of the army) and was formed following the revolution, because the Shah's army had disintegrated and the Islamists did not fully trust its remnants.

From the beginning the Pasdaran was an ideological force loyal to Khomeini. It was first used to crush the mass movement and then, following Iraq's attack, took part in the war. It has always had a separate command structure, controls the basij (the mobilisation force with close to 400,000 total personnel), controls Iran's strategic missile forces, is in charge of defending the nuclear installations and has extensive economic power through its connections to top politicians who were former members (inc. Ahmadinejad). It is ideological, highly-motivated, well-paid and trained, and keeps an eye on the regular army (which the Islamic regime has overhauled completely over the past 29 years).

The nearest historical equivalent to the Pasdaran was the SS, which was a military organisation under the control of Hitler and the Nazi party. Could any 'Marxist' justify joining the SS when the US or Britain attacked Germany?

The error of the "join the Iranian army" political line has already been proven in practice. After Iraq attacked Iran in September 1980 a number of Iranian groups, particularly the Tudeh and Fedaiin Majority, made it their policy. Since they were already giving the IRI uncritical support, and even collaborating with it, they tried to "join the Iranian army" to do propaganda work at the front. Once there they found out that they had to pray, observe religious duties and so on. Many of their members were shot on the spot when they refused to do these things.

It could be argued that their position was actually 'better' than Schwartz's - as at the time US imperialism was clearly backing the Baathist regime and the Iranian regime appeared far more

'revolutionary' and 'anti-imperialist' than today. Of course imperialism's backing for Iraq was not aimed at overthrowing the Iranian regime and the 'revolutionary' and 'anti-imperialist' slogans were just empty rhetoric.

So the call to "join the Iranian army" - over 25 years after witnessing what the regime did to the Stalinists and how it has propped up reaction in the region - shows total ignorance about the nature of this regime and its relationship with US imperialism. Schwartz should know that in a real war the concrete situation of doing anti-war propaganda in the army is nothing like Yevgraf (played by Alec Guinness) joining the Tsar's army in Doctor Zhivago! Although, to be fair, Schwartz never said anything about anti-war or anti-regime propaganda while inside the army!

The 'standard' position

Although it has been bad enough that many people within the 'Trotskyist' movement have taken positions on countries with no knowledge other than what they have read in the bourgeois media in Europe, a bigger mistake has been to take the letter of the Comintern's or Trotsky's position without understanding the reasoning behind it.

If we look at Trotsky's position on the war between Italian imperialism and Ethiopia, we see that the main consideration is that the defeat of the imperialist country will create an international balance of forces more favourable to the proletariat and lead to the underdeveloped country's independence. Trotsky says: "Of course, we are for the defeat of Italy and the victory of Ethiopia ..." and correctly adds that "... we want to stress the point that this fight is directed not against *fascism*, but against *imperialism*. When war is involved, for us it is not a question of

who is "better," the Negus [Ethiopian emperor] or Mussolini; rather, it is a question of the relationship of classes and the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism."[†]

It is clear that in today's world the "question of the relationship of classes" would not be limited to classes in the imperialist country but would take into account, indeed put equal (or even more) emphasis on, the position of workers in the dominated country. As for "the fight of an underdeveloped nation for independence against imperialism", this is, historically speaking, largely irrelevant.

Trotsky could even maintain such a position regarding Brazil in the late 1930s.

"In Brazil there now reigns a semifascist regime that every revolutionary can only view with hatred. Let us assume, however, that on the morrow England enters into a military conflict with Brazil. I ask you on whose side of the conflict will the working class be? I will answer for myself personally — in this case I will be on the side of "fascist" Brazil against "democratic" Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will

[†] Trotsky, *The Italo-Ethiopian Conflict*, in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1935-36*, p 41.

give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat."[‡]

Trotsky's position on the war between Fascist Italy and Ethiopia, and the British threats against a semi-Fascist Brazil, are similar to Marx's position, for example, on the Russo-Turkish War in 1878. This is because the conditions had not changed fundamentally between 1878 and 1935 or 1938. The pace of development during those 60 years had not produced a qualitative change in the class structure of these societies.

Trotsky was dealing with pre-capitalist or very weak capitalist countries, with no significant working class movement - when dealing with Brazil he mentions the British proletariat but not the Brazilian one. But could such a position be taken now, if say an imperialist power were to threaten Brazil for some reason? Could Marxists overlook the fact that during the past 70 years Brazilian capitalism has grown by leaps and bounds? That there has been a huge growth in class differentiation and social inequalities among these classes? That the working class has been involved in many struggles and has matured to the level that it has experienced both a reformist labour government and factory councils? That many other sections of society, like black people, have also developed important mass movements?

In today's Brazil the "question of the relationship of classes" will have to focus on the Brazilian working class, particularly elements around the factory councils and the leftwing of the PT. It is therefore important to bear in mind the historical specificity of any analysis, position or principle.

[‡] Trotsky, *Anti-Imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation*, in *The Writings of Leon Trotsky 1938-39*, pp 31-6.

If this position was still valid for many cases in the late 1950 and early 1960, it became obsolete with their independence. By 1979, in Iran, it had become a class-traitor's charter! As Gustav Mahler said: "Tradition is the handing-on of Fire, and not the worship of Ashes."

The roots of our position

The position of the IRSL (Iranian Revolutionary Socialist League) has its origins in our experience during 1978-81 in Iran. We tried to grapple with the phenomenon of the Islamic counter-revolution, which, in order to crush the revolution, took on an 'anti-imperialist' appearance. Through this method it managed to assume the leadership of the revolution and, having done so, it then proceeded to crush a mass movement that had mobilised 10 million people - a quarter of the population.

The main force within this movement was the working class. During a period of a few months the workers' movement had made up for decades of defeats and stagnation during the Shah's dictatorship: a political strike by the oil workers, workers' councils controlling production and distribution, and so on. All of these were smashed because the Stalinist and Maoist left could not see the wolf in sheep's clothing.

Right from the beginning the Islamists adopted tactics that appeared radical or even leftwing but in fact weakened the workers' movement. In the middle of a movement in which the working class, particularly the oil workers, played a key role the Islamists seized the US embassy and diverted workers and many other activists into gesture politics and shouting slogans outside the embassy. At a time when workers were forming factory councils in many areas, controlling production and even distribution in some cases, certain guerrillaist and Stalinist groups

did not understand the importance of workers' control and workers' councils. They did not understand the revolutionary role that independent movements of women and the national minorities could play.

A counter-revolution that took on a 'revolutionary' guise, exploited the religious and cultural traditions of the masses and, of course, received help from imperialism, in dealing the movement a crushing blow that has lasted for decades.

While its Islamic ideology was recognised as thoroughly medieval and reactionary by the left, a large section of it, including the international left, thought that the Khomeini regime was somehow objectively, or empirically, or even unconsciously(!), 'anti-imperialist' and 'revolutionary'. Such wishful thinking proved disastrous for all the Stalinist, Maoist, centrist and other groups. It even caused a split among the Trotskyists - with half of the group supporting Khomeini. Unfortunately instead of shunning the group with the class-collaborating policy the leadership of the USFI ostracised the group that upheld working class independence!

Yet this sorry episode in our history did not end there. Having gone through this as a tragedy the movement has had to face it many more times as a farce. Many groups that had criticised others for their pro-Khomeini stance during the revolution ended up out-doing each other in 'defending' Iran whenever clashes between the Islamic Republic and the US escalated!

Similar positions and slogans have dogged the movement: "We back Libya" (April 1986); "Victory to Iraq" (1991) and "We are all Hezbollah now" (2007), and their variations, some more strident and some toned down, have come from a wide variety of groups claiming to be Trotskyist. These positions are shared by a

whole range of organisations: from small, marginal, petty-bourgeois sects to large parties with solid working class roots.

And although the movement has seen more than its fair share of charlatans, rogues and muddle-headed philanthropists, we believe that so long as there is no theoretical block against these positions then these mistakes will be repeated.

Our position was first set out in relation to the Iranian regime and then further developed during the Gulf War (in a pamphlet entitled *The Gulf War and revolutionary socialism*). In 1990-91 we did not side with the Baathist regime against US imperialism. We backed the Iraqi masses against both imperialism and its local stooge. The Kurdish and Shia uprisings against the regime showed that this political line was not in any way utopian. If only the whole of the international left had worked to advance this political line ...

Socialists and the national and colonial questions: a brief history

The positions of most leftwing groups, whether they are some kind of Stalinist or 'Trotskyist', have their roots in the Comintern's way of approaching the "national and colonial questions". Unfortunately, however, they copy these principles in a simplistic and formulaic way.

The Second International had a long tradition of ignoring this issue, or at best, adopting resolutions that were never put into practice. This 'international' disliked any real involvement by socialists in the colonies. It even *excluded* Iranian socialists when voting on a resolution on the first Iranian revolution!

At its Second Congress, the Comintern not only established a fundamentally different policy to the Second International on the national and colonial question, but also formulated it in an entirely different way. The various delegates from the colonial countries - particularly the Indian M.N. Roy and the Iranian A. Sultanzade - played a very active role in the pre-congress preparations as well as the two sessions and commission dedicated to this issue. Then a few weeks later a special congress, Congress of the Peoples of the East, was convened to forge closer links with anti-colonial movements and to begin building communist organisations in these countries.

The Second Congress of the Comintern

In the *Theses on the national and colonial question* drafted by Lenin, the Comintern described the three principles on which its national and colonial policy was based: "... the Communist Party should not place the main emphasis in the national question on abstract and formal principles, but in the first place on an exact evaluation of the historically given and above all economic milieu. Secondly it should emphasise the explicit separation of the interests of the oppressed classes, of the toilers, of the exploited, from the general concept of the national interest, which means the interests of the ruling class. Thirdly it must emphasise the equally clear division of the oppressed, dependent nations which do not enjoy equal rights from the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations, as a counter to the bourgeois democratic lie which covers over the colonial and financial enslavement of the vast majority of the world's total population, by a tiny minority of the richest and most advanced capitalist countries, that is characteristic of the epoch of finance capital and imperialism."[§]

[§] *Second Congress of the Communist International: Minutes of the proceedings*, Volume 1, p 177.

It is through this method, paraphrased below, that the Comintern reached its positions:

- (i) a concrete analysis of the historical conditions, especially the economic situation;
- (ii) a strict differentiation of the interests of the oppressed and exploited classes from those of the ruling class dressed up as 'the national interest';
- (iii) a clear distinction between the oppressed, dependent nations and the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations.

(i) A concrete analysis

The Comintern was fully aware of its limitations here but tried its best to base its analysis on precise and concrete information about the situation in these countries. At the time of the Second Congress there were still no CPs in most countries of 'the East' (or even in Europe): in the whole of Asia, Latin America and Africa there were just three CPs. Even these parties had a small base, lacked enough experienced cadres and their scope for activities were limited because of very repressive conditions.

That is why when submitting his draft of the *Theses*, Lenin prefaced it with the following:

"In submitting for discussion by the Second Congress ... the following draft theses on the national and the colonial questions I would request all comrades, especially those who possess concrete information on any of these very complex problems, to let me have their opinions, amendments, addenda and concrete remarks ... particularly on the following points ..."**. He then lists 16 issues from around the world, including "... Polish-Jewish and Ukrainian experience; Alsace-Lorraine and Belgium;

** Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 31, p 144.

Ireland; ... Balkan experience; Eastern peoples; The struggle against Pan-Islamism; Relations in the Caucasus; The Bashkir and Tatar Republics; Kirghizia; Turkestan ... Negroes in America; Colonies; China-Korea-Japan."

It is important to note that not only did Lenin think that he lacked sufficient knowledge on the "Eastern peoples", colonies in general, large areas like China-Korea-Japan or the struggle against Pan-Islamism, but even many places that had until recently been part of the Tsarist empire. Having "concrete information" on these "very complex problems" was the key to developing tactics that were relevant to the objective conditions in each country. And this was what Trotsky tried to follow - as far as conditions would allow - after the degeneration of the Comintern and his exile. For example, when asked about Latin America he began by saying: "I am not sufficiently acquainted with the life of the individual Latin American countries to permit myself a concrete answer on the questions you pose."^{††}

This approach meant that by the time of the Fourth Congress CPs had been established in many countries and were active in the workers' and anti-colonial movements there.

The main difference between then and now

We believe that when comparing the general international situation vis-à-vis the national and colonial question during the early twentieth century with today's conditions there is one main difference: the Comintern was dealing with *dependent countries* as opposed to *independent nations*.

This new development, in turn, has had the following consequences: the indigenous bourgeoisie rather than European

^{††} Trotsky, *Anti-Imperialist Struggle is Key to Liberation*, op. cit., p 34.

rulers has come to power; the indigenous bourgeois state apparatus and army uphold the status quo; capitalism had become the dominant mode of production in the former pre-capitalist societies; the growth and economic importance of the working class (rather than peasants); growth in industrial rather than agricultural production; shift to urban rather than rural living; and last, but not least, class struggle - especially of the proletariat - within the ex-colonial nation.

Over the past decades the combined effect of these factors has led to the specific concrete situation in these countries.

Independence

It was foreign domination that had held back the productive forces in these societies.

The *Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, written by M. N. Roy, the Indian delegate at the Second Congress of the Comintern, and adopted by the Congress, clearly point out the source of the problem: "Foreign domination constantly obstructs the free development of social life; therefore the revolution's first step must be the removal of this foreign domination."^{††}

Political independence that removes the main obstacle to capitalist development - colonial domination - has therefore always been the main political aim of the bourgeoisie of these countries. Once the bourgeoisie was in power, however, its main reason for being against imperialism disappeared (even though in a number of cases this is just formal independence). So while the 'national bourgeoisie' was opposed to the colonial administration

^{††} *Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question*, in *Second Congress of the Communist International*, op. cit., pp 115-120.

it is now no longer fundamentally opposed to the economic domination of the country by imperialism.

This 'national bourgeoisie', which in many aspects is a client of the bourgeoisie of the imperialist countries, nevertheless, has its own interests that may come into conflict with the imperialists. But so long as there are super-profits then there is enough for thieves of all sizes.

A very important feature of independence and the ascent of the local bourgeoisie is the development of the nation state. A 'potential nation' during the anti-colonial struggle now becomes a reality. The formation of the nation is also itself the beginning of its stratification into various classes and layers. Soon enough the local classes begin to confront each other head-on (without any confusion or complexity about the true nature of the bourgeoisie which was unclear during colonial rule).

Once the 'national bourgeoisie' comes to power it becomes the ruling class. Whether it came to power through a struggle like in Kenya, or from above through a deal with imperialism like in Iran, it no longer plays any progressive role in society. Any 'anti-imperialist' talk or behaviour is the result of bargaining for more concessions from imperialism, and any resulting clashes or even war, does not change the character of this bourgeoisie in relation to other classes in the country or internationally.

The bourgeois-democratic tasks are implemented in a deformed and unfinished way. This is as much as the bourgeoisie can do without losing control. These do enough to develop the productive forces and capitalist relations of production.

Yet it is important to note that even *before independence* the Comintern was clear about the nature of the "privileged classes in

the oppressed countries" and what the reality of independence could be like in many cases. The *Supplementary Theses* mention that: "The struggle to overthrow foreign domination in the colonies does not ... mean underwriting the national aims of the national bourgeoisie but much rather smoothing the path to liberation for the proletariat of the colonies." The Comintern, unlike the 'Trotskyists', did not give the national bourgeoisie any 'knee-jerk' unconditional support.

The *Theses* also explain that where possible the Comintern should "... give direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations ... through the Communist Parties of the countries in question."

It is important to note that: first, the Comintern is setting out its policy on "*revolutionary movements in dependent nations*" (emphasis added) and not *reactionary*, or other, movements let alone bourgeois state (or semi-state) structures in *independent* countries. Second, even when giving "direct support to the revolutionary movements in dependent nations" the Comintern tries to do this "*through the Communist Parties of the countries in question*" (emphasis added). So although there were just three Communist parties in the colonial and semi-colonial world, in Mexico, the Dutch East Indies and Iran, the Comintern had a clear vision of how it wanted to help the revolutionary movements that were fighting against colonial occupation.

The *Theses* also differentiated between different countries and draw attention to a number of important points in "... states that have a more backward, predominantly feudal, patriarchal or peasant patriarchal character". These were:

"a) All Communist Parties must support the revolutionary liberation movements in these countries by their deeds. The form

the support should take must be discussed with the Communist Party of the country in question, should such a party exist. [...]

b) An unconditional struggle must be carried out against the reactionary and medieval influence of the clergy ...

c) A struggle is necessary against Panislamism, the Panasiatic movement and similar currents ...

d) Support for the peasant movement ... against the landowners and every form and remnant of feudalism is particularly necessary. What must be striven for above all is to give the peasant movement as revolutionary a character as possible ...

e) A determined fight is necessary against the attempt to put a communist cloak around revolutionary liberation movements that are not really communist in the backward countries. The Communist International has the duty to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies only for the purpose of gathering the components of the future proletarian parties – communist in fact and not just in name in all the backward countries and training them to be conscious of their special tasks ... of fighting against the bourgeois-democratic tendencies within their own nation. The Communist International should accompany the revolutionary movement in the colonies and the backward countries for part of the way, should even make an alliance with it; it may not, however, fuse with it, but must unconditionally maintain the independent character of the proletarian movement, be it only in embryo."

So it is no surprise that, when referring to some of these countries, Lenin said: "You will have to base yourselves on the bourgeois nationalism which is awakening ... and which has its historical justification."^{§§}

^{§§} Lenin, Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East, in *Collected Works*, Vol 30, p 161.

The working class

In 1919, in his *Address to the Second All-Russia Congress of Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East*, Lenin said that: "... the majority of the Eastern peoples are ... not workers who have passed through the school of capitalist factories, but typical representatives of the working and exploited peasant masses who are victims of medieval oppression." He added that "... the bulk of the population are peasants, and ... the task is to wage a struggle against medieval survivals and not against capitalism."***

The Second Congress was very clear about the predominance of the peasantry and the absence or recent appearance of the proletariat: "Thanks to the imperialist policies whose efforts are directed towards holding up industrial development in the colonies, the native proletariat has only come into existence fairly recently. The dispersed local cottage industries have given way to the centralised industries of the imperialist countries. As a result the vast majority of the population was forced to engage in agriculture and export raw materials abroad. On the other hand we can observe a rapidly growing concentration of the land in the hands of big landowners, capitalists and the state, which again contributes to the growth of the number of landless peasants." (*Supplementary Theses*)

With the development of the productive forces, however, the proletariat became ever more important in the daily economic and eventually political life of the new nation. At the same time as it was formed the new nation started becoming more and more differentiated. Class stratification progressed from the city to the village and into all major sectors of the economy.

*** Lenin, *ibid.*

The predominantly agricultural and rural forms of employment were overtaken by industrial and urban forms. Even in the villages, the remaining industries not only adopted more and more of the technologies provided by the factories but a fundamental shift took place when the agricultural production was organised along capitalist lines and was aimed towards supplying the market rather than the subsistence of the producers. Large-scale industry developed and even the smallest family-run workshops were run along capitalist lines. There was even a split in the countryside, with the development of rich property-owning peasants and rural proletarians (and class struggle between them).

This pattern, where there was no ideological hindrance, drew in ever more layers of people into capitalist production and the labour-power market. Not only were more and more layers from other classes proletarianised but women were drawn into the world of work and social life generally.

The workers became one of two main classes in society - even if they, to begin with, didn't know it themselves. The other main class, the bourgeoisie, was fully aware of its interests and had the full backing of its class allies internationally. However, because of its place within the world capitalist system, the pace of industrialisation in this type of country cannot keep up with the destruction of the old methods or forms of production. Consequently all those who become proletarianised cannot always actually join the ranks of the proletariat and be absorbed into the labour-power market, and many, sometimes millions, end up living on the margins of capitalist society in shanty downs around cities. These lumpen elements can, with the wrong leadership, play a reactionary role against the real proletariat.

Within a few years the workers (and all the exploited and oppressed layers of the country) increasingly see their 'own bourgeoisie' as the **main class enemy** - or as the local 'agent' of imperialists if there is less independence. Proletarian struggles become the most important ones in this type of country. Although at times students, youth, poor peasants, national minorities, women and so on may become the main section of the masses struggling against the 'national' government, it is only when important sections of workers join these struggles that they rock the government and even the structures of the capitalist state.

(ii) No class-collaboration between the oppressed and exploited classes

The Comintern's primary aim here was to set out clearly that the workers of the imperialist or advanced countries had no common 'national interest' with their own bourgeoisie. It was imperative that the newly-formed (or soon to be founded) Communist parties took a clear stance against the bourgeois ideology propagated by their own ruling class and did not side with it in military adventures and annexations abroad - even when they were dressed up as part of the 'national interest'.

Today, with the bourgeoisie in power in all the colonies of Lenin's time, this resolute stand against class-collaboration has to be extended to not only to India-Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, China, and the central Asian republics, but all of Asia, all of Africa and all of Latin America.^{†††}

In most of these countries there is also a long history of proletarian class struggle, which, in some cases, even stretches back to the time of the anti-colonial struggle. Therefore, when a

^{†††} Of course, we do not think that N. Korea or Cuba are capitalist.

country is threatened in some way, the international left should not look to defend the national sovereignty or territorial integrity of these countries. The workers and other exploited and oppressed classes in these countries have material interests that are opposed to those of their own bourgeoisie and they therefore have no common 'national interest' with it.

It would be a betrayal of the working class movement in these countries to suddenly expect workers to forget their decades-long traditions and suspend the class struggle simply because the bourgeoisie has over-reached itself vis-à-vis America's designs for the country (or the region). The bourgeoisie of the country may expect such support but the workers must know that the nature of such a disagreement with imperialism is totally reactionary and that if it really leads to war then the best way to fight imperialism is for the exploited and oppressed masses, led by the most advanced layers of the working class, to organise the military resistance to the invaders *and* mobilise to overthrow the regime.

Of the Comintern's three principles this is the one that needs to be modified. The principle against class-collaboration needs to be extended to all countries of the world.

(iii) Distinguishing between the oppressed, dependent nations and the oppressing, exploiting, privileged nations

This seems to be the only principle that the vast majority of the 'Trotskyists' have learnt from the Bolsheviks (and Trotsky after the degeneration of the USSR).

Obviously this still holds to a great extent: no one in their right mind could equate Baathist Iraq with US imperialism. The majority of the 'Trotskyists', however, use this as a simple

formula: Iraq=oppressed, US=oppressor. Once this categorisation has taken place then there is no need to think or worry about a concrete analysis of class forces on the ground in the oppressed country. This is what leads to positions that not only fail to gain any supporters in the oppressed country (or region) concerned but also create big problems when attempting to recruit workers in the west.

Firstly, if we look at this in a purely short-termist and 'calculating' way then two points should be mentioned:

(a) In countries like Iraq or Iran, if the workers and exploited masses are supporters of the regime then they have already joined the Baath party or Hezbollah-Pasdar-an-Basij. They have no need to affiliate to a small sect in Europe that defends the regime. For an Iranian being a Hezbollahi is more natural, carries material benefits and privileges and provides security. What does being a Hezbollahi by proxy - through a European sect that previously criticised the regime for its abuses and so on - provide other than draw the suspicions of the secret police?

(b) In the imperialist countries, although the 'Trotskyists' may think that by giving unconditional (or even conditional) support to regimes in Iraq, Libya or Iran they are 'challenging' bourgeois ideology and the pro-war atmosphere in their own country.

What actually happens is that many workers in the west are repelled by what these regimes are doing to their own workers, women, students and so on - and they do not have 'the theory' to excuse these atrocities. They are, of course, under the influence of bourgeois ideology - as they are on other issues. But one of the best ways to begin to break this influence of bourgeois ideology is to show how much workers in the imperialist and advanced

countries have in common with their brothers and sisters in the dominated and oppressed countries.

Secondly, even though for over thirty years the sects in Europe and N America have defended and supported various Islamic and Arab nationalist movements or groups. Yet they show no significant long-term gain among workers. Where is the radical and organised anti-militarist movement that was built on this basis? How many thousands of workers have become members of revolutionary Marxist organisations because of their stance vis-à-vis these conflicts?

Thirdly, looking at this historically, they must recognise that the nature of imperialist domination and oppression of today is very different and much more complex than 80-90 years ago. Our 'Trotskyists' cannot use this third principle of the Comintern as a master-key that opens all locks. This principle is not an excuse for class collaboration in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It does not rule out or replace the need for a concrete analysis of the concrete situation.

Today's 'Anti-imperialism'

Because of its balancing act between the masses and its ties to imperialism on the one hand, and its own national (and regional) interests as a minor bourgeois partner of imperialism on the other, the indigenous bourgeoisie may in certain situations adopt not only 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric, but provoke diplomatic incidents and even start some small scale military action.

Whatever the outward manifestation of these conflicts of interest the indigenous bourgeoisie remains fundamentally regressive and reactionary. There is no progressive content to these disagreements with imperialism. Not only is the bourgeoisie

unwilling to engage in a real anti-imperialist struggle - i.e., one that is also anti-capitalist and for socialism - but, as the ruling class, it wants to uphold the status quo.

The interests of the workers in these countries are the same as workers in the imperialist or advanced capitalist countries. They are no less proletarian than their European or N American brothers and sisters. The workers in the dominated countries therefore must maintain an independent political position and organisational structure from their 'own' bourgeoisie, and to do their utmost to use the crisis to overthrow not only the government but the entire capitalism system.

The third camp

Considering that in all dominated countries the concrete historical conditions and economic situation have changed enormously, that there is a national bourgeoisie that would like to promote a 'national interest', and that imperialist domination has taken a new form, we believe that the Comintern's three principles still apply - but in a modified form.

The main factor for Marxists should be the development of the class struggle, particularly of the proletariat. Over several decades the working class in these countries has time and time again developed massive strikes or even general strikes, tried to set up independent trade unions and organisations, formed workers' councils, controlled production and so on.

Considering the way these countries became independent, i.e., on the territory of a colony that included many diverse nationalities, national oppression by the dominant ethnic (or religious) group, and struggles against the state and central government, have also

been in evidence. The 'national interest' of the nation-state is against all the basic rights of the nationalities as well as workers.

That is why, for example, the defeat of the Baathist regime in 1991 was a signal for huge numbers of Kurds and Shias to revolt against it. It is true that the leadership of both of movements was reactionary. And although the masses had great illusions in what US imperialism's promises, they showed that there was great potential for forming a third camp or front if a revolutionary leadership had been present.

In places like Iraq or Iran, therefore, the working class should lead the masses in forming an independent third camp - neither with its 'own' bourgeoisie in defence of a 'national interest', nor with imperialism. This is a united front of the workers and all exploited and oppressed layers in society. It should not only be anti-imperialist but also fight for the overthrow of capitalism through posing transitional demands like workers' control.

It would call on all international leftwing or progressive organisations to lend it support to make this independent and truly revolutionary front a real alternative to the other two camps. Instead of calling for workers to join the army of the reactionary stooge bourgeoisie the Marxists should call on workers who are drafted into the army to shoot their officers, to form soldiers' councils, to arm the masses with heavy weaponry to defend their factories and neighbourhoods, to train the masses in military skills to a high level and to conduct a revolutionary war against imperialism and the local bourgeoisie.

This is the real way to confront and defeat imperialism. It is, of course, a tall order. But preparations for a revolution are not an ordinary event. This is our duty. Whether such a front actually takes shape depends on theoretical and practical preparation

before the event and our resolute action in being able to lead the masses towards this goal once a conflict has begun.

The nightmare scenario

The nightmare for Marxists in the semi-colonies and dominated countries would come true when once a conflict starts, not only do the international left not help with the forming of such a front, but openly side with the 'little' bourgeois regime against the 'big bully' of imperialism.

This line, in effect, means that the workers are told to suspend the class struggle until the end of the conflict! In practice this has more in common with the Second International in July-August 1914 than with the Third International in 1919-22.

Those who have taken pro-Khomeini, pro-Gaddafi, pro-Saddam and similar positions have not only betrayed the working class in these countries but have discredited the whole of the left. The job of building truly revolutionary Marxist organisations that are rooted within the working class has become much harder because of these errors.

Morad Shirin and Maziar Razi

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Is Bush's threat against Iran real?

Maziar Razi

In his State of the Union address Mr Bush, in the presence of both houses of Congress, in addition to setting out his government's domestic and foreign policies accused the government of Iran of supporting terrorism and denying the people of this country their freedom.

The part of the speech that specifically dealt with the advance of democracy and political stability in the Middle East, the President of the United States said: "Today, Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror - pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve."

Mr Bush said: "We are working with our European allies to make clear to the Iranian regime that it must give up its uranium

enrichment program and any plutonium reprocessing, and end its support for terror.”

The president of the United States said to the Iranian people: “And to the Iranian people, I say tonight: As you stand for your own liberty, America stands with you.”

There is nothing new about Bush’s speech. Around three years ago in his famous speech he called Iran, Iraq and North Korea an ‘axis of evil’ and declared that the governments of these countries are endangering world peace by supporting terrorism. After that he attacked Iraq and put in place another hand-picked regime instead of Saddam’s. Last month the President of the United States also said that he does not think that military action to stop the nuclear activities of Iran, which America claims is aimed at the secret production of nuclear weapons, is off the agenda.

Before assessing whether the Bush government will prepare an attack on Iran (just as with Iraq), we must pay attention to the current bullying motives of the American government.

The real motives for the Bush government’s warmongering

Despite the rhetoric of Bush the main motive for the military offensive against Iraq (and possibly Iran) are not to bring about ‘democracy’ or freedom! We have seen the democracy that has been imposed on Iraq! One of the main motives for America’s military attack on Iraqi soil (and possibly on Iran) is access to the oil resources in these countries. Companies like Esso, Texaco, Halliburton (from which Vice President Dick Cheney annually receives \$600,000); and other oil companies have benefited from this military attack and will be increasing their oil revenue for many years. But the real reason for the military attacks is not oil

only. The real motive must be sought in the deep economic crisis of the American imperialist system.

The American economy since the spring of 2000 (18 months before the 11 September events), after a decade's boom, has succumbed to a deep crisis. This economic crisis was demonstrated by the gradual fall of the NASDAQ market that includes the stocks of many production companies, particularly of computers. Also the Dow Jones Industrial Average gave in to the crisis. By 2001 the NASDAQ market fell by \$3 trillion in value. Today this figure has reached \$4 trillion. Many of the stock holders lost their vast capital. The production of large industries began their downward course and unprecedented unemployment enveloped the workers of factories and companies. The unemployment rate, a few months before September 2001 increased from 3 to 5 percent. In just two years of Bush's presidency two million people became unemployed. These figures were unprecedented in at least the past two decades.

The last period shows the end of the 'golden' era of 'neo-liberal' policies of the conservative wing that were begun by Reagan and were continued during the term of George Bush Snr., and became consolidated after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But with the beginning of the period of economic crisis, all the long-term plans of the US government reached a dead-end. Therefore, during the period before 11 September, the policy advisers of the ruling elite of America began work on 'new' policies for solving this deep economic crisis. But the policies presented were not so new. These were policies that during the past two decades, and particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990, were in circulation among the US ruling elite. What is today called 'the Bush Doctrine' has its roots in these views.

The 'neoconservative' or 'hawks' wing that today holds all the executive positions of the ruling group in the Bush cabinet, has since the last decade believed that in the post-Cold War period and the fall of the Soviet Union, in order to prevent economic crises like the 1930 one in America, the US must deal with world affairs in a unilateral way. The key figures of this viewpoint are people like Paul Wolfowitz (the main policy developer) - Donald Rumsfeld's deputy; Richard Cheney - the Vice President; Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense; Richard Perle, the President's advisor; Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State. This political clique stands against the 'doves' wing that defends a moderate and multilateral approach to world affairs.

These views have been openly expressed by this clique since 1991. For example, Richard Cheney, the Secretary of Defense in George Bush Snr's cabinet, on 21 February 1991, at the start of the military attack on Iraq, said to the Senate Defense Committee that: "This war is an example of the type of clashes that we will possibly be involved in during the new era ... Other than South East Asia, we have main interests in Europe, Asia, the Pacific Ocean and Latin and Central America. We must organise our policies and forces in such a way that we can in the future prevent the occurrence of such regional dangers or to crush them quickly." (Re-translated from a Persian translation.)

Even though these views were expressed at the start of the February 1991 war, and at the time of American economic growth were not decisive, but in the late 1990s, with the beginning of the economic crisis, these views were strengthened. In 2000 George W. Bush, through open electoral fraud, was elected as President to implement the policies of this wing. The events of 11 September 2001 were in fact like a gift for putting into practice policies that had been prepared for over a decade. If it turns out that bin Laden has organised 11 September, then he

would have been of great service in putting these policies of the clique into practice.

After 11 September the same position, now as the official view of the US government, was formulated in a document entitled *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*:

- 1- Maintain and secure the unchallenged military superiority of the United States in the world as the only military superpower.
- 2- The absolute readiness of the US government for 'pre-emptive' military attack against any country or force in the world that endangers the national security or interests of the United States.
- 3- US citizens abroad to be exempt from any sort of international criminal proceedings. (Re-translated from a Persian translation.)

The ground offensive against Afghanistan and then Iraq, demonstrated the beginning of putting this plan into practice on a world scale. The threats of a possible military attack on Iran are based on this policy.

The military budget of the US government has been planned on the basis of realising this policy. Since 11 September until now the military budget of the US has increased by \$160 billion. By proposing a budget of \$75 billion from the Congress on 25 March 2003, this figure reached \$359 billion, and will probably go up in the next few months as Bush was re-elected; to reach several times that. At the same time military complexes and industrial-military companies have already become involved. Companies such as Northrop, Lockheed, General Dynamics and Boeing, have increased their military production.

Is a military attack on Iran imminent?

Even though the instinctive tendency of the Bush government is based on warmongering and military offensives, but contrary to the bourgeois and petty-bourgeois tendencies of the Iranian opposition, which from the beginning of the 1979 insurrection have been counting the days when America will send its troops to Iran and replace the mollahs with a pro-western regime, the US government has always preferred to come to an agreement with the capitalist-clerical regime of Iran. The monarchists and devotees of Reza Pahlavi [the Shah's son] do not have the necessary political credibility in Iran (no matter how much noise they make about becoming social democrats and wanting unity with other tendencies). The seal and coat of arms of the royal regime and SAVAK [the Shah's security police] and thugs [who were paid to take part in the 1953 CIA coup] have forever been stamped on their foreheads. The Mojahedin, which never became a bourgeois alternative, had their political gamble of becoming dependent on Saddam's regime disgracefully defeated. The reformers also turned out to be breathless and useless. Even though the US government is saving all these alternatives for the future, but its main perspective is doing a deal with the Islamic Republic itself.

It is obvious that in order to balance the situation to its advantage, imperialism must deal with the regime through two methods or two tracks. The moderate method that up until now the European governments, especially the governments of Britain, France and Germany, have adopted and will be continuing. And that of bullying and force that is expressed by Bush. In fact there is no political difference between the US and the European governments on the situation of Iran (the differences are tactical and minor). The recent trip by Condoleezza Rice to Britain and Germany is indicative of this general consensus. These two

methods are both designed for guiding the Iranian regime on the straight and narrow. Mr Bush's speech in Congress also expressed this that while his government does not find the political structure and policies of the Islamic Republic acceptable, it nevertheless is not prepared to negate the diplomatic attempts of the European countries regarding Iran's nuclear programme and other issues like the human rights situation. It does not want to cause bitterness in the relations of America and the Europeans and to lose their support on various international issues, including Iran.

The reaction of the Islamic Republic to the Bush government, despite superficial 'protests' and 'resistance', has had a qualitative change since three years ago until now. For example, three years ago, at a time when Bush called Iran one of the countries in the 'axis of evil', the head of the Guardian Council, Ahmad Janati, called Bush's words "astonishing" and compared him to a madman who "doesn't know what is good for his own country". Khameneii, the Supreme Leader, described Bush as someone "thirsty for human blood" and finally Khatami called Bush's words "insulting". But this time there was no hostile reaction from the regime. On the contrary, Hossein Mousavian, one of the members of the regime's team negotiating with the Europeans, said in an interview with the *Financial Times* (3 February 2005), while protesting about the slowness of contacts between the European and Iranian governments, said that he does not have objections to the US government taking part in the discussions alongside the European governments! This time the leaders of the regime called Bush's claims about the regime's preparations for obtaining nuclear weapons as incorrect. This recent reaction shows the regime's submissiveness towards imperialism. The only quarrel is on getting more concessions from them.

On the other hand when Ms Rice, in her interview on 4 February 2005, was asked about the possible conditions that would be followed by an America military attack on Iran, said that such an attack is not on the agenda of the United States government at the present time and added that there are still many diplomatic avenues in dealing with the nuclear programme of Iran. In other words, so long as the Iranian regime continues this submissive course to its logical conclusion, the US government has no issues with this regime. Even if it is one of the most despotic regimes in the world and is repressing the people.

In addition, and especially after the disastrous experience in Iraq, the balance of forces rules out another military attack being placed on the agenda of the American government. The US government is forced to remain in Iraq for a long time and does not have the necessary ability for a military attack on Iran.

‘Terrorism’ and the Bush government

In his recent speech George Bush presented himself as a defender of freedom and democracy and declared his hostility towards terrorism. But he forgot to point out this truth that the United States (and the CIA spying organisation) leads all terrorist states. Were not Saddam and bin Laden trained by the same CIA? Were not today’s ‘terrorists’ the same people who were armed with heavy weaponry by the US government, so that its interests in the repression of the Kurdish people and a war against Russia could be pursued? Was not Mr Khatami’s government being supported by the US government until a few years ago because it was a ‘moderate’ and reformist government? Did not Jack Straw, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, in the past few months travel to Iran and make behind the scenes deals with the regime? How was it that Saddam Hussein, so long as he did not disobey the US government, was thought of as one of America’s allies? Were not

the crimes of Saddam's regime against the Kurdish people many times more tragic than his military attack on Kuwait? How was it that the US government did not make the slightest protest about the use of chemical weapons and the massacring of people in Kurdistan? How was it that in the face of the 'serial murders' of the regime's oppositionists, and the killing of Iran's honourable students and workers in front of parliament, Mr Bush did not call Khatami's government 'terrorist'? Is 'terrorism' defined according to the wishes of Mr Bush? Why does not the same Mr Bush say that while he was the Governor of Texas he signed the death warrants of several people? Why does Mr Bush not utter a word about the role of the CIA in the coup d'état of 19 August 1953 against Dr Mossadegh, the coup against Allende in Chile, and the recurring tragedies of the CIA killing the most honourable human beings in the world?

It is obvious that these contradictions are rooted in the terrorist nature of the US government itself. If terrorism is supposed to be uprooted from the world then the 'devil' himself must first of all be destroyed. So long as real democracy does not exist throughout the world and the main 'devil' is present, then such 'axes of evil' will be reproduced - even if some of them are dealt with.

The turn of the Iranian regime and the situation of the labour movement

Immediately after Iraq was occupied by the US government the authoritarian wing of the Iranian regime made a turn in their policy towards America. This turn is headed by former president Rafsanjani. In its first issue after the occupation of Iraq, *Rahbord*, a periodical which is published by the Strategic Studies Centre, a body which is tied to the Iranian regime's Expediency Council, published a 24 page interview with Ali-Akbar Hashemi

Rafsanjani, the chairman of this Council. In the interview Rafsanjani deals with the role of the Expediency Council in resolving difficulties between Iran and America. He said that “as Muslims we have no problem with resolving any of the foreign issues facing us... We have a tenet in Islam which is the precedence of the expediency of power over the expediency of weakness... In principle, the Expediency Council has been created on the basis of this need.” He referred to Khomeini’s view which specified that one can even stop prayers and fasting if it is for the expediency of the system, and added that: “To endanger our country and imagine that we are acting in an Islamic way is not Islamic.” In this interview he claimed that the foreign policy apparatus of Iran, because of the inexperience of its officials, had in many cases missed opportunities, but now it has reached a state under which it appreciates the world’s political issues and can assess and analyse them!

Following on from these claims, the new course of the right-wing clique took place, and it is aimed at attracting the trust of western governments. It is obvious that for the imperialist governments to invest in Iran, to loot the oil resources, and to use the labour power of Iran, it makes no difference which of the ruling cliques is in power - so long as their interests are guaranteed. And now the right-wing clique is playing this role.

Under these conditions the workers’ movement of Iran is entering a new stage in its political life. Creating a ‘modern’ capitalist system that is tied to the policies of the world banks and the world capitalist system is on Iranian capitalism’s agenda. This process will mean the continuation of the flow of foreign capital into Iran. In the next period international capitalism, by importing spare parts, training technicians and technocrats, professional managers, will enter Iran’s ‘virgin’ economic scene.

Getting the wheels of industry into motion goes together with employing workers at a higher and more regular basis. Together with employment, gradually the uncertainty and insecurity that workers have about jobs (the fear of losing their job) will diminish and this process will in turn boost workers' self-confidence. But this process will not end here. The newly established and modern capitalism, which for many years has stayed backward due to reasons like the Iran-Iraq war, repression, wrong economic policies and incompetence of the regime's leaders, will be forced to increase the intensity of labour to make up time. New and advanced machinery, educated managers who are knowledgeable about management issues, rational economic planning, will increase the intensity of labour among workers and, as a result, the workers will be condemned to endure super-exploitation. Super-exploitation together with self-confidence among workers will mark a new stage in workers' struggles.

For the first time in over two decades of capitalist rule, the contradictions between 'labour' and 'capital' are appearing as more noticeable and precise than before. Also, the *modus operandi*, both of the capitalists and workers will change. If in the past the imposition of a mediaeval Labour Code, together with the naked repression of workers, was part of the regime's policy; in the next period a new Labour Code that, on the face of it is written in accord with international laws and regulations, will be in force. The *modus operandi* of the capitalists for super-exploitation is to create organisations and laws that are acceptable to the international banks and capitalist governments throughout the world.

It is obvious that in order to organise their anti-capitalist struggles the workers of Iran will enter a new stage. Workers' struggles after May Day 2004 demonstrate the change in the balance of forces in favour of the workers. The central demand of workers is

setting up independent workers' organisations. But independent workers' organisations are not formed spontaneously or by the International Labour Organisation. And even in the event that they formed in that way, they will stand opposed to the central demands of the workers (the right to strike, workers' control, and a sliding scale of wages rising in line with inflation and so on). Independent workers' organisations can only be set up by the workers themselves. To prepare for such organisations having self-confidence and finding the means for self-organisation are the main issue. This cannot be achieved unless there is active participation by workers in the political scene.

For an effective intervention within the workers' movement the drafting a workers' action programme based on the democratic, trade union and transitional demands of the workers is on the order of the day. The workers and the youth must at the same time introduce their own representatives to society, and, around these individuals, present the workers' action programme to society.

5 February 2005

The new course of the EU, the nature of the Iranian regime and the working class

Maziar Razi

The meeting of the heads of 15 European Union countries in Luxembourg on 17 June 2002, which followed up the recent position of European governments from a similar meeting a month earlier, has strengthened relations with Iran. Next September the Council of Ministers will begin discussions with Iran for the signing of an economic co-operation treaty (of course, depending on the European parliament ratifying it, which it probably will). During the past month the representatives of European countries have travelled to Iran many times to strengthen relations, and in return, the representatives of the regime have visited the leaders of European countries. For example, Mr Michel, the Belgian Foreign Minister, representing the foreign ministers of the 15 EU countries, recently went to Tehran and presented a report to the Luxembourg meeting. Before him Christopher Patten, the special representative of the

EU for negotiations with the leaders of the regime, had gone to Iran. The regular trips of Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Deputy Foreign Minister, to various places in Europe and also the four day trip of the head of the Islamic Parliament, Mehdi Karroubi to Finland and then Ms Liisa Jaakonsaari, head of the Finnish parliament's foreign policy commission, to Iran on 14 June, and their negotiations on the developments in Afghanistan and the Middle East and human rights (!); Karroubi's trip to Austria and a meeting with Thomas Klestil, the President; the visit of Abbas-Ali Alizadeh the general head of Tehran province's judiciary to Wiesbaden in Germany and meeting with the city's public prosecutor, Dr Kumer; the trip of Ms Anna Lindh the Foreign Minister of Sweden to Iran last month; and so on are all aimed at preparing a "honeymoon" between the EU and the Iranian regime.

It is obvious that adding the name of the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran to the list of terrorist organisations, and Iran being declared a safe country by international organisations, are part of these behind the scenes negotiations.

The reasons for the new course by the European leaders

The main reasons for such a new course must be sought in the international situation of western capitalist governments and also in the internal developments of the regime.

Europe's disagreements with America

The new course of the heads of European governments is partly a reaction to the recent adventurist policies of the Bush government (and Sharon). After 11 September 2001, the Bush government

organised the attack on Afghanistan to solve the economic crisis of America and after that, under the guise of a War on Terrorism, has declared war on all those who oppose him in the Third World. George Bush, in his speech on 29 January 2002 to joint session of the US Congress, by calling Iran, Iraq and North Korea an "axis of evil" attacked them. In this speech Bush declared that these countries seek to produce chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. He said: "With the production of these weapons of mass destruction these regimes create the danger of digging their own graves". It is obvious that the reason for such an attack under the present conditions cannot be just to do with the nature of these regimes, because terrorist acts by the governments of Iran and Iraq is nothing new. The main issue is the economic crisis of the US itself. In fact Bush admitted in his speech that "American society is in an economic recession."

This speech was made straight after the bankruptcy of Enron, one of the biggest American capitalist companies. A company that has, more than any other, direct political links with Bush and the Republican Party. On top of this, the bankruptcy of companies like K-Mart, Global Crossing, Sunbeam and all of the steel industry are an issue.

(The right-wing government of Sharon is also following this adventurist policy with the same phrases. It planned the attack on the towns of the West Bank of the River Jordan and Yasser Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah which caused the deaths of hundreds of innocent Palestinians; and the destruction of the economic base like cutting off the electricity and drinking water, food and medical supplies and so on.)

It is obvious that the US government's policy of one-sided attacks and Bush's bullying behaviour towards his opponents in the 'Third World' was not based on an agreement with the European

governments and on the interests of European capitalists. Although world capitalism uses a general policy of aggression towards the capitalist countries of the Third World, nevertheless, they have their tactical differences. The economic interests of the European countries do not at the same time and in a uniform way correspond to those of the policies of the US government. The recent speeches of the representatives of European countries show this contradiction.

For example, the French ambassador in Tehran, Francois Nicolo, recently announced that: "The axis of evil does not exist for France" (Norooz newspaper, 15 June 2002). Ms Liisa Jaakonsaari, head of the Finnish parliament's foreign policy commission, at her meeting with representatives of the Islamic parliament in Tehran claimed that for Finland "The harsh language of America against Iran, and that the Islamic Republic is part of the axis of evil, are unacceptable" (Hamshahri newspaper, 15 June 2002). The recent position of the representatives of the European parliament shows the opposition to the use of harsh words and the ultra-right policies of America's Republicans. In the middle of this the British government, which until now was in America's camp in every respect, has for the first time in the past decade separated itself from the US government. Of course, the US (and the Israeli) government have publicly protested against the policies of the European countries and show displeasure against this turn.

The regime's reformers

One of the central analyses of the leaders of the European countries for becoming closer to the regime is that it appears to strengthen the 'reformist' wing within the regime. The view of Anna Lindh, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, before and after she went to Iran were published in Dagens Nyheter, one of Sweden's

most respected newspapers, on 16 April 2002 was that "The trip to Iran is in fact support for that country's reformers". According to the Dagens Nyheter report, Anna Lindh then added that the oppression of the people in Iran is still "unacceptable", but despite this, there have been changes in the country. She then said: "In Iran the reformist tendencies are growing. These groups want to change Iran, to make it modern and democratic and the President of Iran belongs to this wave." According to Dagens Nyheter, the Foreign Minister of Sweden adds: "For all those who want to create reform in Iran, it is necessary to travel to that country and have close contact with them." She continued: "Travelling to Iran was in fact to support the reformers in that country (Dagens Nyheter newspaper, 18 April 2002).

Ms Anna Lindh (and the heads of European countries) must first clarify what they mean by 'reforms' within the regime and then count out the steps that have been taken by the 'reformers'. If these people were looking for the results of reforms and the reformers, then it would have been enough to take a look at the woeful situation of the people during the period of the President's so-called reforms. Instead of behind the scenes 'negotiations' with people who have had a part in suppressing the human rights of workers, the youth and women, it would have been better to hold talks with the representatives of these oppressed layers. Obviously the motive of the heads of the European countries was not to find out the truth and the turn towards the regime is based on the economic interests of international capitalists.

'Reforms', even in the bourgeois sense, mean that demands like unemployment benefit, social insurance, paid holidays and so on, which were traditionally posed as part of the 'minimum' demands of the late nineteenth century social democratic predecessors of Ms Anna Lindh. The 'reforms' in Iran are even more limited than the demands of late nineteenth century social democracy. At a

time when even the workers' wages go unpaid for six months to a year in Iran, and the regime and its reformist factions shamelessly arrested and imprisoned the workers of Baresh textiles in Esfahan; when the workers of Jamco and Shadanpoor are shot in front of parliament; and when the slightest protest by workers is nipped in the bud - just because the workers demand their unpaid wages - how can the regime's defenders among the heads of European countries imagine that reforms are taking place and growing? Ms Lindh forgets that Khatami, the leader of reforms, has been in power for over six years. The reformers also have a parliamentary majority. And yet the suppression and beating of workers and students has been taking place during the time of these very same 'reformers'.

'Reforms' in the sense of achieving unemployment benefit, social insurance, the right to have holidays; 'reforms' in the sense of having democratic rights like the right to the freedom of speech; the right to organise and to strike; the freedom to found trade unions and independent workers' organisations; free education for women and men at all levels; respect for human rights; the right to lodge complaints and to prosecute any government official by any citizen and so on, are demands that are approved by all of Iranian society. But, the 'reformers' - even those who are now in opposition - do not want such reforms and in practice have not taken the slightest step in this direction. When Khameneii, with just one mention, blocked the move by the majority of the reformist parliament (supposedly those who had been voted in by the people) for freedom of the media and newspapers of the reformers themselves, not even one of them protested. Then we cannot conclude that the 'reformers' can be expected to take steps about other basic issues.

The heads of the European countries surely know about these issues. But the two-faced nature of the governments, who

supposedly support the freedom of speech and democratic rights, gets them into this contradictory position. The defence of reforms for the people of Iran is completely opposed to support for the 'reformers'! The best and quickest way for achieving reforms in Iran is the international isolation of the regime in power and not strengthening it. The heads of the European countries, with their new turn towards signing economic-political treaties with the regime, show in practice that they do not want reforms!

The Iranian regime's position in response to the EU's turn

A day after the EU foreign ministers' Luxembourg decision all the media welcomed this step. Hamid-Reza Asefi, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, and Mohammad-Javad Zarif, the Deputy Foreign Minister, expressed their satisfaction with this decision. This event, on its own, shows the reduction of internal differences within the regime on the new orientation towards world capitalism.

Doubtless the ruling elite's factions, just as before, have their own differences on having close relations with the capitalists' governments, especially the American government. But, it should be mentioned that this time the differences on their policy vis-à-vis the US only became intensified when George Bush said that Iran was part of the 'axis of evil'. Despite this, the 'differences' of the two 'authoritarian' and 'reformist' factions do not totally divide into 'pro-western' and 'anti-western' views. Right from the regime's first day the internal differences were concerned with the two forms and ways of running a capitalist system. One view wants to maintain the present situation and continue with an Islamic ('semi-feudal') system and economy with a 'particular' relationship with world capitalism (as the governments of Syria

and Libya); and the other dreams of a return to the golden age of the monarchy. The first is based on building power centres and making short-term profits; and the second wants a concentration of power and the creation of a modern capitalist system. The internal differences of the ruling elite have always been based on a power struggle between one faction against the other. At no time has there been any differences on the repression, intimidation and exploitation of workers. The latest repression of workers and students demonstrate this reality. At no time has antagonism against European and American governments reached the level of seeking independence from world capitalism - even at the height of the US Embassy siege and the propaganda about the 'Great Satan'.

The ruling system in Iran is a unique form of capitalism. The internal clashes between the 'Islamic system' faction, and the faction favouring the creation of a modern capitalist system with an orientation towards world capitalism, has always existed. But during two decades the logic of capitalism has made the 'moderate' faction appear more acceptable.

For this reason world capitalism has constantly been strengthening the faction that is in favour of 'modern' capitalism. For world capitalism the existence of a concentrated capitalist state, which guarantees the flow of capital and capital investment, is a necessity. Obviously a 'semi-feudal' Islamic system with a mediaeval form would be incapable of this.

That is why two tendencies have continuously appeared within the ruling elite - although they have taken different forms at different times. In the beginning the Bazargan government supported the modern capitalist view; after that Banisadr, then Rafsanjani and Khatami and now Behzad Nabavi represent this tendency. Contrary to the views of many who think of the

Khatami 'reforms' as a watershed, within this process the issue of 'reformism', as a tendency of world capitalism, has existed from the first day of the formation of the government of the Islamic Republic. The only difference is that under the present conditions this tendency has been strengthened. Today, the surrender of the 'authoritarians' to the logic of the capitalist process, because of the depth of the economic and political crisis in Iran, can be witnessed.

For example, recently Mohammad Khazaii, the Deputy Foreign Minister, declared that the regime has a problem with the US government but "has no differences with American merchants"! As if American merchants are a separate phenomenon from the US government! The Iranian regime, despite all the anti-American slogans and uproar, in the first three months of this year (1381) had exports worth \$30 million to the US and imported \$9 million worth of goods from America (Radio Azadi, 15 June 2002). Obviously, all the recent trips by the leaders of the regime to European countries, and the contacts with the US, would have been impossible if they had been carried out in secret and without consultation and even permission of the 'authoritarian' faction. It is clear today that the two factions of the ruling elite have reached a common set of view on establishing economic and political relations with the capitalist governments of Europe (and later with the US government). Of course, some of the regime's right-wing elements will continue to express their opposition to this. But these differences have a mainly decorative aspect and are posed with demagogic aims for getting approval from the rank-and-file of the regime's Hezbollahi base. Both factions of the regime today know full well that to preserve the present system and their own political power they themselves must accept the logic of going in the same direction as the imperialist governments. In other words, the creation of a Third

World modern capitalist system (like that of the Shah) is on the agenda.

The perspective of the workers' movement

Creating a modern capitalist system that is tied to the policies of the international banks and the world capitalist system will mean that foreign capital, and also the dollars of exiled Iranian capitalists, will flow into Iran. Foreign capitalists, who have for years been anticipating large investments in Iran's industries and, because of the lack of any guarantees by the regime for the security of their capital, have concentrated their capital outside Iran's borders, will in the next period enter Iran's undeveloped economic scene by importing spare parts, training technicians and technocrats, professional managers and so on. All along one of the complaints of the 'reformers' has been the shortage of professional managers in the factories. For example, in a recent interview with Radio Azadi Massood Behnood complained about the non-professionalism of managers and gives this as one of the reasons for the failure of reforms.

Getting the wheels of industry into motion goes together with employing workers at a higher and more regular basis. Together with employment, gradually the uncertainty and insecurity that workers have about jobs (the fear of losing their job) will diminish and this process will in turn boost workers' self-confidence. But this process will not end here. Due to reasons like the Iran-Iraq war, repression, wrong economic policies and incompetence of the regime's leaders (especially the absolutist faction) Iran's economy has fallen behind the times. The newly established and modern capitalism will for many years have to make up for this backwardness. It will be forced to increase the intensity of labour. New and advanced machinery, educated managers who are knowledgeable about management issues, the

rational economic planning, will increase the intensity of labour among workers and, as a result, the workers will be condemned to endure super-exploitation. Super-exploitation together with self-confidence among workers will mark a new stage in workers' struggles.

For the first time in over two decades of capitalist rule, the contradictions between 'labour' and 'capital' will appear as more noticeable and precise than before. Also, the modus operandi, both of the capitalists and workers will change. If in the past the imposition of a mediaeval Labour Code, together with the naked repression of workers, was part of the regime's policy; in the next period a new Labour Code that, on the face of it is written in accord with international laws and regulations, will be in force. In other words, if in the previous period they used an iron fist, then in the next period, they will use an iron fist in a velvet glove to smash workers' struggles.

The capitalists' method for implementing this super-exploitation is to create bodies and laws that are acceptable to the international banks and capitalist governments of the world. Of course, the preparation for creating such a process has been going on for a number of years. For example, the " restructuring of the Labour House" (according to Hassan Sadeghi); the re-activation of the Labour House regarding labour issues and raising the profiles of the Islamic Labour Party and the High General Commission of Islamic Labour Councils; adopting the central slogans of the workers; posing and explaining the necessity of "workers' strikes" in *Kar-o Kargar* [meaning *Work and Worker*, is the daily paper of the Labour House]; and so on. All these show the reformers' preparations for laying the groundwork for a period of intimidation and exploitation of workers within the context of a modern capitalist system.

If we reflect on the writings of the reformers, the underlying reason why the supporters of modern capitalism are putting forward labour issues becomes clear. For example, Jafar Kamboozia, the MP for Zabol, said in an interview that strikes would be acceptable by the system on the condition that they are "the last resort of the workers and no harm comes to the system or economy of the country" ("The right to strike is the workers' right", *Kar-o Kargar*, 12 Dey 1380 [2 January 2002]). Also, Dr Nateghpoor, sociologist and member of the science commission of Tehran University, said: "Although workers' strikes can be an effective way of taking action, but we must take care that this method must usually have legal support. Because in a society where workers' strikes are thought of as a way of confronting the government and the political structure of the country, it is obvious that this action will go hand-in-hand with complications and negative results for workers." ("Workers' strikes: A necessary and a possibility", *Kar-o Kargar*, 11 Dey [1 January 2002]). Or, Hassan Taghizadeh, the head of the High Commission of Islamic Labour Councils, who describes strikes as a necessity but says: "Strike must be remote from political tendencies" ("Strikes, the undeniable right of workers", *Kar-o Kargar*, 11 Dey).

In other words, the supporters of the bourgeoisie within the labour movement accept workers' strikes on the condition that they are devoid of their real content. Even in European capitalist countries there is never talk of having strikes that do not harm the economy. The ideologues of the regime must explain how the workers can stop work and go on strike, and, at the same time, not damage the economy? Contrary to the ideologues, strikes are an economic and a political weapon in the hands of workers, which are used for getting out of the confines of laws imposed by the capitalist government. If strikes are supposed to take place within the framework of capitalist laws and with the permission of the people who are exploiting the workers, then we can no

longer called them 'strikes'! Workers' strikes are for gaining rights that the capitalists do not want to bear. Strikes are a weapon that the workers have for demonstrating their power.

Even during a short strike the workers set up a strike committee. Having a strike committee is itself an organisational measure. A strike committee is the first seed of workers' power against the power of the capitalists. The success or defeat of a strike shows the existence or absence of workers' power in society. The continuation of a strike and its general extension can pose the question of dual power (workers' or capitalists') in society. Strikes can change the balance of power in favour of workers at a general level. It can pose the question of workers' power and the ousting of bourgeois power. So it is obvious that the debate about "strikes within the legal framework of the government" of the bourgeoisie is a totally false point of view.

That is why the workers must formulate their own rules on organisational issues. If it would be impossible to draw up these rules then it would also be impossible for independent workers' organisations to exist. Independent workers' organisations cannot be formed together or side-by-side with state institutions, because all these bodies are built by the bourgeois state and are tools for intimidating and slowing down the process of rebuilding the labour movement. Heading these state bodies is the Labour House. To create the independent workers' organisations all state bodies must become powerless.

Deviations within the workers' opposition

One of the deviant theories is based on the belief that the Labour House can be reformed and improved, and that the role of the vanguard workers is to be active within this institution to make it more radical. One of the theorists of this deviant tendency is

Yadollah Khosravi (the former secretary of the oil refinery workers' union also known as Khosroshahi among exiles). In his recent interview with *Andishe-ye Jame-e* magazine (*Society's Thought*, published in Iran) Khosravi expresses his views on the Labour House in the following way. The interviewer asks Yadollah Khosravi's opinion on the Labour House, based on the assumption that some of the labour-activist critics, call the Labour House a "state" institution and not an independent one. Yadollah Khosravi replies that one of the faults of the Labour House is that it is like a political party. Because in its constitution issues like: "Support for the struggle of dispossessed peoples of the world in their struggle for their rights and freedom" and the "struggle against ... racism and Zionism ..." has been posed. He therefore believes that the Labour House is an organisation like a political party, not an independent workers' organisation, and "we cannot call it a labour organisation". And also that in the Labour House's constitution the "dividing line between political and labour organisations has been made blurred" (it would be better if Yadollah Khosravi shows that under the present conditions in Iran how the workers' labour issues can be separated from their political problems - even in European countries labour unions also deal with political issues). The other fault he finds is that the leaders of the Labour House are engineers and not workers (*Andishe-ye Jame-e*, No. 23, Ordibehesht 1381 [April-May 2002], p.40). And at the end of his interview he quotes approvingly the position of Hassan Sadeghi, the head of the Islamic Labour Councils: "The organisation rebuilding of the Labour House is an urgent matter." (ibid, p 41). He then deals with explaining the meaning of independent workers' organisations and says: Workers' economic independent organisations that include all workers ... regardless of the faith, colour of skin, sex, political affiliation of the individual and so on. This organisation takes in all workers who ... are employed in

the work environment and does not have a no entry sign (ibid, p.42).

Therefore, Yadollah Khosravi does not in principle have an objection to the Labour House being a state institution and only wants to reform or "organisationally rebuild" it. The logic of his discussion points to removing political issues from the Labour House's constitution and that workers, instead of engineers, should take charge then there is no objection to workers intervening and participating in such a body. Obviously this is a view that from the root wants to compromise with the capitalist state.

Firstly, this experienced worker (the former secretary of the oil refinery workers' union), and, on the face of it someone who is against the capitalist state, after all these years 'activity' in the labour movement still does not understand the meaning of the capitalist state. He confuses the meaning of the 'state'. On the one hand, he says that "independent workers' organisations must be independent from the state and political parties" (ibid, p.42), and, on the other, he wants to reform the Labour House. He, like the other trends within the international labour movement who seek compromise, thinks of the state as only a form of state (the legislature, the executive and the judiciary). Whereas from the point of view of anti-capitalist forces the concept of the state goes beyond these. The capitalist state includes not only the capitalist government, parliament, the repressive apparatus and the armed forces; it also includes the propaganda machinery, mosques, the mass media, educational centres and also its labour and political institutions. All of these institutions together ensure the exploitation of the working class. Therefore, a body called Labour House is also part of the deception and repression of the workers and has been planned for this purpose. We only need to look at the claims of the Labour House to prove this: "The

distance and closeness of the Labour House with government or their decisions is tied with the way of looking at workers' interests. At no time has total enmity ... been dominant " (This is the house of all workers, Labour House Public Relations, *Andishe-ye Jame-e*, No. 23, p. 76 - emphasis added). It is obvious that the concept of independence from the state must include independence from the Labour House. That is because the two are linked together.

Secondly, the rebuilding of a modern capitalist system and the establishment of pro-state 'reformers' also needs organisations with the working class. Labour House, the High Commission of the Islamic Labour Councils and the Islamic Labour Party have all been designed for the strengthening of the capitalist system in a new form. Therefore labour-political struggles of workers for forming independent labour organisations cannot be possible without struggles against these organisations. The Labour House is a tool in the hands of capitalism for the crushing and suppression of workers. There can be no truce between the independent workers' organisations and the Labour House. One is the opposite of the other.

Thirdly, Yadollah Khosravi thinks that the capitalist state is capable of have supporters of the capitalist system among the workers. He says that independent workers' organisations do not have a 'no entry' sign for any workers. Clearly there can be no bar on the entry of workers into independent workers' organisations. But what is to become of workers who work in a factory, are from working class families and yet, at the same time, are part of the capitalist state? Workers who today head bodies like the Islamic Labour Party or the Labour House are the same people who represent the capitalists within the working class and are preparing the implementation of superexploitation. Was it not the case that during the Shah's reign, as Yadollah Khosravi himself

says, a 'workers organisation' made of SAVAK agents-workers existed? (ibid, p.40.) Obviously independent workers' organisations, which are supposed to be independent of the state, must also be independent of all workers' elements that support the capitalist state. There is no "no entry' sign" outside independent workers' organisations, except for the supporters of capital and the supporter of the capitalist system. It is clear that Yadollah Khosravi's motive for posing the slogan of "there is no no entry sign" within the workers' movement is for opening the door of independent organisations to the activists of the Labour House. And through this to give a nod and a wink to the modern capitalist regime of the future.

Those people in the workers' left opposition who today want to create a bridge between the workers' vanguard and the Labour House are not only not doing a service to the independent workers' movement, but are themselves becoming a barrier in front of the workers' movement. The struggle against the 'reformers' of the capitalist state is inseparable from exposing and isolating the supporters of co-ordination with state bodies.

The vanguard workers and the whole of the working class (and all of society) demand reforms in the sense that they of gain their democratic rights and a free atmosphere for bargaining and defence of labour and political rights. But, the aim of the capitalist state from 'reforms' is different from the workers' aim of reforms. These two types of 'reforms' will confront each other in the future.

11 July 2002

Open letter to President Hugo Chavez from Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League

**Mr Hugo Rafael Chavez Frias,
President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**

Dear Mr President,

In November 2004, at the time of your fourth official visit to Iran, a number of Iranian labour activists wrote to you (a copy of the letter is enclosed) expressing their concern about how the Iranian regime was using your name and popularity among the Latin American masses, and progressive and anti-globalisation activists throughout the world, to falsely present a similarly positive image for itself.

Your Excellency, they highlighted the fundamental differences between the Bolivarian government, which enjoys popular support and strives to eliminate many longstanding economic and social problems in Venezuela, and a regime which came to power by crushing the mass movement that had mobilised millions of

people against poverty and against the Shah's CIA-installed dictatorship.

Two governments with opposite programmes

In the 20 months since their letter the economic, social and political situation in Venezuela and Iran have developed in opposite directions. Although both countries have seen a similarly significant boost to their oil (and gas) revenues the contrast between the ways in which this extra money has been used by the two governments could not be more marked: their economic policies, social programmes and political priorities are diametrical opposites.

On the one hand, in Venezuela, we have seen the nationalisation of an increasing number of companies, the free provision of healthcare, education and so on, and the policy of granting the masses, especially the workers and the poor, more rights in a new constitution. For workers these developments have meant giving them greater control over the way they work and the way they live. Most importantly, the expropriation of factories and the presidential encouragement of workers' control and participation have transformed the character of the workers' movement in Venezuela. It was not long ago that the corrupt, pro-boss and bureaucratic Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela had a monopoly over representing the workers of Venezuela. Today the CTV has become marginalised.

The Bolivarian movement and the policies of the government have brought about a huge shift in the balance of class forces in Venezuela. Not only has the government encouraged the Venezuelan workers to build the Union Nacional de los Trabajadores as an alternative to the CTV, but the workers have become involved in running and managing factories and other enterprises. The whole world knows that Your Excellency has

even drawn up a list of 1,149 closed-down factories and given their owners an ultimatum: re-open them under workers' control or the government will expropriate them!

In Iran, on the other hand, on top of the lack of many basic democratic rights affecting the vast majority of the population, the workers are also without *any* trade union rights. But this has not always been so: the overthrow of the Shah brought about many freedoms for workers including, in some cases, control over production and even distribution. Then, however, the Islamic hierarchy managed to hijack the movement's leadership by manoeuvres and stunts which appeared to be 'radical' or 'revolutionary'. Once they had assumed this leadership the mollahs then smashed the movement, killing thousands of workers and pushing the workers' movement back by several decades. Under this regime even the 'yellow' pro-boss unions that the Shah had tolerated became and remain illegal! Even a CTV-style trade union federation is illegal!

Today the workers have to tolerate poverty and severe conditions at work due to the absence of two main rights: the right to form their independent unions and the right to go on strike. The lack of these two rights not only means that they cannot present a united front to defend their basic rights and standard of living, but, when faced with attacks by the bosses and the regime's thugs, they are totally at the mercy of the authorities. Not only are they prevented from struggling as a class but they are also criminalised for it!

The result of this is that official (and underestimated) unemployment stands at 10.85 percent, with unemployment among youth (15-24 year-olds) standing at 22.35 percent (autumn 2005 figures). Even when workers are employed they are often not paid - in many cases for over a year. And those who get their wages face an impossible task in paying for the basic necessities

of life. For example, with the rent for a two-bedroom flat at \$422 a month, a civil servant on \$120 wages, or a teacher on \$180, or even a doctor on \$600 a month struggle to survive (2005 figures). It is no wonder that 90 percent of the population live below the poverty line!

Privatisation: the regime's solution

The regime's main 'answer' to all these economic problems is privatisation. But even though privatisation has been a key government policy for 14 years the state still owns over 70 percent of the economy. This is due to political instability and insecurity, diplomatic isolation, corruption and constitutional limitations. So far, therefore, most of the privatisations have involved selling companies to the relatives of the elite and 'charitable foundations' run by the same rich and powerful people.

Article 44 of the Islamic Republic's Constitution states that the ownership and management of large companies like banks and financial institutions, large mines, the main industries, airlines, shipping companies, power generators and communications networks should be exclusively in the state's hands.

The way they dodged this in the crucial oil industry was to introduce the 'buy back' schemes a few years ago. To date foreign 'buy back' involvement in oil has brought in \$40 billion.

The key missing factor has been foreign direct investment. During the whole of the past 27 years just \$4 billion has been invested in Iran (in steel and mining). That is why on 3 July Ayatollah Ali Khameneii, the real leader of Iran, ordered the government to make preparations for selling 80 percent of shares in large state-owned enterprises to the private sector. In addition, the co-operatives' sector will be expanded and the extent of state intervention and investment in the Iranian economy is going to be

reduced. Khameneii's edict is aimed at further circumventing Article 44.

Since the state-owned companies are mostly unprofitable, and the regime's main way of improving the profitability of the companies is to sack many workers and to make the remaining workers toil harder for less money, it is clear that they hope to make Iran an attractive destination for foreign direct investment from American and European companies in this way.

The Iranian regime and imperialism

We believe that this government has no fundamental disagreements or contradictions with US imperialism. Looking at the ups and downs of the Tehran-Washington relationship we see that the trend points to normalisation of most links within a few years. Indeed, the Iran regime has already been helping the Americans in their military invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq - and propping up the puppet regimes of Karzai and Maliki through significant trade, security and other deals. Despite the rhetoric and posturing, therefore, this is a regime that is heading towards re-establishing old links with the US and letting in American trade and investment.

The inescapable logic behind this rapprochement with the United States has been the deteriorating state of the Iranian economy and its precarious long-term prospects. It therefore comes as no surprise that in May 2003 the regime made overtures to US imperialism to resolve all outstanding issues, including nuclear facilities and terrorism. It did, after all, make the now infamous Iran-Contra deal with the Reagan government while calling America "the Great Satan"!

A turn towards imperialism and renewed repression

Once the aims of the 'reformist' wing of the regime were achieved - i.e., channelling and neutralising internal dissent and breaking the government's diplomatic and trade isolation - the ruling elite installed a new nominal head of state, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, through a completely undemocratic and bogus 'election' process. The main task of Dr Ahmadinejad's cabinet is to consolidate the regime's weakening social base prior to further privatisation, liberalisation, de-regulation and cuts in various social benefits and subsidies. These policies will prepare the way for closer economic relations with US imperialism and for much needed investment and technology from American companies - and help the survival of the regime for a few more years.

In order to be able to contain and suppress the inevitable social protests that these neo-liberal and pro-imperialist policies will cause, however, the regime needs to use its social base in a similar way to the time of its inception during the early 1980s. In addition to these policies, therefore, it has adopted schemes like the \$1.3 billion Reza Love Fund (financial help with the costs of getting married) to shore up support in its own base. This layer of society will then be more effective in repressing the struggles which manifest the genuine aspirations of women, the youth, national minorities and, most important of all, workers.

The selection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad - the former mayor of Tehran, whom you know well from when you unveiled a statue of Simon Bolivar in the capital - represents a turn by the regime towards the final resolution of its differences with imperialism, particularly US imperialism. Despite all the 'defiant' and 'anti-imperialist' gestures and rhetoric the regime is preparing to resolve its outstanding differences with the Americans.

They want to turn it into a place like Colombia, where thousands of trade unionists have been killed so that multi-national

companies can exploit the workers and the natural resources without any hindrance.

Economic hardship and repression against workers

At the same time as improvement in diplomatic relations with most countries we have witnessed a big disaster in domestic policy. There has therefore been a massive growth in social movements in Iran. The great upsurge in workers' struggles during the past two or three years has been caused by the ever deteriorating economic and social situation and the fact that the workers have no official or even legal bodies or procedures for solving these problems. The coupling of the ever deteriorating economic situation with the lack of rights in defending oneself has meant that the masses, especially the workers, have had to become much bolder and the regime's social base has also become smaller and more demoralised.

It is over nine years ago that independent workers' organisations that had continued their clandestine struggle through the Iran-Iraq war began to voice their grievances publicly. Starting with open letters to Mr Khatami on May Day 1997, they became emboldened in their struggles and began to close roads, occupy factories and demand taking over the control of factories. Some, like the workers of Jamco and Shadanpoor textiles, who were merely demanding the payment of their unpaid wages (!), were gunned down and killed in front of parliament. Others, like the copper workers of Khatoonabad, were killed when they protested against lay-offs.

Yet despite these brutal measures we have seen hundreds of strikes and protests. The most important of these has been the struggle of the bus drivers and mechanics working for the Vahed Company in Tehran.

The Vahed workers' struggle for a trade union

Islamic regime and management have been harassing and intimidating the Vahed bus drivers and other workers for over 16 months. In March 2005, when activists tried to re-launch the trade union which had been disbanded during the repression of the 1980s, the company began firing them. Then on 9 May 2005 around 300 agents of the Labour House and the Islamic Labour Councils - two bodies that the Islamic regime uses to suppress genuine workers' organisations and trade unions - attacked a meeting of the Founding Committee of the Trade Union of the Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company. Aided by the security forces, they were able to break the door of the union's office, smash windows, tear up documents and books, and beat up around ten members of the Founding Committee.

Hassan Sadeghi, the Secretary of the Co-ordination Headquarters of the Islamic Labour Councils, and at least a further nine leaders of the Labour House and the Islamic Labour Councils, led this attack. The assailants in particular targeted Mansour Ossanlou, the leader of the union. While Sadeghi held Ossanlou's hand behind his back, another regime-appointed 'labour leader' tried to cut out his tongue. Following hospital treatment it was Mr Ossanlou who was taken into custody for questioning - not the attackers!

Then a few weeks later, these attackers attended the 93rd Session of the International Labour Council in Geneva! On 14 June 2005 the conference reviewed the labour situation in Iran with Sadeghi and another of the attackers pretending to be genuine workers' representatives and 'experts'! By late July the number of fired workers had reached seventeen. These were all leaders and members who had been involved in organising the first general assembly of the Vahed trade union on 3 June 2005 - when 8000 of the 17000 workers took part in debates and elections.

The regime gradually, and under much pressure from the Vahed workers, workers in other industries and international organisations, released these leaders and activists. Nevertheless, the persecution of the Vahed trade unionists continued at a lower level until 22 December. At 6am on that day, Information Ministry personnel searched the home of Mr Ossanlou and arrested him and several members of the Steering Committee of the union. This was a move calculated to make them feel isolated - as international support during the Christmas break would have been difficult to mobilise.

But the Vahed workers were not going to be cowed by the bosses. Around 3000 of them went on strike on 25 December 2005. The regime's response was to freeze the trade unionists' bank accounts, block wage payments and put together dossiers full of trumped up charges. It also used Dr Ghalibaf, the new mayor of Tehran, to sweet talk the workers into ending their strike. Ghalibaf told them stories about being from a humble background and that his father had been a worker and so on. But all his promises about the underlying problems of the workers turned out to be empty ones.

The workers then announced that they will go back on strike on 28 January, demanding that Mr Ossanlou is released and their union recognised. This time the regime's security forces attacked their homes the night before the strike and beat and took into custody members of their families. (A number of the workers' wives and daughters were held for a number of days.)

On the day of the strike the regime mobilised the police, riot police, plain clothes security officers and various paramilitary groups. They tried, through beatings and violence, to force the drivers back to work. They then arrested between 700 and 1300

workers, and many students and other supporters of the strike. The jailed workers resisted: at one stage over 500 were on hunger strike in Evin prison. Those still free announced that they would go on strike on Friday 3 February. Their demands were:

- The release of Mr Ossanlou and other leaders
- Signing a collective agreement
- Union recognition
- Better pay and conditions.

The solidarity and support of the international labour movement was crucial in bringing about the release of many of the Vahed workers. The Iranian labour movement stands at a crossroad and the victory of the Vahed workers will open the way for union recognition, genuine and representative labour organisations, and better pay and conditions for millions of workers.

In contrast to these negative developments in Iran we have the clear and unequivocally pro-working class moves in Venezuela. Today the workers of Iran do not even have a corrupt and pro-boss trade union confederation like the infamous CTV in Venezuela! All they have are the Labour House and the Islamic Labour Councils that attack them.

Questions to ask your hosts

Your Excellency, although we fully appreciate your government's achievements in domestic policy, and your encouragement of left-wing governments and social movements, we must, as a duty to the Venezuelan workers as much as Iranian workers, question a single aspect of your foreign policy. To us it is possible for the Venezuelan government to have close diplomatic and trade relations with the Iranian government without giving it political support - particularly where domestic policy is concerned. Above all, endorsing its labour policy is in complete contradiction

Your Excellency, on the basis of the above points, we believe that your government, and in particular the office of the President, should be cautious in its dealings with this particular government. Our reservations regarding your relations with this regime rest on our analysis of the long-term interests of the Iranian and Venezuelan peoples. When Iranian workers, youth, women and national minorities see someone of your standing having such close relations with individuals like Dr Ahmadinejad and other members of the regime's elite, they become disillusioned with your social model. They see this as your endorsement of the regime and dismissal of their aspirations for freedom and a decent standard of living.

During your recent visit to Belarus you are reported to have said: "We do not want to be deceived or exploited by anyone. We must defend the interests of the individual and not the hegemonic interests of the capitalists, wherever they may be, in Europe or Latin America." Your Excellency, the workers of Iran have for the past 27 years been deceived and exploited by a new clique of capitalists traditionally tied to the mosque and the bazaar. The workers try to defend their livelihoods against the capitalists and their well-armed state. The Venezuelan workers and poor masses are their natural allies in this struggle. We hope that you, Your Excellency, will uphold the interests of Venezuelan and Iranian workers by questioning your host about Vahed, Iran Khodro, and the countless other struggles and the absence of basic rights, like the right to strike, the right to form independent trade unions, the right to elect genuine representatives, and many others.

We therefore urge you to raise these issues with your hosts. For example:

- Why has Mansour Ossanlou, the Vahed bus workers' leader, been jailed for over seven months - often in solitary confinement?

- Why did activists of the pro-regime Labour House and Islamic Labour Councils smash the office of the Vahed trade union and assault its leaders?
- Why did they try to cut our Mr Ossanlou's tongue?
- Why is Mr Ossanlou denied medical treatment that he needs due to the above attack?
- Why, only a few days ago, were three leaders of the Vahed workers arrested when they went to meet the Deputy Labour Minister?

Your Excellency, even Jack Straw, the former Foreign Secretary of imperialist Britain, said that he had "raised" the issue of human rights with the Iranian regime's leaders while meeting them in Tehran. We therefore expect much more than a mention about labour rights from a leader who has such a following in the anti-imperialist and anti-globalisation movements.

Your continuing closeness to the regime's leaders will eventually make the Iranian masses turn their back on the great lessons of the revolutionary process in Venezuela. Winning the hearts and minds of the masses in Iran and similar countries is the best long-term solution to breaking Washington's stranglehold on Latin America. Despite some similarities, and the current difficulties with imperialism, the Islamic Republic of Iran is a regime that is fundamentally different from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. We therefore hope that you will turn down the First Class Medal of the Islamic Republic of Iran that Dr Ahmadinejad will be offering you and stand with the workers of Iran.

Yours respectfully,

Morad Shirin and Maziar Razi

Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League

28 July 2006

The end of 'reformism', what now?

Maziar Razi

On Sunday 2 March 2003, after the majority of votes in the local elections in Iran's cities, towns and villages, had been counted in most places, it became clear that only about 39 percent of the electorate took part in the elections. In Tehran just 12 percent of those eligible to vote took part.

It is obvious that this is the lowest level of participation of the Iranian people in various elections in recent years, especially since 1997 when according to the regime Mohammad Khatami was elected as President with more than 70 percent of the votes cast. Mohammad Reza Khatami, the General Secretary of the Islamic Iran Participation Front and the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, in a speech in Parliament on the level of participation by the people, said: "The main message of these elections is that we became faced with a significant reduction in people's participation in the cities." He went on to say: "We have to contemplate and think about the different problems that exist and

try to understand why 25 million people did not take part in the elections."

"Understanding" the reason why the people did not take part in the elections is very clear. Only naive people, or those with a motive, are incapable of understanding this process. The reason is that in previous elections, to oppose the 'absolutists', the toiling people of Iran turned to the 'reformers' and chose 'the lesser evil'. But gradually their trust in 'the lesser evil' has also disappeared. This is because the people of Iran have in practice learnt that not only were the 'promises' of this faction baseless and empty; but that this group, even with their differences, are themselves also part of the ruling elite. They, like the other faction, are also in favour of repression and intimidation. The people have therefore in practice learnt that electing 'the lesser evil' means preparing the ground for it to become a 'greater evil'. In the past they voted for the enemy of their enemies, but this time they boycotted both enemies.

The exploited and oppressed masses of Iran have been kept waiting by the 'reformers'. On the one hand, after six years of 'thirsting' for improvements in the situation of the most basic democratic rights and freedoms, they have witnessed the steady growth in their distance from, and then disappearance of, the 'mirage' of political 'reforms', and have now abandoned this 'solution'. On the other hand, every indicator of economic and social problems - unemployment, inflation, unpaid wages, child labour, street children, prostitution and so on - has become much deeper and more widely spread than six years ago. The masses feel that the long-running puppet show of 'elections' and 'clashes' between 'reformers' and 'absolutists' is merely aimed at keeping them busy so that the capitalists, whether 'modern' or 'traditional', can go on robbing and making profits. At the end of this six-year

process the masses have become poorer and the capitalists have become richer!

But what has still not been clarified is whether the 'reformers' have any policies that can take them further than these elections. In fact, through behind the scenes negotiations with western capitalist states, this faction is preparing the ground for a period of super-exploitation of the people, under the guise of 'democracy' and 'reforms'. This faction will not stop at any measure that deceives the people so that the interests of native and western capitalists can be preserved. They are preparing a 'soft' way of repressing the people of Iran.

The result of these elections have also shown that analyses and theories that have justified support for the 'reformers', under the guise of defending 'democracy' and the 'democratic revolution', are totally baseless.

The people's non-participation is the beginning of preparations for the creation of an alternative government of a fundamentally different type. A government that aims to get rid of private property and exploitation. The struggle for forming independent organisations of workers, students and women, (that are independent from the state and all political parties) can lay the groundwork for preparing the replacement of the whole system. The forming of these organisations is tied to the creation of a revolutionary vanguard party.

The authoritarians are becoming ‘reformers’!

Maziar Razi

On the eve of the seventh Islamic parliamentary election in Iran, developments within the ruling elite have taken place which have drawn the attention of the European capitalist media. It appears that all the western observers find these developments as favourable and are satisfied with them. The government’s capitulation in signing the additional protocol to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty was undertaken by an ‘unknown’ and ‘unofficial’ person named Seyyed Hassan Rohani, the Secretary of the National Security High Council (and possibly the next president!). His trips to France and meeting with Jacques Chirac, and a series of negotiations with western governments and promises about opening Iran’s doors to international capitalists; giving a nod to the Israeli government, have finally opened the way for a permanent ‘peace’ of the European governments and America with the Islamic Republic. Hassan Rohani has been seen as a ‘trouble-shooter’ and the ‘torch-bearer of the realistic conservatives’ (*Financial Times*, 21 January 2004), and as a ‘trustworthy’ person and the official representative of Khameneii

and the 'undeclared foreign minister' (*The Economist*, 17-23 January 2004). After that Prince Charles's visit to Iran, which was approved by the British government, put the stamp of approval on the policies of the Iranian regime's right-wingers.

At the same time as these preparations, the Guardians' Council boldly rejected the suitability of the most important 'reformist' elements from participating in these elections. 'Protests' and the sit-in by over 80 members of parliament has been like trying to resuscitate someone who drowned a long time ago! The hatred and disgust of the people, who four years ago voted for these very 'representatives', was such that not even one protest took place in their support. The appeals made by the 'reformers' for support were left unanswered even by their own supporters. This was in sharp contrast to some 'researchers' who still wait in the hope that the 'reformers' might bring about some 'new' development for organising a 'democratic revolution'! The 'reformers' have been tossed aside. Even the imperialist governments have given up hope on the 'reformers'.

In fact the 'authoritarians' have announced to the imperialist governments that not only do the 'reformers' have no political power but that they have no mass support either. And if the western governments need any 'reforms' of a capitalist type, then the 'authoritarians' themselves can become 'reformers'.

The turn of the 'authoritarians' in fact took place after the occupation of Iraq by the American government. This turn is headed by former president Rafsanjani. In its first issue after the occupation of Iraq, *Rahbord*, a periodical which is published by the Strategic Studies Centre, a body which is tied to the Iranian regime's Expediency Council, published a 24 page interview with Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the chairman of this Council. In the interview Rafsanjani deals with the role of the Expediency

Council in resolving difficulties between Iran and America. He said that “as Muslims we have no problem with resolving any of the foreign issues facing us ... We have a tenet in Islam which is the precedence of the expediency of power over the expediency of weakness ... In principal, the Assembly Experts has been created on the basis of this need.” He referred to Khomeini’s view which specified that one can even stop prayers and fasting if it is for the expediency of the system, and added that: “To endanger our country and imagine that we are acting in an Islamic way is not Islamic.” In this interview he claimed that the foreign policy apparatus of Iran, because of the inexperience of its officials, had in many cases missed opportunities, but now it has reached a state under which it appreciates the world’s political issues and can assess and analyse them!

Following on from these claims, the new course of the right-wing clique took place, and it is aimed at attracting the trust of western governments. It is obvious that for the imperialist governments to invest in Iran, to loot the oil resources, and to use the labour power of Iran, it makes no difference which of the ruling cliques is in power - so long as their interests are guaranteed.

Under these conditions the workers’ movement of Iran is entering a new stage in its political life. Creating a ‘modern’ capitalist system that is tied to the policies of the world banks and the world capitalist system is on Iranian capitalism’s agenda. This process will mean the continuation of the flow of foreign capital into Iran. In the next period international capitalism, by importing spare parts, training technicians and technocrats, professional managers, will enter Iran’s ‘virgin’ economic scene.

Getting the wheels of industry into motion goes together with employing workers at a higher and more regular basis. Together with employment, gradually the uncertainty and insecurity that

workers have about jobs (the fear of losing their job) will diminish and this process will in turn boost workers' self-confidence. But this process will not end here. The newly established and modern capitalism, which for many years has stayed backward due to reasons like the Iran-Iraq war, repression, wrong economic policies and incompetence of the regime's leaders, will be forced to increase the intensity of labour to make up time. New and advanced machinery, educated managers who are knowledgeable about management issues, rational economic planning, will increase the intensity of labour among workers and, as a result, the workers will be condemned to endure super-exploitation. Super-exploitation together with self-confidence among workers will mark a new stage in workers' struggles.

For the first time in over two decades of capitalist rule, the contradictions between 'labour' and 'capital' will appear as more noticeable and precise than before. Also, the modus operandi, both of the capitalists and workers will change. If in the past the imposition of a mediaeval Labour Code, together with the naked repression of workers, was part of the regime's policy; in the next period a new Labour Code that, on the face of it is written in accord with international laws and regulations, will be in force.

Obviously the workers of Iran have entered a new stage in the organisation of their struggles against capitalism. The central demand of workers is setting up independent workers' organisations. But independent workers' organisations are not formed spontaneously or by the International Labour Organisation. If that does happen, then they will stand opposed to the central demands of the workers (the right to strike, workers' control, and a sliding scale of wages rising in line with inflation and so on). Independent workers' organisations can only be set up by the workers themselves. To prepare for such organisations having self-confidence and finding the means for self-

organisation are the main issue. This cannot be achieved unless there is active participation by workers in the political scene.

During the election period probably a large section of the mass of toilers and the youth will boycott these undemocratic elections. But just 'boycotting' the elections will not help advance the struggles of the workers and the youth. The boycott of the elections must take place in an active way and around demands which alter the balance of forces in favour of the toilers and creates self-confidence among workers. Drafting a workers' action programme based on the democratic, trade and transitional demands of the workers is on the order of the day. The workers and the youth must at the same time introduce their own representatives to society, and, around these individuals, present the workers' action programme to society. The active boycott of the elections means taking part in anti-capitalist struggles with the alternatives of the workers' action programme.

15 February 2004

A short history of Iranian Trotskyism

The founders of Iranian Trotskyism became active in Britain in the late 1960s. In opposition to Stalinism, Maoism and the guerrillaist tendencies, they established an Iranian Commission within the USFI (United Secretariat of the Fourth International) and based their activity on the Transitional Programme and the first four congresses of the Comintern. They produced a theoretical and political journal called *Kand-o Kav*.

During the Iranian Revolution of 1979, there was a unity congress of the Iranian supporters of USFI in Europe and the

supporters of the American Socialist Workers' Party (SWP). In early 1979 the Iranian Socialist Workers' Party (*Hezb-e Kargaran-e Socialist* - HKS) was launched. Within a few months, however, the SWP tendency (led by Babak Zahraie), began to have illusions in the Iranian bourgeois-clerical regime of Khomeini. The group from Europe were very critical of the USFI for the de facto support of a group that had developed illusions in the Khomeini regime. A split took place and the Babak Zahraie group continued its class-collaborationist activities under the name of the Revolutionary Workers Party (*Hezb-e Kargaran-e Enghelabi* - HKE) until they liquidated themselves a few years later.

After 1983 some HKS members were forced into exile and produced a [document](#) that was critical of the USFI's policy and formally left it. Up to 1990 they produced *Socialism va Enghelab* (Socialism and Revolution), a theoretical journal. In 1991, [Maziar Razi](#), one of the founders of HKS and SE, together with a section of comrades, reorganised themselves and published a regular workers' paper which subsequently led to *Kargar-e Socialist* (Socialist Worker) and the formation of the Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League (IRSL).

In Summer of 2008 the IRSL members and supporters joined the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) after several years of close activities with each other.

Statement on the founding of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

By Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

Tuesday, 23 September 2008

Activists of the Iranian Revolutionary Socialists' League (in exile), the editorial board of *Militant* (in Iran) and the Workers' Action Committee (Iran) will from now on continue their activity on the basis of a joint *Tasks and Principles* document and *Workers' Action Programme* inside a single tendency called the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency (IRMT). In order to strengthen the IRMT they will end their activities inside the previous organisational structures.

The *Tasks and Principles* document, *Workers' Action Programme* and the present statement were adopted unanimously at the first conference of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency on 21-22 September.

Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency will begin its activities as the Iranian section of the International Marxist Tendency.

From now on *Militant* will be published as the journal of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency.

We invite all Iranian revolutionary Marxists to assist and join the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency in the task of making organised interventions in the labour, students' and other social movements, and ending the long period of scattering and dispersion among us.

The *Tasks and Principles* document and *Workers' Action Programme* will be published as the programme of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency.

Secretariat of Iranian Revolutionary Marxists' Tendency

22 September 2008