

The Shah has gone, the Bakhtiar government wobbles, and the Ayatollah Khomeiny, like a prophet, utters words of advice to his followers. But behind these personalities there lies an economic and social reality — a reality that explains the political instability of Iran today.

IRAN 1979

Can popular power win?

Despite rapid industrial development and a massive infusion of wealth (through oil), Iran remains industrially undeveloped. Most of the industry is concentrated in small areas, around Teheran, for instance. Most of the country is left behind. The power of multinationals in Iran means an industrial structure that is vulnerable to the whims of foreign businessmen and to the ups and downs of Western market forces. The towns are overcrowded; inflation is high (200% in three years according to the Government's own statisticians); incomes vary enormously; rents are astronomical; housing is abysmal, except for the wealthy; and corruption has become a disease, bringing enormous material benefits to those close to the Shah.

In these ways Iran is not untypical of many 'third world' countries that are economically tied to imperialism. And as in other countries, major changes in the nature of production — both in agriculture and in industry — have removed the class basis for the Shah's authoritarian monarchy. In a way the Shah brought about his own downfall by his very role in promoting the forces that have transformed Iran in recent years.

IRAN UNIQUE

Where Iran is very different from countries that have developed in similar ways in recent years is the combination of the above developments with other special factors.

First is the role that the Shah's regime has come to play as regional policeman for imperialism in the Middle East and as America's agent against 'Soviet expansionism'. This has enabled the Shah to obtain an enormous array of sophisticated weaponry (he spent nearly £5000 million on arms in 1977 alone).

All this, of course, could not prevent the overthrow of the Shah, but it does mean that the US government and its allies will do all they can to influence developments in Iran and, in particular, to prevent the victory of an anti-imperialist movement in Iran.

RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION

The second important feature of Iran is the religious opposition. The Iranian Shia Moslem sect developed as an opposition to Arab domination in Iran, and has almost always played an oppositional role. Led, since 1963, by Ayatollah Khomeiny it has become more radical in its opposition, and this largely explains its appeal to the mass of Iranians.

But there are progressive and reactionary elements which are bound to come more into conflict the more the religious leaders move from opposition to a position of power. On the one hand, Khomeiny talks of removing the basis of Iran's economic dependence on imperialism, of transforming production so that it serves the needs of the Iranian people and not the needs of the West. On the other hand, he talks of the constitution being based on the Koran — not as rigidly as in Saudi Arabia, but nevertheless insisting, for example, that women wear the chador (long shroud) to hide the

contours of their body.

Another indication of the divisions among the Moslems is the existence on the one hand, of vigilante forces who go around tearing up Marxist leaflets, tearing down wall posters and disrupting left meetings, and, on the other hand, Moslem militants who are very close to Marxism and who hold continuous and open discussions with the left.

But the opposition is far more than being a religious opposition, and Khomeiny may well find that the Koran is no longer so popular when it becomes a symbol of oppression rather than of opposition.

DUAL POWER?

The massive working class participation in the Iranian opposition since last September has been both spectacular and novel. It involves unskilled and semi-skilled factory workers, qualified technicians and engineers, white-collar workers at various levels and service workers. It was the main force leading to the Shah's removal, in that it hit imperialism's interests in Iran at their most vulnerable point. And it now appears to be leading to the most exciting development in Iran so far — the beginnings of forms of workers' councils and dual power.

So far, it seems, we have the first tentative steps towards organisations of the working class at shop floor level. Most of these are strike committees, and are very widespread. But some have developed further, holding daily meetings, electing delegates, reading and discussing strike bulletins from other strikes and leaflets from Left organisations, discussing how to develop the strike most usefully, and analysing the situation in Iran in general and their part in it.

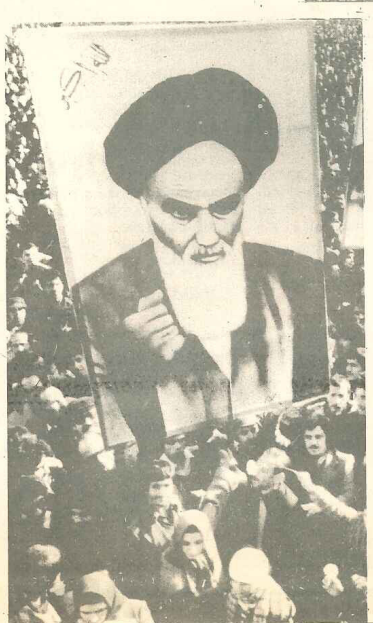
POPULAR POWER

In addition, as reported in BF in January, there are such instances as the people's occupation of Mashad, which indicate a developing pressure for popular rule, for people's control over their own lives. These instances of alternative power structures, moreover, are crucial. For the existence of alternative power poses a threat to any form of regime in Iran that ignores the wishes of the Iranian people — whether a military regime created with American backing, the current Bakhtiar government, or a regime that in some way incorporates religious leaders (including Khomeiny) together with members of the National Front (the main parliamentary opposition).

The left, however, is very weak. The state of the organisations on the left means that they can only play a marginal role at present. The left was forced underground and into exile in the years under the Shah, and has only been able to come into the open in the last few months. Moreover, while the religious forces have been in opposition, the left has been unable to take on anything like the leadership role.

But the strike wave has opened up possibilities, and it seems that elements of the left are playing a role in trying to develop strike committees into workers' councils. The experience of this will be important

THE STRUGGLE WORLDWIDE



both for the left and for the prospects of alternative power, and will no doubt put the left in a stronger position once it becomes the leading oppositional force.

THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE

What can we expect in the next few weeks or months in Iran? Certainly the Bakhtiar government cannot last long. Its purpose is to provide a temporary balance between the immediate demands of the opposition movement and the wishes of the far Right, which remains strong in the military hierarchy in particular. Thus the Shah is gone, but the change remains strictly formal and the regime's structure intact.

The far more difficult transition for the imperialists will be the transition to a new regime. Here Khomeiny must play a part, and it is still far from clear what his role will be and how the elements in the opposition will line up around him.

Meanwhile the strike wave continues on a massive scale, and the economy remains shattered. Iranian people have tasted a hint of democracy and are hungry for more. Iranian women, for their part, have begun to see something that is neither the Shah's fake liberalisation nor the false 'protection' of Islam, and they will never again be completely taken in by either.

It is too early to say what effect Khomeiny's arrival in Iran will have on the political situation. Already the Army's attempt to re-assert control has left many dead in the streets. Whatever compromise the different ruling groups stitch together, there is no doubt they will try to impose it on the backs of the Iranian masses, whose heroic struggle is far from over. The departure of the Shah is just one important step. We must make sure that it does not demobilise the militant solidarity that we have for the people of Iran. However much they have needed that solidarity in the past, they will be needing it even more in the days to come.

UNITY SPROUTS IN BRUSSELS

THE RULING CLASSES of Europe frequently meet together to discuss and coordinate their strategy — but this is not the case for the revolutionary left, which often has neither the resources, nor the desire to be part of a Europe-wide co-ordination.

That's why a conference held last month in Brussels is important. The aim of the conference, which brought together 15 left-wing groups, was to get agreement on an electoral platform for the elections to the European parliament.

Because of the many problems involved, of the groups signing the platform, only VS (Denmark) and Proletarian Democracy (Italy) have definitely decided to put up candidates. Sinn Fein is organising a boycott campaign, and in the other countries, meetings will be organised to publicise and win support for the campaign.

THE PLATFORM

The main points of the campaign are:

- * Opposition to the EEC and the European parliament.
- * For the rights of the individuals and against repression.
- * For the creation of jobs.
- * For the support of agricultural workers (badly hit by the reorganisation of the industry).

* For National Identity and self-determination, to include support for all those national minorities fighting for their independence.

* For Womens Liberation

* For the Democratic rights of soldiers. Against NATO and the unification of European military power

* For a people's culture in opposition to a consumer culture directed by monopoly 'Showbiz' capital.

* Against Nuclear Power

* For an education system based on the needs of working class kids.

SONG CONTEST

Amongst the meetings organised for the campaign, there will be a 'Counter-Eurovision' contest to take place in Brussels on March 30th — the same night as the Eurovision song

contest. Progressive musicians from all over Europe will be attending and a record is planned. As part of the campaign, Big Flame will be organising a meeting on unification — the English and the EEC experience.

An important point to come out of the meeting is the inability of groups from different countries and different political positions to work together. It is quite possible that during the campaign we will be able to build the basis for further co-operation. All the groups present recognise the need for international cooperation but are rightly wary of any international organisation composed from above.

Who Signed

Amongst the groups that have signed the platform: P.L.S. (Belgium), Democrazia Proletaria (Italy), K.B. (Germany), M.C., O.I.C., P.T.E. (Spain) O.U.T. (Portugal), P.S.U., O.C.T., (France), VS (Denmark) Provisional Sinn Fein (Ireland), Big Flame (England)