

What Has Happened to The Iranian Revolution? Has It Already Run Its Course Into Its Opposite, Counter-Revolution? Or Can It Be Saved and Deepened?

June 25, 1981

Dear Friends:

The removal of President Bani-Sadr, first from his post as Commander-in-Chief, and, within 12 short days, on June 22, from his post as President, accompanied in both cases by armed gangs shouting: "Death to Bani-Sadr! Death to the Second Shah!" has brought the counter-revolutionary elements to such dominance that one must ask: Have the contradictions in the Iranian Revolution that were present from the start reached a counter-revolutionary climax? What, indeed, has happened to the Iranian Revolution that was so massive, so courageous, so persistent in the long preparatory strikes that became a General Mass Political Strike and drove the Shah from power? Could the revolution have lasted no more than one and a half years? Is its bent to devour its own children—and in so insensitive a manner also its poets as to have arrested Saeed Soltanpour as he was being wed and shortly thereafter to have executed him—to go unimpeded? Even Stalin didn't act that rapidly and that deadly against the Russian poets. Has the revolution already run its whole course, straight into its opposite, counter-revolution?

Let's not rush to final judgment. The decisive question has not yet been answered: **What about the masses who achieved that great dual revolution against their own ruler and his foreign backer, U.S. imperialism which had put him in power and kept him there for a whole quarter of a century? Had the 1917 revolutionaries written off the Russian Revolution in August, the counter-revolutionary Month of Great Slander, there would have been no November Revolution.**(1) Let us first examine the objective and subjective situation more closely, not for any scholastic purposes, but to see whether there is a way to stave off the full thrust of the ongoing counter-revolution, and thus return to the 1979 revolution and its goals as well as its mass participation.

I. THE FALL OF BANI-SADR UNDER THE WHIP OF KHOMEINI AND HIS COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY ISLAMIC REPUBLIC PARTY

It is, of course, no small matter that, 17 short months after Bani-Sadr was elected as the first president ever of

Iran by no less than 75 percent of the population, he has been driven from office by Khomeini, whom Bani-Sadr had given shelter in Paris when the Ayatollah had been expelled from Iraq. After a very brief playing with the democratic nationalist intellectuals, by naming Bani-Sadr to be Commander-in-Chief, Khomeini raced to the most narrow theocratic, monopolistic, one-party state, with One Man Rule—his own, as he had always planned. The goons who call themselves Hezbollahi (Partisans of God), vigilante-like carrying out all orders of the IRP, immediately surrounded the offices of the President, shouting for his death, while chanting (as they indiscriminately wielded their weapons of terror): "The only leader is Ruhollah! The only party is the Party of God!" Having rhymed the Ayatollah Khomeini's name with no less than God himself, they believe they can, unburdened by any responsibilities, proceed to create havoc in an already chaotic state of the economy—40 percent fall in production, 40 percent rise in unemployment, run-away inflation, the Kurdish insurgency, and labor and peasant unrest.

Nor is it only a small truth that the demonstration for Bani-Sadr, the opposition to his ouster, the Left's wish to deepen the revolution, was attacked by an IRP-ordered demonstration, headed by the so-called "Revolutionary Guards" who did not limit themselves to wielding knives but proceeded to shoot indiscriminately. Forty lay dead; hundreds were wounded; and just over the week-end alone 40 others were executed for supporting Bani-Sadr. Without any shame whatever, the handing judge, Khalkhali, was shouting: "We will show them we are men of war and will dig their graves in the streets." The true martyrs, however, were the Mujahadeen, who were certainly more active and for a longer period of time in the revolutionary preparation against the Shah than was the late-comer, Beheshti, the Chief Justice, and many of his cohorts who were accusing Bani-Sadr of being "a second Shah."

Bani-Sadr isn't any "second Shah"; Khomeini is. And so is the IRP, waiting for the 81-year-old Ayahtollah to die so that its leadership can take his place and complete the counter-revolution.

From the very day that Bani-Sadr had been democratically, overwhelmingly elected, the IRP began plotting to make the post of President powerless by turning

to their clandestine mosque activity as well as their open work now that they already had plenty of power, to make sure that the next election—for the parliament was one they would win. This was followed up by many other usurpations of power to which we'll turn directly after we examine what it is that Bani-Sadr did after he received that overwhelming vote of mass confidence. Did he follow through with the mass activities, be it for democracy, for workers' control of production, for extending the shoras? Did he elicit from them how they wished to concretize, that is, to maintain power in their own hands? Did he pay attention to the innumerable publications and Left groups—all sorts of independent Marxists, Marxist-Humanists, the Tudeh, the Trotskyists? What, exactly, did he do for the Women's Liberation Movement that he supposedly favored? 2 What about the intense discussions and activity of deepening the revolution—not merely against the 52 second-level hostages in the American Embassy, but the genuine anti-imperialists and anti-native capitalists?

Therein—and not in what both the bourgeois, Communist and Trotskyist press now talk about: failure to build "a party structure"—lies the beginning of the end of the petty bourgeois, revolutionary intellectual, who does want more democracy, more freedom, but who has no total philosophy of liberation. Bani-Sadr couldn't have taken **organizational responsibility** for a philosophy of liberation he did not have. He, himself, was both bourgeois and totally committed to Ayatollah Khomeini. Thus, though he didn't think the taking U.S. hostages (which after all was engineered by the "followers of the Imam" advised by the IRP) was the way to fight American imperialism, he bowed to what had been done behind his back, and most deliberately with a view to appear more militant, more Left, more anti-U.S.A. than he. Thus, while he did nothing to encourage the new decentralized forms of self-rule of the masses, the IRP did everything to build up its single-party rule. Thus he even followed Khomeini and the IRP as they moved full blast against the revolutionary elements in the University, especially its bookstalls of Marxist literature.

The IRP, on the other hand, never stopped moving in a most reactionary way to what they called "pure" Islam, as witness the most barbaric, strait-jacket type of law, the "Vengeance Act."(3) Allegedly it is rooted in the Koran. It most assuredly is not accepted by any Arab nation or Sunni believers or, for that matter, strictly Persian Shi'ites. The act metes out punishment for all "crimes", sexual as well as political, with but two male witnesses needed to testify. Executions follow immediately. No wonder that the handing judge Khalkhali was so highly rated by "the Party" that he was even permitted to indulge in the goriest of all spectacles—bringing the corpses of the U.S. soldiers from the desert where President Carter had sent them to die, for a public dis-

play.

What never stopped was the plotting about the institutionalization of what they (Khomeini and the IRP) called the Islamic Republic, supposedly modeled on the 1906 Constitution that had emerged during the Iranian Revolution which had driven out their first Shah, established a Parliament, and written a Constitution. The present Constitution, however, not only bore no resemblance to the original Constitution, but established the so-called Office of the Religious Guide; more accurately it should have been called office of the Emperor, who not only, like Louis XIV in feudal times, had defined "L'état, c'est moi", but also claims a direct line to God. Thus, witness how Khomeini vetoed everything and anything he disagrees with, even those measures his own mullahs may have voted for, or didn't want, as they didn't want Bani-Sadr named Commander-in-Chief.

Those mullahs weren't innocents—**there are no innocents among rulers, with or without Khomeini.** They never gave up the intrigue to usurp all new institutions, beginning with the "Revolutionary Council" and control over the militant students who had been carefully educated in Iran with great hostility to the revolutionary students who had been educated abroad, and were "tainted by the West." What they actually meant was not "the West" but Marxism, which is not taught in any U.S. university and which the students learned independently.

The fifth institutionalization was the street gangs, as a vigilante order unto themselves. With the parliamentary majority in place, with the closing of all the newspapers from Bani-Sadr's to the Tudeh's Mardom and the Mujahadeen's Mujahid, the neo-fascistic party was ready to move against Bani-Sadr.

The 40 or more who were executed in a single week-end, were but the beginning of the blood-letting. But can we say that there it will end? The Left against whom all the blood-letting is perpetrated will not limit its revolutionary energy to showing its critical support for Bani-Sadr. Not only is illegal work every bit as critical as open opposition, but what is needed most of all, what is imperative to work out now, what has heretofore been disregarded though it is absolutely irreplaceable, is a philosophy of revolution, a philosophy of total liberation.

As I pointed out at the start of this Letter, had the Russian revolutionaries given up in August 1917; had they turned away not only from the counter-revolution but had an attitude of "a plague on both your houses" to the reformists as well; had they not used the period for working out fully **State and Revolution** as the ground for a new revolution, there would have been no November 1917. It is true that no Lenin is visible on the Iranian horizon. But the ideas of revolution and liberation, as well as the masses who fought for them, are

there. Let us see what can be done to transform the present reality.

II. A LOOK BACK INTO HISTORY AND FORWARD FROM THE PRESENT GLOBAL REALITY

Let's begin at the beginning, at the installation of a new power that has been so characteristic in Iran from the very first time they threw out the first Shah, at the turn of the century. It is the coalition of the clergy with genuine revolutionaries in throwing out a Shah who was tied to a foreign power—Russia, in the case of the 1906-1911 Revolution. This certainly distinguishes the Iranian clergy from priests who generally align with the reigning power. But, once a democratic Constitution was created, the clergy began burdening it with the type of amendments that restored most powers to the Shah once the foreign enemy was thrown out. That didn't keep the counter-revolution in Russia, which just crushed its own revolution, from returning to Iran and crushing that one.

The second chapter of that first revolution, as the second chapter of this era's 1979 Revolution, was begun by women liberationists. Indeed, in 1906 the Iranian women were the first in the world to establish a women's anjumen (soviet), and their main demand was for continuing with the democracy of the Majlis. Did Bani-Sadr's call for democracy mean as much? Not quite. Though he said he was for Women's Liberation, he not only kept quiet as Khomeini moved against the movement, but set up an alternative paper, *The Muslim Woman*, edited mainly by men!

With Iraq's invasion of Iran, the war naturally became his main preoccupation. But did this mean, as the IRP is insinuating, that Bani-Sadr was bringing back the hated military machine, which Khomeini and the IRP had never fully dismantled? Actions speak louder than words, and the fact is that the Army didn't follow Bani-Sadr and is now speaking out against him; in a word, they showed they know how to stick to the rulers that win.

How fantastic, then, that the abysmally opportunistic Trotskyists are so anxious to be "in" that they actually fabricated a "proletarian" ground for Bani-Sadr's ouster from his Army post:

Those workers who have returned from the war front have tended to blame Bani-Sadr for the situation in the army and for the lack of any decisive victories in the war. They are aware of Bani-Sadr's strong base of support among the hated army command (*Intercontinental Press*, June 22, 1981).

So strong that not a single army commander came to Bani-Sadr's defense. The Trotskyists must know the truth, but just like the Tudeh, they are so busy trying to work out a way to remain "legal" that all else takes a

subordinate position. All this appears in an article, "The Drive to Oust Bani-Sadr", which opposes the ouster, at least insofar as it means "repression", especially since they know very well the repression will be directed also against them, and that their paper was among the six that were immediately shut down. That isn't the only thing repression means to the clergy. Along with the thrust against the Left will no doubt come an attempt to work out a compromise with Iraq. Let us not forget that, just as soon as the mullahs saw that Bani-Sadr was not involved in the release of the hostages, they moved to do exactly that in quite capitulatory terms. And now that Bani-Sadr is not involved with the Army, they will try to work out a deal with Iraq.

As for the Fedayeen, some factions accepted "anti-imperialism" as much at face value as did the Tudeh, as if it means only anti-U.S. and not anti-Russia—which is equally imperialistic. Indeed, Russia is still hoping that the ideological void—opened up by the fact that revolutionaries have not been armed with Marx's own Humanist, anti-vulgar-communist, philosophy of liberation—will create room for Russia to enter the Iranian scene.

The Mujahadeen showed themselves to be most courageous and became deeply involved in the demonstrations against Bani-Sadr's ouster, but defending Bani-Sadr against Khomeini and the IRP must not mean uncritical support. Which is why I showed not only how ambivalent was Bani-Sadr's conception of democracy, of workers' control of production, of women's liberation, but that it couldn't have been otherwise once Islam came first and "socialism" came "later."

This is not the first time, historically speaking, that some theoreticians tried to dilute Marxism by a strange admixture with religion, be it U Nu's Buddhism or Ben Gurion's Zionism(4); whether it is Senghor's admixture of Christianity with Marxism which he calls African Socialism, or Polish Catholicism with a "new" socialism, or Islam's "Marxism." The truth is that the theocratic rush is for total power, single party rule, single ideology, or rather single religion which is on an even deeper false consciousness than is bourgeois ideology. This whole concept of a single Leader with veto power and a direct line to "God" is not even in the mainstream of Sunni Muslims, but the theocracy established by Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali, 14 centuries ago.(5) The strange admixture of religion and Marxism has not worked before and will certainly not work now. For that matter, it didn't work when Sartre tried to dilute that new continent of thought and revolution—Marx's Humanism—with Existentialism.

We must under no circumstances leave out of sight the global conflict, for this is not a mere Iranian or even Middle East problem. Nor is it just a question of U.S. imperialism. There is another nuclear titan, Russia. And

both of these fighting for a single world hegemony mean to have the last word. That is exactly what must not be permitted them. Thus, while Russia did not, with its invasion of Afghanistan, aim for the Gulf as the U.S. implied, Russia is certainly preparing itself to be at the ready for an opening into the region. The opening they would prefer is to gain power from within, and the Tudeh Party is not without successes as was shown when the commander of the so-called "Revolutionary Guards" showed his preference for that party by believing—or saying he believed—that Tudeh is a "follower of the line of the Imam."(6)

As for U.S. imperialism, it has never given up its hunger for the oil of that region.(7) How do you suppose it got so solid an enemy as Iraq (and at a time when Iraq certainly had not only the whole Arab world with it, but literally the whole world in its total opposition to Israel's pre-emptive, unilateral strike against its nuclear reactor) to work out with the UN-U.S. representative Kirkpatrick so mild a Resolution of condemnation of Israel that it didn't even ask for any concrete acts against Israel? I can't help but feel that the many double-crossing deals circulated in the UN now by the U.S. representative include one to arm Iraq in its war against Iran. After all, that's where U.S. imperialist sympathies lay in the first place when it couldn't help Iraq because Iran held the U.S. hostages. More important still, and of this there is no doubt, the Iranian Revolution so shook up the U.S. empire and its perspectives for the Gulf that even now, when the mullahs have turned away from revolution, the irreversible fact established by the Revolution, far from giving the U.S. any outpost there, is non-alignment. A hawk's eye is needed to follow the global conflict and not sign off the Iranian Revolution.

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION: THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION IS NOT YET DEAD

The Iranian Revolution is the one world factor that not only U.S. and Western imperialism would like to bury. So would the Arab world with Saudi Arabia in the forefront; and China, which can see only Russia as Enemy Number One and is in the process of helping U.S. imperialism. Marxist revolutionaries must never forget their absolute opposition to capitalism, imperialism, the powers-that-be; and therefore must not in any way fall into the trap of burying the Iranian Revolution prematurely. The truth is that there are plenty of forces in Iran who made the revolution. There is the Kurdish insurgency, which has by no means been put down and will not go away with the ouster of Bani-Sadr. On the contrary, the truth is that the objective crisis has never been deeper and the masses have never suffered more than now. Let's not underestimate the great experience

that the Iranian masses have had in overthrowing the Shah. That will not sink into the void that is being created by the mullahs. On the contrary, as the capitalists in Iran, especially the oil monopolies, will proceed with their drive for more production and lower wages, the class struggles will become stronger. Let us not underestimate the dissatisfaction of the peasantry that, after all the promises of agricultural reform, has yet to witness any redistribution of the land. Moreover, the economic conservatism of the mullahs is as deep as their political repression, as witness the Khomeini declaration: "I must tell you that during the previous dictatorial regimes, strikes and sit-ins pleased God. But now..." Khomeini then proceeded to say that the same phenomenon of strikes is now a manifestation that "the enemy is plotting against us."(8) Furthermore, let us not forget that Khomeini's early opposition to the Shah was so feudalistic as even to oppose the mild so-called "White Revolution" because he wanted no disturbance of the feudal relations on the land.

Iranian revolutionaries are experienced in underground activities, Iranian revolutionaries knew how not to give up their arms when the IRP first demanded it. The Women's Liberation Movement, like labor, like the national minorities, like the youth, have begun a chapter of the revolution they still mean to finish.

PUT SUCCINCTLY, THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION IS NOT YET DEAD, NOT BY A LONG SHOT. NEW REVOLUTIONARY FORCES—FROM THE PROLETARIAT TO THE PEASANTRY; FROM THE MINORITIES, ESPECIALLY THE KURDS, HUNGRY FOR SELF-DETERMINATION, TO THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT; FROM REVOLUTIONARY INTELLECTUALS FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM OF THE PRESS TO THE YOUTH WHO HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE VANGUARD IN THE REVOLUTION—ARE BOUND TO UNFOLD NEW POWERS AGAINST THEIR OWN RULING CLASS AND NOT ALLOW IT TO REMAIN ONLY OPPOSITION TO THE FOREIGN ENEMY. ALL THESE FORCES CAN MERGE INTO FULL CIVIL WAR, THIS TIME ARMED WITH A PHILOSOPHY OF REVOLUTION THAT WOULD INITIATE THE ROAD TO A CLASSLESS SOCIETY ON TRULY NEW HUMANIST BEGINNINGS. THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION HAS NOT YET RUN ITS COURSE. THE IRANIAN MASSES HAVE NOT HAD THEIR LAST WORD.

Let us keep our eyes open and have our international solidarity at the ready.

Raya Dunayevskaya
Detroit, Michigan

P.S.— June 28. In the three days between writing the letter above and its mimeography, the news comes that the IRP headquarters has been blown up, and included in the carnage is the death of Beheshti. No doubt the IRP

will now blame Bani-Sadr, who has never indulged in any terrorist act, but whom they dared characterize as "an agent of American imperialism." In truth, however, the terror that will be unleashed will not be against American imperialism but against the Iranian Left. At the same time, the terrorist acts perpetrated by the extreme right, who consider themselves the "purest" because they insist the mullahs should not engage in politics, have been covered over. Whatever chaos results now, it will not in any way change the analysis made above, and above all the need for international solidarity with the true Iranian revolution.

NOTES

1. See my Political Philosophic Letter, Dec. 17, 1979, "What is Philosophy? What is Revolution?", which had concentrated on the April Thesis, pointing to the fact that it was the concept of State and Revolution which was the ground on which Lenin reorganized the party, preparing for social revolution. What is important here, however, is the timing, between the first draft as "Marxism and the State" which was written before April, and the final draft which was written after the Month of Slander, which forced Lenin to flee to Finland. It was that final version as *State and Revolution* which was circulated to an actual revolutionary group, and hewed out the path to November. See

especially N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917*.

2. See the Spring 1980 pamphlet, *Iranian Women, The Struggle Since the Revolution*, published by the Iranian Women's Liberation Group in London (Box No. 7, Sisterwrite, 190 Upper Street, London N1, England), which quotes a TV-radio interview with Bani-Sadr from which it is clear that he not only didn't disagree with their Muslim reactionary, mythical view on women now passing for "science"—"Men's level of sexual urges and needs are much higher than women's and this is because of certain sex hormones in man's body, whereas there are no sex hormones in woman's body"—but saw that his alternative group should set up its own paper, *The Muslim Woman*, that was edited and run mainly by men.
3. See "Iran's Gluttonous Revolution," by Flora Lewis, *New York Times*, June 15, 1981.
4. See my Weekly Political Letter of Nov. 13, 1969, "Israel, Burma, Outer Mongolia and the Cold War."
5. See *Christian Science Monitor*, June 18, 1981, "Iran Races Toward Total Mullah Rule."
6. See *Merip Reports*, March-April, 1980.
7. See Marxist-Humanist Perspectives for 1981-1982, *News & Letters*, August-September, 1981.
8. See V.S. Naipaul's "Among Believers: An Islamic Journey," *Atlantic Monthly*, July, 1981.