

Iranian Revolution: 30 Years On

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30 years ago, on Feb 11th 1979, following a 2-3 year period of revolutionary crisis and an armed insurrection in Tehran the night before, the government of Shapour Bakhtiar appointed by the last Shah fell and a coalition of bourgeois nationalist and Islamic currents headed by Mehdi Bazargan took power in Iran. The new regime took its legitimacy neither from the insurrection nor from any of the factory councils, strike committees or neighborhood associations but from a secret committee set up by Khomeini in Neauphle-le-Château in France. Only some time after the overthrow, did the new Iranian regime invent a name for this committee: The Council for Islamic Revolution. Officially, this is why the Iranian regime calls this revolution an Islamic Revolution.

This was a loose committee set up in November 1978 to direct negotiations and plannings with USA for a regime change in Iran. By that time it was already made public that the Carter administration had resigned itself to the fact that the Shah must go. The Shah himself was saying so at the time. He even protested the appointment of George Ball to a special White House Iran task force under the National Security Council's Brzezinski. Ball was known for his views in support of a policy for the balkanization of the entire Greater Middle East along tribal and religious lines, creating "an arc of crisis" around the then Soviet Union. He was very open with his recommendations that the USA should drop the Shah and negotiate with Khomeini. Khomeini's committee thus entered into discussions/negotiation with USA through a number of channels including those directly with the CIA. This committee included representatives of a coalition of Shiite clerics and Bazari merchants, some but not all of the political parties associated with the National Front and teams directly negotiating with both the USA and the Iranian Army and Secret Services - inside the USA itself (Yazdi, who became the first foreign minister), in France (Ghotbzadeh, who became the head of the Iranian TV and Radio) and in Iran (Behshiti and Bazargan, one became the power behind the throne, the other headed the first government).

To cut a long story short, after this agreement, first the Shah was sent packing to Egypt then a couple of weeks later Khomeini was brought back to Tehran with much pomp and splendor on the 1st of Feb 1979. The insurrection was not part of the plan. It only happened, as it did, because the Royal Guards, having heard that the Army chiefs had already signed up to the transfer of power, revolted against the deal and stormed the Air Force barracks in Tehran. The homafars inside the base (Helicopter technicians) opened up the arsenals and armed the people in Tehran. By the early morning next day not only were the Royal Guards defeated but all known SAVAK (Shah's secret police) headquarters or Police stations were also taken over. Next day, the Army chiefs, declared their neutrality; and a decree issued by Khomeini's "Council", backed by the so-called "14 military committees" controlling Tehran, appointed Bazargan as the new Prime Minister.

Although Bazargan's government itself soon fell, and although over the last 30 years Iran has witnessed a number of different governments and political directions, the basic character of the new Iranian regime has not changed since; more or less the same coalition of forces which took power after the overthrow of the monarchy, still rules Iran, today, 30 years later. And here lies one of the main baffling aspects of the Iranian

revolution. People continually confuse the genuine Iranian revolution with this so-called "Islamic" hijack. The continuity of the post-revolutionary power has strengthened this confusion. Especially since Khomeini has claimed not only the leadership of the Islamic Revolution but also the genuine popular one which had started well before he was brought on to the scene. A case of a hijacker claiming he was the actual pilot in the first palce!

So yes! The current theocratic regime came out of the Iranian revolution but as a counter-revolution bent on its destruction. The revolutionary crisis which led to this overthrow began with the revolts of the shanty town dwellers in Tehran in 1976 well into the second year of an economic crisis marking the failure of the Shah's White Revolution. But alongside the masses of workers, the rural and urban poor, women, artists and intellectuals, students and national minorities, struggling for the overthrow of the monarchy, there were also sections of the traditional ruling classes displaced precisely by the Shah's US-backed bourgeois reforms. These layers also wanted his head. Even in a more radical way than say the average bourgeois nationalists or pro-Soviet or Chinese leftists. The various internal and external power brokers of capitalism at the time, least amongst which was the Carter Administration, gradually aligned themselves behind this latter group and helped it crown itself as the leadership of the "Opposition". To safeguard the historical interests of capitalism in Iran, i.e., to prevent the total destruction of the bourgeois state, they thus helped to Islamize the Iranian revolution. Even if certain sections of the revolutionary masses themselves had illusions in this masquerade, the Islamic Revolution was indeed nothing but a thoroughly counter-revolutionary revolution.

Even if one may not agree with the characterization of the Iranian revolution by some as "the third great revolution in history" (after the French and the Russian ones), there is no doubt that indeed it was one of the most important revolutions of the 20th century. The counter-revolution that defeated it was also the most vicious; the likes of which has not been seen in recent history. The last Shah was justly called "the butcher of the Middle East". But if in 40 years of his rule over 500 political prisoners were executed, the new regime, only in its first few years alone executed well over 20,000 political prisoners; all leaders and activists of the 1979 revolution. The tragedy of this revolution was that having succeeded in overthrowing the monarchy and its US backed capitalist cronies it gave power to layers even more backward and reactionary than what it overthrew.

Despite the brutal repression that has been sustained for 30 years to keep this counter-revolution in power, the forces of a new revolutionary change in Iran have been gathering pace for a number of years. But by attacking the results of their first regime change with another one from above backed by sanctions and the threat a military strike, they are in fact preparing to behead the second revolution before it even can raise its head. The Iranian regime itself, whilst fearful of its own future, still carries on doing their Master's biddings by precisely using the external threat as an excuse for suppressing further the mass opposition to its brutal rule. Both sides are once again destroying the only force that can bring about genuine change. This is why every progressive force internationally should loudly announce on this 30th anniversary: Hands Off People of Iran! No to Imperialist War! No to Islamic Republic!