selections from:

Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*

(Princeton University Press, 1982)

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ELEVEN

The Islamic Revolution

The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times, the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists—kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But in revolutions, the masses break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside the established representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime. Whether this is good or bad we leave to the judgement of moralists. . . . The history of revolution is for us first of all the forcible entry of the masses into the political arena.

—L. Trotsky, *The Russian Revolution* (New York, 1959), p. ix.

MIDDLE-CLASS PROTEST (MAY 1977-JUNE 1978)

In the mid-1970s the shah's regime seemed as durable as the massive dams he built and proudly named after his relatives. A vast army, equipped with ultramodern weapons and helped by an efficient secret police, appeared to have the capacity to stamp out rebellions as far away as Oman. An immense bureaucracy, bolstered by the well-financed patronage network, claimed to have the power not only to control the economy but also to radically restructure the whole society. And an enormous income derived from the oil industry provided the means to buy off potential opposition and further expand the instruments of social control. This led most observers to conclude that the regime was so firmly grounded that it was indestructible. Even the scarce few who were less sanguine about the stability of the regime and more aware of the social tensions rising behind the facade expected the system to last until the late 1980s, when the oil revenues would fall. They felt that even though the regime had no foundations in the social fabric and no channels for releasing the mounting tensions, yet its institutional pillars were strong enough to

withstand the pressures exerted by uneven development and lopsided modernization. In their estimate, cracks would appear not in the late 1970s, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

These calculations, however, were dashed by two unexpected crises: an economic crisis in the form of acute inflation; and an institutional crisis produced by foreign pressures on the shah to relax police controls and observe the human rights of political dissenters. Inflation, which had almost disappeared from the Iranian scene during the second half of the 1960s, reappeared with a vengeance in the early 1970s, raising the cost-of-living index from 100 in 1970 to 126 in 1974, further to 160 in 1975, and further to over 190 in 1976.[1] The rise was even steeper for such essentials as food and housing, especially in the cities. For example, a report published by the London *Economist* in 1976 estimated that rents in residential parts of Tehran rose 300 percent in five years, and that by 1975 a middle-class family could be spending for housing as much as 50 percent of its annual income.[2] A complex combination of factors caused this inflation: the lack of housing and influx of over 60,000 well-paid foreign technicians; the failure of agricultural production to keep up with the rising population; the sudden jump in food prices on the world markets; the crash industrialization program and the continued growth in the military establishment, which created labor shortages, raised wages in the rural sector, drained labor from the rural sector, and thus further aggravated the agricultural problem; and, most important of all, the overheating of the economy once the oil billions were poured into ambitious development projects—in 1974-1975 the government tripled its development investments and increased the money supply by over 60 percent.[3] When economists warned of the dangers of overheating, the shah declared that statesmen should never listen to economists.

However complex the causes of inflation, the regime found a simplistic solution: it placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the business community. In the words of the London *Economist*, "inflation began to gain momentum in 1973, and by the summer of 1976 had reached such alarming proportions that the Shah, who tends to look at economic problems in military terms, declared war on profiteers."[4] At first, the regime took aim on big businessmen, arrested with much fanfare "industrial feudalists" such as Elqanian and Vahabzadeh, and thereby frightened many others to transfer capital to safer territories.

[1] The Plan and Budget Organization of Iran, *Salnameh-i Amar-i Keshvar* (Annual Statistics for the State) (Tehran, 1977).

[2] M. Field, ed., *Middle East Annual Report* (London, 1977), pp. 150-58.

[3] "Iran's Miracle that Was," *Economist*, 20 December 1975.

[4] Field, *Middle East Annual Report*, p. 14.

As an American journal noted, "the rich voted with their money long before they voted with their feet."[5] And a foreign correspondent aptly stated that the "anti-profiteering campaign" caused schizophrenia among rich entrepreneurs: on one hand they benefited from the socioeconomic system, especially the development plans; on the other hand they suffered from the political system, which placed their wealth and futures in the hands of one man.[6]

Discovering that the war on rich entrepreneurs did not end inflation, the regime took aim on shopkeepers and small businessmen. The central government imposed strict price controls on many basic commodities, and imported large quantities of wheat, sugar, and meat to undercut local dealers. Meanwhile, the Resurgence party organized some 10,000 students into vigilante gangs called "inspectorate teams" and dispatched them into the bazaars to wage a "merciless crusade against profiteers, cheaters, hoarders, and unscrupulous capitalists."[7] Similarly, the so-called Guild Courts set up hastily by SAVAK gave out some 250,000 fines, banned 23,000 traders from their home towns, handed out to some 8,000 shopkeepers prison sentences ranging from two months to three years, and brought charges against another 180,000 small businessmen.[8] By early 1976, every bazaar family had at least one member who had directly suffered from the "anti-profiteering campaign." One shopkeeper told a French correspondent that the White Revolution was beginning to resemble a Red Revolution. Another told an American correspondent that "the bazaar was being used as a smokescreen to hide the vast corruption rampant in government and in the bosom of the royal family."[9] The formation of the Resurgence party had been an affront to the bazaars; the anti-profiteering campaign was a blatant invasion of the bazaars. Not for the first time, the bazaar community increasingly turned to its traditional ally, the ʿulama, for help and protection.

This economic crisis coincided with external pressures on the shah to relax police controls. In early 1975, the London-based Amnesty International, which in the past had focused on political prisoners in the Soviet bloc, turned its attention to noncommunist countries and discovered that Iran was one of the world's "worst violators of human

[5] Mansur, "The Crisis in Iran," *Armed Forces Journal International*, January 1979, p. 29.

[6] E. Rouleau, "Iran: Myth and Reality," *The Guardian*, 31 October 1976.

[7] A. Masʿoud, "The War against Profiteers," *Donya*, 3 (January 1976), 6-10.

[8] P. Balta, "Iran in Revolt," *Ittilaʿat*, 6 October 1979.

[9] *Iran Times*, 8 December 1978; E. Rouleau, "Iran: Myth and Reality," *The Guardian*, 31 October 1976; N. Cage, "Iran: Making of a Revolution," *New York Times*, 17 December 1978.

rights." The more conservative International Commission of Jurists in Geneva took the regime to task for "systematically using torture" and "violating the basic civil rights of its citizens." Likewise, the UN-affiliated International League for Human Rights sent an open letter to the shah in which it accused the regime of intensely abusing human rights and called upon him to "rectify the deplorable human rights situation in Iran."[10]

While international organizations were criticizing the regime, groups of Iranian exiles formed their own human rights committees to publicize SAVAK atrocities. For example, in London graduate students who had contacts with the Labour party and the British trade union movement formed the Committee against Repression in Iran. In New York a similar group of students received help from American writers to establish the Committee for Artistic and Intellectual Freedom in Iran. In Paris the Third National Front worked closely with French lawyers and intellectuals such as Jean Paul Sartre to publicize the plight of political prisoners in Iran. And throughout Western Europe and North America, the Iranian Student Confederation and the Islamic Student Society constantly organized street demonstrations to expose the regime's unpopularity and to tarnish the favorable image the shah had meticulously projected over the years through the Western mass media.

These activities brought results, encouraging influential newspapers that had previously praised the shah to criticize his police methods. For example, the highly respected *Sunday Times* of London ran a series of exposés on SAVAK and concluded that "there was a clear pattern" of torture used not only against active dissidents but also against intellectuals who dared whisper criticisms of the regime.[11] Even more serious for the shah, American Congressmen began to question the wisdom of selling so much sophisticated weaponry to a regime that depended entirely on one man; Washington insiders began to refer to the regime as a "one-bullet state." After hearing evidence presented by Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, the chairman of the House of Representative's Subcommittee on International Organizations declared that the Iranian regime could not be considered stable until it permitted "popular input," created proper parliamentary structures, and allowed the freedom of press,

[10] Amnesty International, *Annual Report for 1974-75* (London, 1975); International Commission of Jurists, *Human Rights and the Legal System in Iran* (Geneva, 1976), pp. 1-72; J. Shestack, Letter to H.I.M. the Shah, 17 June 1977.

[11] P. Jacobson, "Torture in Iran," *Sunday Times*, 19 January 1975.

discussion, and assembly.[12] Similarly, a Subcommittee on Arms Sales, after receiving information from the State Department, the CIA, and the Defense Department, concluded that it was potentially dangerous to sell so many weapons to such a repressive regime.[13] Finally, Jimmy Carter, in the 1976 presidential primaries, championed the cause of human rights throughout the world, and, in the last stages of the presidential election, specifically named Iran as one of the countries in which America should do more to protect civil and political liberties. Although it is not clear that the new administration in Washington actually pressed the regime to liberalize, Carter's election certainly had an immediate impact on both the shah and the opposition. The former felt that the new president expected him to display at least some respect for political liberties. The latter also felt that the White House—for the first time since Kennedy's administration—was willing to protect moderate dissenters from SAVAK onslaughts. As Bazargan put it after the revolution, Carter's election made it possible for Iran to breathe again.[14]

The shah had a number of reasons for responding positively to external pressures. He did not want to jeopardize his "special relations" with Washington and his access to American arms. He was reluctant to lose the image of a forward-looking modernizer eager to bring the advantages of Western civilization to Iran—an image he had cultivated at great expense in Europe and America, especially on Madison Avenue. Moreover, he was convinced that his reforms were so popular that he could relax controls without endangering the whole regime; decades of propaganda had managed to fool the ruler if not the ruled. As he confidently told foreign correspondents in early 1975, the opposition was limited to a handful of nihilists, anarchists, and communists.[15] Furthermore, the death of the more realistic and experienced politicians—notably ʿAlam, ʿAla, Eqbal, Saʿid, Hakimi, Bayat, Sayyid Ziya, Qavam, Soheily, and the elder Zahedi—had reduced the shah's circle of advisers to a small group of younger yes-men competing to tell their monarch what he wanted to hear. Thus the shah began to walk toward the abyss of revolution, with court advisers inadvertently helping him to pull down the crown further over his eyes.

The program to relax police controls began in early 1977, and picked up pace in the summer of that year. In February, the regime

[12] U.S. Congress, Subcommittee on International Organizations, *Human Rights in Iran* (Washington, D.C., 1977), p. 25.

[13] Cited by Rouleau, "Iran: Myth and Reality."

[14] M. Bazargan, "Letter to the Editor," *Ittilaʿat*, 7 February 1980.

[15] Cited in "Iran towards Unity," *Khabarnameh*, no. 42 (June 1975), p. 1.

amnestied 357 political prisoners. In March, it allowed the International Commission of the Red Cross to visit twenty prisons and see some 3,000 prison inmates. In April, it permitted foreign lawyers to observe the trial of eleven dissidents accused of terrorism; this was the first time since the early 1960s that outside lawyers had been allowed into a military tribunal. In early May, the shah gave a private audience to a representative of Amnesty International and promised to improve prison conditions. In late May, he gave a similar audience to a representative of the International Commission of Jurists, and, after complaining that the "Jewish controlled press in America" was maligning him, agreed to amend court procedures to better protect the rights of political detainees.[16] In early June, the Resurgence party announced that it welcomed free discussions and constructive criticisms. In July, the shah dismissed Hoveida, who had headed the government for the previous twelve years, and gave the premiership to Jamshid Amouzegar, a fifty-one-year-old American-educated technocrat who headed the more liberal "progressive wing" of the Resurgence party. And in August, the government decreed the court reforms promised earlier to the International Commission of Jurists. These reforms, entitled Rules of Procedure in Military Courts, introduced four significant changes: civilians brought before military tribunals could choose nonmilitary lawyers to be their defense attorneys; detainees were to appear before magistrates within twenty-four hours of their detention; defense lawyers could not be prosecuted for statements made in court; and trials were to be open unless such publicity endangered public order. In decreeing these reforms, the shah privately promised the International Commission of Jurists that in future trials would be in civilian rather than in military courts. This proved to be as big a blunder as his 1949 decision to permit free elections in Tehran.

This slight loosening of controls encouraged the opposition to raise its voice. In May 1977, fifty-three lawyers—many of whom had supported Mossadeq—sent an open letter to the imperial palace and thereby initiated an intense campaign of protests through public communiques.[17] Their letter accused the government of interfering in court proceedings and announced the formation of a special commission to protect the judiciary from the legislative branch. This was

[16] W. Butler, "Memorandum to the International Commission of Jurists on Private Audience with the Shah of Iran," 30 May 1977.

[17] For the open letters sent in 1977 see: *Jonbesh* (Movement), a newsletter edited by Hajj Sayyid Javadi; *Buletin-i Khabari* (Bulletin of News), the organ of the Writers' Association; and *Khabarnameh* (Newsletter), the organ of the Union of the National Front Forces.

the first time since 1963 that a group inside Iran had dared to denounce the regime publicity. In June, the three leading personalities of the National Front—Sanjabi, Foruhar, and Bakhtiyar—wrote a more daring letter addressed to the shah, pointedly avoiding use of the royalist calendar and the title Aryamehr, and accusing the regime both of wrecking the economy through inflation and neglect of agriculture, and of violating international law, human rights, and the 1905-1909 constitution. The letter concluded as follows:

> The only way to restore national unity and individual rights is to abandon despotism, respect the constitutional laws, observe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, abolish the one-party system, permit the freedom of press and assembly, release political prisoners, allow exiles to return home, and establish a government that enjoyed public confidence and respected the fundamental laws.

Also in June, forty prominent poets, novelists, and intellectuals sent an open letter to Premier Hoveida and revived their Writers' Association, which had been suppressed since 1964. The letter denounced the regime for violating the constitution, demanded an end to censorship, protested that SAVAK stifled all cultural, intellectual, and artistic activity, and argued that many citizens were in prison for the "crime" of reading books disapproved by the police. The forty signatories covered a wide spectrum of political opinion. They included Behazin, the veteran pro-Tudeh novelist; Baqer Momeni, a Marxist intellectual who had left the Tudeh in the mid 1950s; Hussein Malek, a professor of sociology and since the death of his brother Khalel Maleki the country's leading non-Tudeh Marxist theorist; Manoucher Hezarkhani, another independent Marxist essayist; Naser Pakdaman, a young professor of economics and early member of Khalel Maleki's Society of Iranian Socialists; Homa Nateq, a young French-educated professor of history sympathetic to feminist causes and to the left wing of the National Front; Simin Daneshvar, a novelist, feminist, and widow of the famous writer al-Ahmad; Dr. Ghulam Hussein Sa'edi, a trained psychologist who had become the country's leading playwright and had been arrested in 1975 for publishing depressing literature; Fereydoun Adamiyat, a prominent secular liberal intellectual who had written the best-known histories of the constitutional movement; and 'Ali Asghar Hajj Sayyid Javadi, a popular essayist who began his political career in the early 1940s within the Tudeh, in the 1950s joined Khalel Maleki's group, in the 1960s wrote on socialist and Islamic themes, and by the 1970s had a large following among lay religious readers.

The opposition grew more vocal during the summer of 1977. In early July, a number of writers and publishers formed a Group for Free Books and Free Thought. In a letter sent to journals published in exile, they gave detailed cases of writers who had been tortured and whose works had been censored.[18] In late July, sixty-four prominent lawyers met openly in a Tehran hotel and drafted a strongly worded manifesto. The manifesto accused the government of violating the constitution, demanded the immediate abolition of all extra-constitutional tribunals, and argued that since the legal profession was the "guardian of the fundamental laws" they would assume the responsibility of defending the independence of the judiciary. These lawyers were headed by Nazeh of the Liberation Movement; 'Abdul Karim Lahiji, a young European-educated lawyer sympathetic to the National Front; and Hedayatallah Matin-Daftari, a grandson of Mossadeq, an important member of the Second National Front, and a veteran human rights lawyer who had been badly beaten up by SAVAK in 1964 for trying to give legal counsel to political prisoners.

The opposition grew even more vocal during the autumn. The Writers' Association elected Behazin as its chairman and obtained the signatures of ninety-eight prominent intellectuals on another open letter to the government. This letter accused the regime of hypocricy, arguing that SAVAK continued to censor the media while the shah was telling the world that he was liberalizing. Meanwhile, fifty-four judges sent an open letter to the High Court complaining that the government had grossly violated the constitution, especially the independence of the judiciary. Twenty-nine opposition leaders, including Bazargan, Sanjabi, Bakhtiyar, Matin-Daftari, Lahiji, Ayatallah Zanjani, Nazeh, and Hajj Sayyid Javadi formed the Iranian Committee for the Defense of Freedom and Human Rights. In their first act, they sent an open letter to the secretary general of the United Nations detailing how the regime had systematically used torture, military tribunals, and arbitrary arrest to intimidate the opposition. One hundred twenty lawyers, led by Nazeh, Lahiji, and Matin-Daftari, formed the Association of Iranian Jurists, demanded immediate implementation of the constitutional laws, and announced that since their previous requests had not been met they would set up a working group with a newsletter to monitor prison conditions and publicize SAVAK abuses. Similarly, a group of professors formed the National Organization of University Teachers to fight for academic freedom, while merchants in the Tehran bazaar established the Society of Merchants, Traders, and Craftsmen to curtail the activities of the Resurgence party. Even

[18] Group for Free Books and Free Thought, "An Open Letter," Payam-i *Daneshjow* (Student Message), 4 (August 1977), 51-94.

more important, theology students in Qum formed an Educational Society and demanded the return of Khomeini, the end of censorship, the reopening of Fayzieh seminary and Tehran University—both of which had been closed recently because of student protests, freedom of press and assembly, dissolution of the Resurgence party, independence of the judiciary, help for agriculture, "true sovereignty for Iran," and the "end of ties with imperialistic powers."[19]

Seeing that these professional and human rights groups were able to function, old and new political organizations began to emerge. Sanjabi, Foruhar, Bakhtiyar, a bazaar merchant, and representatives from the Society of Socialists revived the National Front, calling it the Union of National Front Forces (Ittehad-i Niruha-yi Jeb'eh-i Melli). They also started a paper called *Khabarnameh* (Newsletter), and demanded from the government dissolution of SAVAK, trials in civilian courts for civilian defendants, release of all political prisoners, return of all exiles, end of censorship, freedom for all political parties, and removal of restrictions on guilds and trade unions. In announcing these demands, Sanjabi stressed that the National Front would continue to pursue the course set by the late Mossadeq: make Iran truly independent in foreign affairs, and establish genuine democracy at home by fighting for individual rights, social freedoms, and the constitutional laws.[20]

Similarly, Bazargan revived the Liberation Movement, worked closely with the National Front and the bazaar community, and called for the implementation of the 1905-1909 constitution. Meanwhile, Rahmatallah Moqadam Maraghehi, a French-educated liberal intellectual from a prominent Azerbaijani family with close ties to Ayatallah Shari'atmadari, brought together a group of like-minded secular professionals to form a new party called the Radical Movement (Nahzat-i Radikal). Finally, the Tudeh party reemerged from its underground existence, revived some of its cells, especially in Tehran, Abadan, and Rasht, and, helped by ex-Feda'i members, started publishing in Tehran a newspaper named *Nuyid* (Harbinger). It is significant that in this early stage of the revolution none of the major opposition parties openly called for the establishment of either a republic or an Islamic republic. On the contrary, they all stressed that their immediate goal was to reestablish the 1906-1909 fundamental laws that had created a constitutional monarchy.

Until mid-November 1977, the opposition focused its energies on indoor activities: writing letters, forming new groups, reviving old

[19] Educational Society of Qum, "Demands," *Mujahed*, 6 (January 1978), p. 5.

[20] K. Sanjabi, "Speech," *Khabarnameh*, 24 August 1977.

ones, drafting manifestos, and publishing newspapers. After mid-November, however, the opposition overflowed into the streets. This marked the start of a new stage in the revolutionary process. The turning point came on November 19, when, after nine evenings of peaceful poetry-reading sessions organized by the Writers' Association in the Iranian-German Cultural Society and in Aryamehr University, the police attempted to disband the tenth session with its full-capacity audience of some 10,000 students. The attempt promptly incited an angry crowd to march out of the campus into the streets shouting antiregime slogans. In the ensuing clash with the police, one student was killed, over seventy were injured, and some one hundred were arrested. The next ten days saw more student demonstrations and the closure of the main Tehran universities in protest over the bloodshed of November 19. And during the course of the following week, the country's major universities struck to commemorate Azar 16—the unofficial student day—and the demonstrators arrested in the previous disturbances were acquitted after brief trials in civilian courts. These trials were a clear sign to the country that SAVAK could no longer use military tribunals to intimidate dissenters. Liberalization, which had been introduced as a political tranquilizer, was proving to be a potent stimulant.

Street protests multiplied in January 1978. On January 7, Ittila'at published a diatribe against the antiregime clergy, calling them "black reactionaries" and accusing them of secretly working with international communists to undo the achievements of the White Revolution.[21] The article also charged that Khomeini was really a foreigner who in his youth had worked as a British spy, led a licentious life, and, to top it all, had written erotic Sufi poetry. The article outraged Qum. The seminaries and the bazaar closed down, demanding a public apology; and some 4,000 theology students and their sympathizers clashed with the police as they took to the streets, shouting "we don't want the Yazid government," "we want our constitution," and "we demand the return of Ayatallah Khomeini." According to the government, two were killed in the clash; according to the opposition, seventy were killed and over five hundred were injured.

The casualty figures may have been in dispute, but the repercussions were unambiguous. The following day, Khomeini called for more demonstrations, congratulated Qum and the progressive (*motaraqi*) clergy for their heroic stand against paganism (*taghot*), and accused the shah of collaborating with America to undermine Islam, destroy Iranian agriculture, and turn the country into a dumping ground for

[21] "Iran and the Black and Red Reactionaries," *Ittila'at*, 7 January 1978.

foreign goods.[22] Meanwhile, Shari'atmadari, in a rare interview with foreign correspondents, complained that the government had slandered the 'ulama, the police had behaved in an un-Islamic manner, and said that if wanting the constitution was a sign of "black reaction" then he had to confess to being a staunch "black reactionary."[23] He also threatened to personally convey the bodies of the dead demonstrators to the palace gates in Tehran unless the government immediately stopped its attacks on the 'ulama. Moreover, Shari'atmadari, together with eighty-eight clerical, bazaar, and other opposition leaders, called upon the country to observe the fortieth day of the Qum massacre by staying away from work and peacefully attending mosque services. Thus began three cycles of forty-day upheavals. Journalists, later searching for the spark of the revolution, latched onto the *Ittila'at* article and its subsequent outburst in Qum. But in actual fact, the beginnings of the revolution were more complex and the first spark can be pushed back to the poetry-reading sessions and their subsequent upheavals in Aryamehr University. These two crises not only reflect the complexities of the whole revolution but also epitomize the two divergent forces present in the revolutionary movement: the salaried middle class and its hotbed of political discontent—the modern universities; and the propertied middle class and its centers of sociopolitical organization—the traditional seminaries and the old-fashioned bazaars.

The fortieth day of the Qum massacre fell on February 18. To mourn the dead, the major bazaars and universities closed down. The clergy held memorial services in most large towns. And peaceful demonstrations took place in twelve cities, including Tehran, Qum, Isfahan, Mashad, Ahwaz, Shiraz, and Rasht. In Tabriz, however, the demonstration turned violent after an irate police officer shot dead a teenage student protestor. Incited by the scene, the demonstrators marched onto the police station, and, finding that the authorities were not willing to shoot, took over much of the city, attacking police stations, Resurgence party offices, banks, luxury hotels, and cinemas that specialized in sexy films. In the Tabriz upheaval, as in most upheavals throughout the revolution, demonstrators, however angry, rarely indulged in physical attacks on persons and private property. On the contrary, they invariably avoided persons, focusing instead on particular types of property—police stations and Resurgence party offices because they symbolized the Pahlevi state; luxury hotels because they catered to the affluent rich, both native and foreign; "pornographic"

[22] R. Khomeini, "Proclamation," *Mujahed*, 6 (January 1978), 1-2.
[23] Cited in *Khabarnameh*, no. 54 (January 1978), pp. 1-2.

movie houses because they violated the puritanical mores of the bazaar middle class; and banks, partly because they transgressed the Islamic taboo against usury, partly because they discriminated against small businessmen, but mainly because they were owned by the royal family, the state, and the wealthy entrepreneurs. Small banks owned by bazaar entrepreneurs were often left untouched, and, as European eyewitnesses in Tabriz reported, all the large banks that were attacked lost all their records but "not a single" cent from their tills. These demonstrators, which the government press denounced as "greedy mobs," were interested more in making a political point than in lining their pockets. The Tabriz uprising lasted two full days, subsiding only when the government rushed in military reinforcements, including tanks, helicopter gunships, and armored troop carriers. After the uprising, the total dead were estimated as 6 by the government, as over 300 by the opposition, and as nearly 100 by the European eyewitnesses.[24] Whatever the real figure, this was the largest public protest since 1963. The religious leaders and the National Front asked the country to honor the dead by attending mosque services on the fortieth day after the upheaval.

The fortieth day came on March 29. On that day and the following two days, most bazaars and universities closed down, while large memorial processions were organized in fifty-five urban centers. Although most of these processions were orderly, in Tehran, Yazd, Isfahan, Babol, and Jahrom they turned violent, attacking not only banks, party offices, luxury hotels, and select movie houses, but also police cars, royal statues, and liquor stores. In Yazd, where the most violent of these confrontations took place, some ten thousand mourners, after listening to a fiery preacher just released from prison, marched out of the bazaar mosque and headed for the main police station, shouting "Death to the shah," "Greetings to Khomeini," and "Long live the martyrs of Qum and Tabriz." Before they reached their destination they were intercepted by a volley of police bullets. The nationwide three-day crisis did not end until the shah rushed back from naval maneuvers in the Persian Gulf and took personal command of the antiriot police forces. According to the regime, five demonstrators were killed in the three days of rioting. But according to the opposition, over one hundred were killed in Yazd alone. As before, Khomeini, Shari'atmadari, and other religious as well as lay opposition leaders asked the country to show their disgust with the government by peacefully attending fortieth-day services.

[24] N. Albala, "Mission to Iran" (unpublished report submitted to the Court of Appeals in Paris, March 1978), p. 9.

The next fortieth day fell on May 10. Again bazaars and major teaching institutions went on strike. Again mosque services and memorial processions were organized in many towns. And again some of these processions—this time as many as twenty-four—turned violent. In Tehran, the shah hurriedly canceled a visit to Eastern Europe and ordered two thousand troops to cordon off the city's bazaar and use tear gas to break up a meeting held outside the main mosque. In Qum, the disturbances lasted a full ten hours and subsided only when the army intervened, closing off the city's electricity and shooting indiscriminately into the crowds. In breaking up these crowds, troops chased a group of demonstrators to the doorstep of Shari'atmadari's home, and, violating the traditional right to take sanctuary in the houses of religious leaders, broke in and shot dead two theology students. According to the government, the three cycles of forty-day riots had left 22 dead and some 200 injured.[25] According to the opposition, they had left 250 dead and over 600 injured.[26] Observers may question these figures, but they cannot dispute the fact that serious cracks had begun to appear in the formidable-looking Pahlevi regime.

To deal with the crisis, the regime adopted a complicated three-pronged strategy. First, it tried to physically intimidate the leaders of the secular opposition. Creating an Underground Committee of Revenge, SAVAK sent threatening letters to the lawyers and writers prominent in the human rights movement; circulated leaflets accusing these lawyers and writers of being stooges of American imperialism; kidnaped and badly beat up Homa Nateq and another member of the Writers' Association; and bombed the offices of Sanjabi, Bazargan, Matin-Daftari, Nazeh, Foruhar, Lahiji, Moqadam Maraghehi, and Hajji Moinian, a bazaar merchant closely identified with the National Front. Similarly, the Resurgence party set up a vigilante force called the Resistance Corps, staffed it with policemen in civilian clothes, and attacked meetings organized by student groups, the Writers' Association, and the National Front. In one such attack, the Resistance Corps, pretending to be irate workers, seriously injured thirty people who were celebrating 'Ayd-i Qurban (Day of Sacrifice) in the private gardens of a National Front leader. Moreover, the shah, when asked by the press if he would negotiate with the secular opposition, rejected any such possibility on the grounds that the National Front was "even more traitorous than the Tudeh party."[27]

[25] Compiled from *Ittila'at*, February-June 1978.

[26] Compiled from *Mujahed*, the organ of the Liberation Front published in North America.

[27] Cited in *Iran Times*, 21 July 1978.

Second, the regime abandoned some of the policies that had aroused the wrath of the bazaars and the moderate clergy. It called off the anti-inflation war against small businessmen, dissolved the notorious "inspectorate teams," amnestied shopkeepers imprisoned for profiteering, ended plans for establishing a grand state-owned market, and permitted the Tehran bazaar to form a Society of Merchants, Traders, and Craftsmen. Moreover, the government publicly apologized to Shari'atmadari for the attack on his home; banned "pornographic" films; promised to open the Fayzieh seminary; and allowed 184 journalists to publish an open letter that criticized the state-controlled media for portraying peaceful religious processions as hooligan mobs led by outside agitators and Marxist-Islamic lunatics. Furthermore, the shah made a well-publicized pilgrimage to the Imam Reza shrine in Mashad; increased the annual quota of pilgrims to Mecca; issued a code of ethics for the imperial family, ordering his fifty relatives to end all their business activities; and replaced General Nasiri, the notorious chief of SAVAK for the previous twelve years, with General Moqadam, a respected professional officer whose Azerbaijani family had close ties to Shari'atmadari. The shah also promised to make the forthcoming Majles elections "100 percent free"; encouraged a circle of liberal intellectuals around Empress Farah to form a Study Group on Iran's Problems; and announced that he was willing to negotiate with the religious leaders, since "some of them are not that bad."[28]

Third, Premier Amouzegar tried to slow down the spiraling cost of living—the main economic cause of middle-class discontent—by slowing down the economy. Unable to persuade the shah to reduce the military budget, Amouzegar cut drastically civilian expenditures, especially the development plan. He eliminated $3.5 billion from the Five Year Plan, stretched the remaining three years of the Five Year Plan to four-and-a-half years, tightened credit, shelved plans for a subway system in Tehran, eliminated eighteen of the twenty proposed nuclear plants, postponed the building of many new factories, hospitals, and housing projects, and, most important of all, sharply reduced the number of government contracts given to the booming construction industry. As one American businessman noted, "the Iranian spending spree is over."[29] These cuts had an immediate effect. The GNP, which had been rising at the rate of 15 to 20 percent per annum in the previous years, increased only 2 percent in the first half of 1978. The urban construction industry, which had grown as much as 32 percent in the previous year, increased only 7 percent in the first

[28] Cited ibid., 8 July 1978.

[29] Cited by Y. Ibrahim, "Behind Iran's Revolution," *New York Times*, 4 February 1979.

nine months of 1978. Conversely, the cost-of-living index, which had spiraled at the rate of 30 to 35 percent in the previous years, rose only 7 percent in the first nine months of 1978. The government had managed to control inflation by engineering a mild recession.

The government strategy appeared to work. By the summer of 1978 the streets were remarkably quiet, no major disturbances occurred for two full months, and, even more significant, the fortieth day of the May 10-12 massacres passed without any new bloodshed. In preparation for the fortieth day, Shari'atmadari and the moderate clergy beseeched the faithful to attend mosque services but scrupulously to avoid street demonstrations. Shari'atmadari also told the press that he "did not care whether the shah went or stayed but he did want the return of the constitution."[30] Khomeini, on the other hand, exhorted the country to continue protesting until the "pagan regime" was overthrown.[31] The fact that in June the public heeded Shari'atmadari rather than Khomeini led many to conclude that the regime had weathered the storm. As Amouzegar confidently declared in early June, "the crisis is over."[32] In fact, the crisis had only just begun, and the summer quiet turned out to be the lull before the final storm.

MIDDLE- AND WORKING-CLASS PROTESTS (JUNE 1978-DECEMBER 1978)

During the upheavals of early 1978, the urban wage earners had been conspicuous by their absence. With the notable exception of Tabriz, where workers from small private factories had joined the uprising, most demonstrations had taken place around the universities, bazaars, and seminaries, and their participants had been drawn predominantly from the traditional and the modern middle classes. The situation changed drastically after June, however, when the urban poor, especially construction laborers and factory workers, started to join the street demonstrations. Their participation not only swelled the demonstrations from tens of thousands of marchers to hundreds of thousands and even millions, but also changed the class composition of the opposition and transformed the middle-class protest into a joint protest of the middle and working classes. Indeed, the entry of the working class made possible the eventual triumph of the Islamic Revolution.

[30] *Iran Times*, 2 June 1978.

[31] R. Khomeini, "A Message," *Mujahed*, 7 (June 1978), 1-3.

[32] Quoted in "Step by Step toward the Iranian Revolution," *Mardom*, 11 February 1980.

The working-class protests were triggered by the economic recession. Before the government engineered the recession, the ambitious development projects had eliminated urban unemployment and had even created local labor shortages. These shortages, in turn, had pushed up the wages of unskilled as well as skilled workers. Between 1970 and 1977, the rise in urban wages outpaced the 90 percent rise in consumer prices. For example, the daily minimum wage set by the government jumped from 80 rials in 1973 to 210 rials in 1977.[33] The daily income of unskilled construction laborers went up at the rate of 33 percent per year, rising from the equivalent of $1.20 in 1970 to over $5.50 in early 1977. The average wage in twenty-one key industries climbed 30 percent in 1974-1975 and 48 percent in 1975-1976.[34] The rise in the standard of living was most noticeable among skilled factory workers. In 1971, manufacturing workers in Tehran earned on average 220 rials a day—170 rials in basic pay, 31 rials in overtime, and 19 rials in profit-sharing. But by 1977, machine-tool workers in Arak were earning as much as 850 rials in basic pay alone and 150 rials in overtime.[35]

The rise in real wages directly effected the number of strikes occurring in the main industries. During the middle-class upheavals of October 1977-June 1978, there had been only seven major industrial strikes.[36] The number rose sharply after June, however, when the recession began to take its toll, especially in the construction industry, and the government further cut expenditures by placing a ceiling on wage increases and canceling the annual bonuses usually given to all state employees. By midsummer, real wages started to fall, unemployment rose from almost nothing to nearly 400,000, and take-home pay in the construction industry slumped as much as 30 percent.[37] Moreover, the shah used a televised press conference to launch a campaign against high wages and low productivity. Arguing that the "welfare state" had covered workers with "soft wool," he declared,

> This is intolerable. Those who do not work, we shall take them by the tail and throw them out like mice. He who does not do his job properly is betraying not only his own conscience but also his patriotic duty. . . . I remember a few

[33] International Labor Office, *Employment and Income Policies for Iran* (Geneva, 1973), p. 79; *Iran Times*, 21 March 1978.

[34] R. Graham, *Iran: The Illusion of Power* (New York, 1979), pp. 89, 90; E. Rouleau, "Iran: Myth and Reality," *The Guardian*, 31 October 1976.

[35] International Labor Office, *Employment and Income Policies for Iran*, p. 80; "Factory Conditions," *Mujahed*, 4 (August 1975), 4.

[36] Compiled from *Mujahed, Khabarnameh, Mardom*, and *Setareh-i Surkh*.

[37] W. Branigan, "Little Joy Greets Shah's Anniversary," *Washington Post*, 20 August 1978.

years ago a mason—who is now so much in demand that people have to flatter him—was prepared to work a whole day for a mere meal and he never had enough work. But today, in this period of transition, we are in need of more workers and have to run after them in supplication.[38]

The shah ended the interview with the pronouncement that the people had to work harder, make more sacrifices, tighten their belts, and lower their economic aspirations. *Keyhan International* described that interview as historic. It proved to be more historic than anyone could have expected.

The get-tough policy toward labor sparked off a series of industrial strikes. In June, the employees of the electrical works in Tehran and the southern cities, of the water system in Tehran, and of a large industrial plant near Tehran stopped work in protest over the cancellation of the annual bonuses. In early July, over 600 sanitation workers in Abadan struck, demanding health insurance, annual bonuses, and a 20 percent wage increase to compensate for the year's inflation. In late July, 1,750 textile workers in Behshahr stopped work and called for higher wages and free union elections. In August, some 2,000 employees of the machine tool factory in Tabriz stayed away from work for two weeks demanding annual bonuses, higher wages, and better housing. And in September, major strikes over economic grievances broke out in the paper mill of Fars, in the car assembly plants of Tehran, and in the water works and the machine tool factory in Ahwaz.

Workers showed their discontent not only through strikes but also through demonstrations. The first major demonstration that drew large numbers of workers occurred in Mashad on July 22. On that day, a funeral procession for a local Hojjat al-Islam who had died in a car accident turned violent after some of the mourners threw rocks at the police, and the police in return fired into the crowd. By conservative estimates, the dead numbered over forty. This was the first bloody incident since early May. More were to follow in rapid succession. On the seventh day after the Mashad massacre, large memorial services were held in almost every major town. In Tehran, Tabriz, Qum, Isfahan, and Shiraz, the services escalated into street clashes. Even worse violence erupted during the month of Ramazan, which began on August 5. In the first few days of Ramazan, violent demonstrations took place in Tabriz, Mashad, Shahsaver, Ahwaz, Behbehan, Shiraz, and Isfahan. In Isfahan, where the worst incidents occurred, angry demonstrators—some armed with pistols—took over

[38] "Historic Interview with His Imperial Majesty," *Keyhan International*, 26 October 1976.

much of the city and released a highly respected ayatallah who had just been arrested. The government did not regain full control of Isfahan until two days later, when it declared martial law, rushed in army contingents, and shot down over one hundred demonstrators. This was the first time since 1953 that martial law had been imposed on a provincial capital. Amouzegar, in shifting economic gears, thought he was dealing with a Western-style society where recessions can be turned on and off without major upheavals. By mid-August, he had discovered that Iran lacked the political stability of the West, and that government-engineered recessions could very well arouse working-class protests without alleviating middle-class discontent.

After the Isfahan upheavals, the government braced itself for another cycle of forty-day riots. But before the cycle could begin, the country was shaken by a calamity that dwarfed all previous ones. On August 19, coinciding with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1953 coup, a suspicious fire burned to death over four hundred men, women, and children trapped inside a cinema in the working-class district of Abadan. The government promptly accused the opposition of responsibility, citing the recent mob attacks on movie houses. The opposition, on the other hand, accused SAVAK of arranging a "Reichstag fire," locking the cinema doors, and sabotaging the local fire department. It also noted that demonstrators attacked only cinemas that were empty and specialized in foreign sex films, whereas the Abadan cinema was showing an Iranian film containing veiled criticisms of contemporary society. Whatever the truth, it was clear that the 10,000 relatives who gathered next day for a mass funeral blamed SAVAK. Marching through the city, the mourners shouted: "Burn the shah. End the Pahlevis. Soldiers, you are guiltless. The shah is the guilty one." The correspondent of the *Washington Post* commented that the Abadan demonstration, like the riots of the previous eight months, had one simple message: "The shah must go."[39]

The shah tried to deal with the heightened crisis by giving more concessions to the opposition. This time, the beneficiaries included the moderate secular opposition, especially the National Front. On the anniversary of the Constitutional Revolution, the shah announced that the country would soon have a "Western-styled democracy," and that all parties except the Tudeh would be free to campaign in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. He also amnestied another 261 political prisoners; continued to send arrested demonstrators to civilian courts, where they were invariably acquitted; allowed the press

[39] W. Branigin, "Abadan Mood Turns Sharply against the Shah," *Washington Post*, 26 August 1978.

to carry information on labor disputes and opposition parties; removed military guards from the universities; declared that deputies were free to leave the Resurgence party if they wished; and permitted Derekhshesh and Pezeshkpour to revive their teachers' union and Pan-Iranist party, respectively. What is more, on August 27 the shah replaced Amouzegar with Sharif Emami, who had been premier briefly in 1960, and gave him carte blanche to negotiate with the moderate clergy. Of all the court politicians, Sharif Emami was best suited for this task: he came from a clerical family, maintained friendly ties with some of the high-ranking ayatallahs, and for years had served as host to visiting religious dignitaries from the Arab countries.

Forming a new government, Sharif Emami took immediate steps to woo the religious establishment. He rescinded the imperial calendar; released many of the high-ranking clerics imprisoned since 1975; cut off state subsidies to the Resurgence party; closed down fifty-seven gambling casinos owned by the Pahlevi Foundation; asked the more corrupt members of the royal family to take extended vacations abroad; and, abolishing the post of minister for women's affairs, set up a Ministry of Religious Affairs. Moreover, Sharif Emami started a well-advertised campaign against prominent figures alleged to be Baha'is: Hoveida was removed from his post of court minister; Yazdani, the wealthy entrepreneur, was arrested for grand larceny; and two generals, the shah's personal physician, and the director of Iran Air were purged from their position on the grounds that they were Baha'i.

Sharif Emami's overtures seemed to work. Shari'atmadari announced that the country should give the new premier three months to implement the constitution. And in preparation for 'Ayd-i Fetr (day ending the Ramazan fast), Sharif Emami reached a settlement with Sanjabi, Bazargan, Foruhar, and other opposition leaders. Sharif Emami issued demonstration permits for that day and promised to place the military in the side streets. In return, the opposition leaders agreed to keep to a prescribed route, avoid slogans that attacked the shah personally, marshal the crowds with their own men, and discourage demonstrations on the following days. 'Ayd-i Fetr, which fell on September 4, was celebrated as planned. In almost every town, large crowds gathered for outdoor prayers. In Tehran, over 100,000 converged from the major mosques and Husseiniehs onto the spacious Shahyad Square shouting, "the army is part of the nation"; "free all political prisoners"; "we want Khomeini back"; "brother soldiers, why do you kill your brothers?" In the words of a foreign observer, the vast crowd was friendly and contained incongruous elements: dissident students in jeans, traditional women in chadours, workers in

overalls, merchants in suits, and, most conspicuous of all, bearded mullas in black robes.[40]

'Ayd-i Fetr passed without a hitch, but the following three days saw a drastic deepening of the crisis. Crowds continued to pour into the streets even though the opposition leaders called for restraint and the government banned all outdoor meetings. Moreover, the crowds grew bigger, and by September 7 the demonstration in Tehran attracted more than half a million participants. This was the largest meeting ever held in Iran. Furthermore, the crowds began to raise more radical slogans, shouting "death to the Pahlevis," "the shah is a bastard," "throw out America," "Hussein is our guide, Khomeini is our leader," "independence, freedom, and Islam," and, for the first time in the Tehran streets, "we want an Islamic republic." The radical demand for an Islamic republic had superceded the moderate call for the return of the 1905 constitution.

Convinced that the situation was getting out of hand, the shah tried to act decisively. On the evening of September 7, he forced the cabinet to decree martial law in Tehran and eleven other cities—Karaj, Qum, Tabriz, Mashad, Isfahan, Shiraz, Abadan, Ahwaz, Qazvin, Johram, and Kazerun. This was the first time since 1963 that martial law had been imposed on Tehran. To add bite to the decree, the shah gave the military governorship of the capital to General Oveissi, who, as governor during the riots of 1963, had earned the nickname, "butcher of Iran." The shah also banned all street demonstrations and issued warrants for the arrests of Sanjabi, Bazargan, Foruhar, Moinian, Lahiji, Behazin, Matin-Daftari, and Moqadam Maraghehi.

The inevitable confrontations took place on the following morning, Friday, September 8. The worst clashes occurred in southern Tehran, where the working-class residents set up barricades and threw molotov cocktails at army trucks; and in Jaleh Square at the heart of the bazaari residential areas in eastern Tehran, where some five thousand residents, many of them students, staged a sit-down demonstration.[41] In the southern slums, helicopter gunships were used to dislodge the rebels. According to one European correspondent, these helicopters left a "carnage of destruction."[42] In Jaleh Square, commandos and tanks surrounded the demonstrators, and, unable to persuade them to disperse, shot to kill. In the words of a European correspondent,

[40] "The Shah's Divided Land," *Time*, 18 September 1978.

[41] For detailed eyewitness accounts of the Jaleh Square massacre, see: I. Aminzadeh, "September 8: Day of Martyrdom," *Ittila'at*, 6 September 1979; and "I Witnessed the September 8 Massacre," *Mardom*, 11 February 1980.

[42] J. Gueyras, "Liberalization Is the Main Casualty," *The Guardian*, 17 September 1978.

the scene resembled a firing squad, with troops shooting at a mass of stationary protestors.[43] That night the military authorities announced that the day's casualties totaled 87 dead and 205 wounded. But the opposition declared that the dead numbered more than 4,000 and that as many as 500 had been killed in Jaleh Square alone.

Whatever the true figures, September 8 became known as Black Friday and left a permanent mark on Iran. It placed a sea of blood between the shah and the people. It enflamed public emotions, intensified popular hatred for the regime, and thereby further radicalized the population. It also undermined moderates who called for the 1905 constitution and sought a compromise with the monarchy. In the words of a French journalist, the "biggest casualty of Black Friday was the liberalization program."[44] In short, Black Friday ended the possibility of gradual reform and left the country with two simple choices: a drastic revolution or a military counterrevolution.

Four major reasons explain the failure of the year-old experiment to relax police controls. First, the quarter-century of repression had effectively destroyed all free labor unions, all independent professional associations, and all opposition parties with grass-root organizations. Thus when the shah tried to negotiate with the leaders of the moderate secular opposition, he discovered to his dismay that these leaders had neither the personal following nor the political organizations needed to restrain popular emotions. In short, acute political underdevelopment made it impossible for the shah suddenly to change course and initiate institutional reforms. Second, the sudden change of course coincided with an equally sudden economic recession that produced a mass of indignant unemployed workers. They were indignant not only because of unemployment, poverty, and economic insecurity, but also because of the fifteen years of broken promises. They had first been promised land, then proper wages in agriculture, and finally a decent life in the booming cities. They had received, however, none of these. Not surprisingly, they concluded that they had much to gain and nothing to lose in overthrowing the regime.

Third, the barrage of demonstrations polarized the situation by shifting the arena of politics from the drawing rooms and the negotiating tables to the streets and the slums. Each bullet fired, each dead demonstrator, and each massacre diminished the chances of a negotiated settlement. As one religious leader in Abadan stated after the cinema fire, "the majority of the people are against the shah. He

[43] Quoted ibid.

[44] Ibid.

must go. That is the only thing that will satisfy the people."[45] Finally, Khomeini continued his campaign against the modern-day "Yazid," and rejected any form of compromise with the "devil" who had sold Islam and Iran to the foreigners and whose hands were "seeped in innocent blood." As his proclamation on the eve of ʿAyd-i Fetr declared, it was the duty of all Muslims to stand fast against the regime, reject false promises, win over the troops, and persevere in the struggle until the "looting tyrant" was thrown out of Iran.[46]

Black Friday set off a whirlpool of events. In the afternoon of September 8, Shariʿatmadari gave shelter to Bazargan and five other leaders of the Committee for the Defense of Freedom and Human Rights, and, insisting that his own views did not differ from those of Khomeini, declared that he would not even contemplate negotiating with the government until the constitutional laws were fully implemented. The same evening, the Association of Jurists declared that the martial law decree was illegal, since it did not have the prior approval of the Majles; ʿAli Amini, who had been acting as a go-between for the palace and the opposition, announced that the crisis would not be resolved until the shah resigned; and National Front leaders who had escaped arrest told foreign correspondents that the indiscriminate killings had made reconciliation with the regime impossible.[47]

On September 9, some 700 workers in the Tehran oil refinery went on strike to demand higher wages and protest the imposition of martial law. On September 11, workers in the oil refineries of Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, and Abadan joined the strike. On September 13, cement workers in Tehran struck, calling for better wages, removal of martial law, and freedom for all political prisoners. On September 18, employees of the Central Bank published a list of 177 prominent individuals who they claimed had recently transferred over $2 billion out of the country. The list claimed that Sharif Emami had transferred some $31 million, General Oveissi $15 million, Namazi $9 million, Amouzegar $5 million, General Moqadam $2 million, the mayor of Tehran $6 million, the minister of health $7 million, and the director of the National Iranian Oil Company over $60 million.

The wave of strikes gathered force in the latter half of September. By early October, blue- and white-collar workers demanding political as well as economic concessions had closed down not only many of

[45] W. Branigan, "Abadan Mood Turns Sharply against the Shah," *Washington Post*, 26 August 1978.

[46] R. Khomeini, "Proclamation for *ʿAyd-i Fetr*," *Khabarnameh*, special no. 20 (September 98), pp. 1-2.

[47] Gueyras, "Liberalization is the Main Casualty."

the oil refineries, but also most of the oil fields, the petrochemical complex in Bandar Shahpour, the National Bank, the copper mines near Kerman, and forty other large industrial plants. The strike wave grew even more powerful during the course of the next month, especially after October 6, when Khomeini was forced out of Iraq into Paris, and October 16—the fortieth day after Black Friday—when more blood was shed in the major cities. By the third week of October, a rapid succession of strikes crippled almost all the bazaars, universities, high schools, oil installations, banks, government ministries, post offices, railways, newspapers, customs and port facilities, internal air flights, radio and television stations, state-run hospitals, paper and tobacco plants, textile mills, and other large factories. In effect, the working class had joined the middle classes to bring about a massive and unprecedented general strike. Moreover, the possibility of ending the crises seemed remote as long as the strikers—especially the 5,000 bank clerks, 30,000 oil workers, and 100,000 government employees—coupled their economic demands for higher wages and better fringe benefits with such sweeping political demands as the abolition of SAVAK, the lifting of martial law, the release of all political prisoners, the return of Khomeini, and the end of tyrannical rule. The shah faced not just a general strike but a political general strike.

While strikes crippled the economy, demonstrations continued unabated, spreading from the larger cities to smaller towns such as Sari, Arak, Qazvin, Amol, and Sanandaj. The street disturbances reached a new climax in early November, when troops fired into a crowd of students trying to pull down the shah's statue inside Tehran University. Early next morning, students who had gathered for the funeral of their thirty dead colleagues rampaged through the streets, shouting "death to the shah," attacking banks, luxury hotels, and foreign air line offices, and, after escorting personnel out of a section of the British embassy, burning down that section. Foreign correspondents described it as the "day Tehran burned."

In face of the deepening crisis, the shah vacillated and moved back and forth from one extreme position to another. On one hand, he followed up Black Friday with a series of measures designed to intimidate the opposition. He extended martial law to other cities, ordered the army to take over the major newspapers, locked up National Front leaders, and pressed the Iraqi government first to place Khomeini under house arrest and then to deport him. Similarly, after the street upheavals of early November, the shah replaced Sharif Emami with General Ghulam Reza Azhari, the commander of the Imperial Guard, and gave six ministries to other high-ranking military officers. The new minister of labor, General Oveissi, promptly imposed martial law

on Khuzistan, arrested the strike committee elected by the refinery workers, and threatened to sack oil company employees who did not return to work.

On the other hand, the shah offered an olive branch to the opposition. He amnestied 1,126 political prisoners, including Ayatallah Taleqani, Ayatallah Montazeri, and eight Tudeh members who had been in jail since 1955; ended press censorship and withdrew the military officials from the newspaper offices; arrested 132 former government leaders, including Hoveida and Nasiri; dismissed many of the governors-general; set up a commission to investigate the Pahlevi Foundation; and dissolved the Resurgence party. Ironically, the dissolution of the party that had caused so much discontent passed almost unnoticed. Moreover, he canceled arms contracts totaling $4 billion; gave tax exemptions to low-paid civil servants; and met many of the economic demands made by government employees and industrial workers. Furthermore, he sent the empress on a pilgrimage to Karbala; declared that all exiles, including Khomeini, were free to return home; and announced over national television that he heard his people's "revolutionary message," would hold free elections soon, and would make up for "past mistakes."[48] This erratic swing from one extreme to another led some to conclude that the shah was having a nervous breakdown. Others claimed that he had lost touch with reality because he could not bring himself to read newspapers, which had all dropped his imperial titles and now referred to him simply as "the shah." Yet others argued that he could not make firm decisions because Washington would one day reiterate its commitment to human rights and the next day would stress the need for stability and would reemphasize America's special relations with the shah.[49]

The shah's behavior became even more erratic when the opposition rejected the olive branch. Shari'atmadari announced that negotiations were impossible, since the shah had imposed martial law and formed a military government. Khomeini, from his Paris exile, declared that if the shah had really heard the "revolutionary message" he would promptly abdicate and face an Islamic trial. He also declared that there was no room for compromise, that anyone joining the government would be betraying Islam, and that the public should continue

[48] *New York Times*, 7 November 1978.

[49] When it was later revealed that the shah had cancer, some commentators concluded that he had acted indecisively in 1978 because of the psychological side effects of his anticancer drugs. But as the events of 1951-1953 and 1960-1963 had shown, the shah was capable of acting decisively only when he could fully rely on his army and the United States. Whenever these two factors were missing he vacillated and showed signs of "psychological insecurity."

protesting until the "despicable monarchy" was dumped onto the rubbish heap of history. When European journalists asked what should replace the monarch, Khomeini—for the first time—substituted the term Islamic republic (jumhuri-yi Islami) for his usual answer Islamic government (hukomat-i Islami).[50] He was clearly trying to speak in the language of the secular opposition, especially the militants from the Liberation Movement, National Front, and various student organizations that immediately rallied around him on his arrival in Paris.

In early November, Sanjabi and Bazargan were able to leave Tehran to visit Khomeini. After his audience with Khomeini, Sanjabi declared on behalf of the National Front that "the present monarchy did not fulfill the requirements of the laws and the shari'a because it was tyrannical, corrupt, incapable of resisting foreign pressure, and systematically violated the fundamental laws."[51] He also called for a referendum to establish a "national government based on the principles of Islam, democracy, and national sovereignty." At the same time, Bazargan, on behalf of the Liberation Movement, declared that "the mass demonstrations of the previous year had shown that the people followed Ayatallah Khomeini and that they wanted the monarchy to be replaced by an Islamic system of government."[52] Using slightly different terminology, the secular National Front and the devout but lay Liberation Movement had allied themselves openly with Khomeini. In fact, Sanjabi's and Bazargan's historic pilgrimage to Paris revived the secular-religious alliance that had brought about the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909.

As the opposition leaders cemented their alliances, the struggle in the streets and work places intensified. On November 12, the bazaars, universities, and ministries that had just reopened struck again to protest the arrest of Sanjabi after his return from Paris; they remained on strike until the revolution triumphed. On November 15, violent clashes took place in the Kurdish areas, especially in Mahabad, Kermanshah, and Sanandaj. On November 16, the oil workers returned to work but declared that they would produce only what was required for home consumption and for foreign revenues needed to buy essential goods. As one refinery worker said, there is no need to produce more, since the surplus goes into the "pockets of Ali Baba and his

[50] For Khomeini's pronouncements of October-November 1978, see *Khabarnameh*, special number (November 1978), pp. 1-87.

[51] K. Sanjabi, "Proclamation," *Khabarnameh*, special number 23 (9 November 1978), p. 1.

[52] M. Bazargan, "Proclamation," ibid.

forty thieves."[53] And in the last week of November, violent demonstrations broke out in over fifty towns, including some such as Bandar 'Abbas and Ardakan that had been relatively quiet until then.

Far more violent demonstrations, however, were to take place in December, during Muharram. In anticipation of the holy ten days, Azhari warned that foreign enemies were plotting disturbances, and declared that martial law authorities would strictly enforce night curfew and would not issue any demonstration permits. Shari'atmadari replied that the people did not need government permission to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein and his family. Taleqani asked the faithful to go on rooftops at night and shout "God is Great." The National Front and the Liberation Movement called for a general strike on the first and the last day of the mourning period. And Khomeini exhorted the public to make more sacrifices until blood triumphed over the sword and Islam over the "pagan" Pahlevis. He also exhorted the people to win over the soldiers, and the clergy to go into the villages to convince the peasants that "Islam was against big landlords and big capitalists."[54]

Muharram began on December 2 with three days of violence. In Tehran, hundreds of thousands spent the nights on their rooftops shouting "God is Great," while thousands wearing white shrouds to show their willingness to be killed violated the night curfew and poured into the streets. An estimated seven hundred died. In Qazvin, 135 were killed when tanks rolled over demonstrators. In Mashad, some two hundred—many of them high-school students—were fatally shot when they defied the ban on demonstrations and gathered outside the home of a local religious leader. Similar incidents occurred in many other cities.

Fearful that even worse incidents would occur on Tasua and 'Ahura, the climactic final days of the mourning period, the regime backtracked and sought a settlement similar to that obtained on the eve of 'Ayd-i Fetr. It released Sanjabi, Foruhar, and another 470 political prisoners, allowed religious processions to be held in all the urban centers, and agreed to keep the military and police out of the main streets. In return, the opposition leaders promised to restrain their followers, lead the marches personally, keep to prescribed routes, and avoid direct attacks on the shah. Although some violence broke out

[53] Y. Ibrahim, "Despite Army's Presence Iranian Oil Town Is Challenging the Shah," *New York Times*, 19 November 1978.

[54] R. Khomeini, "Proclamation for Muharram," *Khabarnameh*, special number 24 (27 November 1978), pp. 1-4.

in Isfahan, Hamadan, Mashad, Arak, and Tabriz, the massive demonstrations in the other cities were peaceful. What is more, for the first time these urban rallies drew large numbers of peasants from neighboring villages. In Tehran, the Tasua march was led by Taleqani and Sanjabi, and attracted over half a million people. The ʿAshura march, also led by Taleqani and Sanjabi, was even bigger, lasting a full eight hours and drawing nearly two million people. Although opposition leaders had authorized sixty slogans, none of which attacked the shah, the march marshals were unable to prevent radical groups, particularly the Feda'i, Mujahedin, Tudeh, and the pro-Tudeh Feda'i Munshʿeb, from joining the demonstration with such banners as "death to the shah," "hang the American puppet," and "arms to the people." At Shahyad Square, where the rally ended, the crowd ratified by acclamation a manifesto endorsing Khomeini's leadership and calling for the overthrow of the monarchy, the establishment of an Islamic government, the return of all exiles, the protection of the religious minorities, the revival of agriculture, and the delivery of "social justice" to the deprived masses.[55] The *Washington Post* reported that "the disciplined and well organized march lent considerable weight to the opposition's claim of being an alternative government." The *New York Times* wrote that the two days had one important lesson: "The government was powerless to preserve law and order on its own. It could do so only by standing aside and allowing the religious leaders to take charge. In a way, the opposition has demonstrated that there already is an alternative government." Similarly, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that "a giant wave of humanity swept through the capital declaring louder than any bullet or bomb could the clear message: 'The Shah must go.' "[56]

In the two weeks after ʿAshura, the shah's position deteriorated further. Three factors account for this rapid deterioration. First, the opposition battered away with demonstrations, strikes, and even takeovers of offices and factories. By December 20, street violence was a daily occurrence, with youth gangs—many of them from the slums—setting up barricades, taunting the military, and throwing molotov cocktails at army trucks. And by December 25, a series of general strikes had again brought the whole economy to a grinding halt, and

[55] "Resolution Passed at the *ʿAshura* Rally in Tehran," *Khabarnameh*, special number 26 (15 December 1978), pp. 1-2.

[56] J. Randall, "In Iran, a Throng Votes No," *Washington Post*, 12 December 1978; R. Apple, "Reading Iran's Next Chapter," *New York Times*, 13 December 1978; T. Allway, "Iran Demonstrates," *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 December 1978.

grass-root strike committees had occupied many large factories, government ministries and communication centers. In the oil industry, exports ceased when most of the refinery workers resigned rather than continue producing under the control of the martial-law authorities. As one refinery worker later said, we will export oil only after we have exported the shah and his generals.[57] What is more, the guerrilla organizations, which had been revitalized by the release of the members from prison, carried out a number of armed operations, assassinating an American oil director, blowing up two electrical plants, and bombing the American embassy as well as the Grumman company offices in Isfahan. These attacks prompted many Americans to leave the country.

The second factor that further weakened the shah was the clear sign that the army rank and file, formed entirely of conscripts, was no longer willing to shoot down fellow workers, students, shopkeepers, peddlers, and slum dwellers. The *New York Times* reported that the military had decided to backtrack during Muharram because hundreds of soldiers in Mashad and Qum had deserted, and other conscripts threatened to "follow the orders of religious leaders rather than those of their officers." The *Washington Post* disclosed that in the week after ʿAshura troops in Qum refused to fire on demonstrators, five hundred soldiers and twelve tanks in Tabriz joined the opposition, and three Imperial Guards fired a hail of bullets into their officers' mess hall, killing an unknown number of royalists.[58] Similarly, *Nuyid*, the underground pro-Tudeh newspaper, reported that soldiers in many towns were joining the demonstrators and that garrison troops in Hamadan, Kermanshah, and other provincial cities were secretly distributing weapons to the local population.[59] As one senior general later told a foreign correspondent, the officers could no longer rely on their men and had to do much of the street shooting themselves.[60]

The third factor weakening the regime was Washington's loss of confidence in the shah. Until November, the Carter administration openly supported the shah's efforts to remain in power. For instance, shortly after Black Friday, President Carter wrote to Tehran and reiterated America's support for the shah. After November, however, Carter asked George Ball, a former under secretary of state and liberal critic of the shah, to prepare a report on the Iranian crisis for the

[57] *Iran Times*, 12 January 1979.

[58] R. Apple, "Shah's Army Is Showing Stresses," *New York Times*, 19 December 1978; W. Branigin, "Army Subordination Reported in Iran," *Washington Post*, 19 December 1978.

[59] Cited in "Step by Step toward the Iranian Revolution," *Mardom*, 11 February 1980.

[60] R. Apple, "A Lull in the Battle for Iran," *New York Times*, 3 February 1979.

White House. Not surprisingly, Ball reported that the shah would not survive the crisis unless he took immediate steps to dilute his power and establish a broad-based civilian government.[61] Even a more serious warning was sent to Washington by the French government, which, unlike the CIA, retained an effective intelligence service within Iran. The French reported that the shah could not possibly survive, and that the West could work with Khomeini, since the latter was deeply anticommunist in general and anti-Russian in particular. For his part, Khomeini began a propaganda campaign against the left. He claimed that the Tudeh was cooperating with the shah, accused Marxists of wanting to stab Muslims in the back, and denounced Russia as a greedy superpower.[62] He also declared that once the shah was overthrown Iran would become a reliable oil supplier to the West, would not ally with the East, and would be willing to have friendly relations with the United States.[63]

Responding to the new mood in Washington, in late December the shah began negotiating with Sanjabi and other leaders of the National Front. But these negotiations, which remain shrouded in mystery, soon broke down, probably because Sanjabi refused to head a government of national reconciliation unless the shah agreed to resign as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, leave the country, and remain in exile until a national referendum determined the fate of the monarchy. Sanjabi, the veteran politician who remembered how the shah had used the army to undermine Qavam, Mossadeq, and Amini, was unlikely to accept any settlement that would leave the military under the control of the royal family. The experiences of October 1946, July 1952, August 1953, and July 1962 were forever inscribed in the minds of the National Front leaders. The shah's previous victories were now serving to bring about his final downfall.

Although the veteran members of the opposition were haunted by the past, Bakhtiyar, a younger and less experienced leader of the National Front who feared the clergy more than the military, offered to head a civilian government if the shah merely took a vacation abroad, promised to reign rather than rule, and exiled fourteen die-hard generals, including Oveissi. Grabbing at the offer, on December 30 the shah appointed Bakhtiyar prime minister.

[61] R. Burt, "U.S. Pressing Shah to Compromise," *New York Times*, 16 December 1978; S. Armstrong, "The Fall of the Shah," *Washington Post*, 25-30 October 1980.

[62] *Iran Times*, 20 October 1978; *Washington Post*, 2 January 1979; *Iran Times*, 2 February 1979.

[63] *Washington Post*, 2 and 18 January 1979.

THE FALL OF THE SHAH (JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1979)

Bakhtiyar took office with a series of grand gestures designed to win over the opposition. Appearing on national television with a picture of Mossadeq in the background, he talked of his years in the National Front, announced that the shah would soon take a "vacation," and promised both to lift martial law and to hold free elections. In the following week, he canceled $7 billion worth of arms contracts, stopped the sale of oil to Israel and South Africa, and announced that Iran would withdraw from CENTO and cease to be the policeman of the Persian Gulf. He also arrested a number of former ministers and released more political prisoners; promised to dismantle SAVAK; froze the assets of the Pahlevi Foundation; and, describing Khomeini as the "Gandhi of Iran," announced that he was free to return home. Khomeini, with his strong Islamic convictions and detailed knowledge of modern India, could hardly have been flattered by such a description. Finally, he set up a Regency Council to fulfill the shah's constitutional functions while the monarch took an extended "vacation" in Europe. In making these gestures, Bakhtiyar repeatedly warned that if the opposition sabotaged his efforts to create a constitutional government, the generals would follow the example of Chile and establish a brutally repressive military dictatorship.

The opposition leaders reacted in different ways to Bakhtiyar's solicitations. On one hand, Shari'atmadari and the more moderate religious leaders declared that they would support the new premier and that if his efforts failed the country would fall into the abyss of utter chaos. On the other hand, Sanjabi and Foruhar expelled Bakhtiyar from the National Front, insisting that there would be no peace until the shah abdicated. Meanwhile, Khomeini called for more strikes and demonstrations, declared that any government appointed by the shah was illegal, and warned that obedience to Bakhtiyar was equivalent to obedience to his master—Satan.

Clearly, the militant call of Khomeini and the National Front struck the right chord among the public. The work stoppages, after a brief interval in late December, began anew, causing food and fuel shortages, and paralyzing most of the ministries, bazaars, universities, high schools, oil installations, industrial factories, and transport systems. The daily bonfires and street skirmishes went on unabated, further demoralizing the military and prompting more desertions. What is more, the masses continued to come out in large numbers to demonstrate not only against the shah but also against Bakhtiyar. On January 5, hundreds of thousands marched in the main cities to de-

mand Bakhtiyar's removal. On January 8, equally large crowds, including an estimated half million in Mashad, took part in religious processions mourning those who had been killed in the previous month. On January 13, an estimated two million marched in thirty cities—including Shari'atmadari's hometown Tabriz—to demand Khomeini's return, the shah's abdication, and Bakhtiyar's resignation. On January 16, when the shah flew to Cairo, hundreds of thousands poured into the streets to celebrate the historic occasion and to demand the abolition of the monarchy. On January 19, when Khomeini called for a street "referendum" to determine the fate of both the monarchy and the Bakhtiyar administration, over a million responded in Tehran alone. On January 27-28, twenty-eight people were killed in Tehran protesting the closure of the airport to prevent Khomeini's return. And on February 1, some three million turned out into the streets of Tehran to hail Khomeini's triumphant return. Khomeini, the prophet and strategist of the revolution, had come home to take personal command of his revolution.

When Khomeini returned to claim his revolution, the Pahlevi state had already collapsed. Battered by sixteen months of street clashes, six months of mass rallies, and five months of crippling strikes, the three pillars that held up the state and at one time looked formidable now lay in utter ruins. The armed forces, despite their large numbers and ultrasophisticated weapons, were traumatized by having to go out into the streets day in and day out to shoot down unarmed fellow citizens shouting religious slogans. The vast patronage system was now not a lucrative asset but a political liability. Moreover, the gigantic bureaucracy no longer functioned: the Resurgence party had faded away; former ministers were either in exile or in prison, and current ministers, such as Bakhtiyar, were physically immobilized; and the central as well as the provincial administration had been crippled by large-scale civil service strikes. In fact, by joining the general strikes, the civil servants placed institutional interests behind their class sentiments and proved that they viewed themselves not as clogs in the state machinery but as members of the discontented middle classes. Thus the torrent of middle-class and working-class protests had come together to burst asunder the Pahlevi dam, tearing apart its pillars, and washing away most of its foundations.

As the state disintegrated, power passed into the hands of local ad hoc organizations known as Komitehs (Committees). Many of the Komitehs, especially in the Shi'i Persian-speaking central provinces, were headed by local clergymen who followed Khomeini. For example, in Isfahan Ayatallah Khademi, a ninety-year-old cleric who had opposed the shah since 1949, set up a Komiteh in the last week

of January and controlled much of the city by the first week of February. He was helped by diverse groups: wealthy bazaar merchants provided financial assistance; small shopkeepers volunteered to sell goods to the poor at discount prices; some clergymen opened up their mosques to distribute fuel and food to the needy; other clergymen recruited nearly one thousand young men, most of them from the slums, to form an armed militia that later became known as the revolutionary guards (*pasdaran*); teachers, headed by a junior professor, established a Teachers' Association and organized a parallel militia of some 350 armed volunteers; sympathizers in the military, especially among air force technicians, distributed weapons; devout groups that usually organized Muharram processions now marshaled political demonstrations; and bazaar guilds as well as the many strike committees that had sprung up in the large factories coordinated their activities with the city Komiteh. In effect, the Komiteh ruled the city, distributing food, setting prices, policing the streets, and, most significant of all, reviving the old shari'a-styled courts to enforce law and order.

Whereas in the central cities the Komitehs were controlled by pro-Khomeini clergy, in the outer provinces the situation was much more complex. In Azerbaijan, many of the Komitehs were led by clerics, who although outwardly pro-Khomeini, in fact supported Shari'atmadari. In Kurdistan, local power passed into the hands of town Shawras (Councils) formed of intellectuals from the Kurdish Democratic party and clerical followers of Shaykh 'Ezaldin Husseini, the main religious figure in Mahabad. In the Turkoman areas, Sunni mullas and intellectuals from the recently formed Cultural and Political Society of the Turkoman People established local authorities and encouraged peasants to expropriate lands belonging to the royal family. Similarly, in the Baluchi areas Sunni mullas and university-educated teachers who had created the Islamic Unity party set up their own Komitehs. Finally, in the Arab districts of Khuzistan, power was picked up by the newly created Cultural, Political, and Tribal Organization of the Arab People, and by local clerics who, although predominantly Shi'i, supported not so much Khomeini as their own religious mentor Ayatallah al-Shabir Khaqani. Significantly, many of these ethnic organizations demanded not just an Islamic republic but a democratic Islamic republic, and sought guarantees for the provinces, the non-Shi'i communities, and the linguistic minorities.

On his return to Tehran, Khomeini announced that the demonstrations would continue until Bakhtiyar resigned. He also assigned Bazargan the task of forming a provisional government; set up his own Komiteh near Jaleh Square to coordinate the many local Ko-

mitehs and to dissolve unreliable ones; and even more importantly, appointed a secret Revolutionary Council (Shawra-yi Inqilabi) to negotiate directly with the chiefs of staff, bypassing Bakhtiyar. It was not until a year later that it was revealed that the original members of this Revolutionary Council included Bani Sadr—Khomeini's chief lay adviser from Paris; Bazargan, Yazdi, and Qotbzadeh—the three most influential spokesmen of the Liberation Movement; and Ayatallah Beheshti, Ayatallah Mottaheri, Hojjat al-Islam Rafsanjani, and Hojjat al-Islam Muhammad Bohanar—four former students of Khomeini from Qum.[64]

While the Revolutionary Council was secretly negotiating with the chiefs of staff, the guerrilla organizations and the Tudeh party delivered the regime its coup de grâce.[65] The final drama began in Tehran on the evening of Friday, February 9, when the Imperial Guard tried to crush a mutiny among air force technicians and cadets at a large military base near Jaleh Square. As soon as the fighting started, the guerrilla organizations rushed to help the besieged cadets and technicians. After six hours of intense fighting, the rebels forced the Imperial Guards to withdraw, distributed arms to the local population, set up street barricades, and, in the words of *Le Monde*, converted the district of Jaleh Square into a new "Paris commune."[66]

Early next morning, the guerrillas and the air force rebels drove truck loads of weapons to Tehran University. And helped by hundreds of eager volunteers, they spent the day leading a series of successful assaults on nine police stations and the city's main arms factory. By the end of the day, the city had been flooded with weapons. As one Tehran newspaper observed, "guns were distributed to thousands of people, from ten-year-old children to seventy-year-old pensioners." Similarly, the correspondent of the *New York Times* reported that "for the first time since the political crisis started more than a year ago, thousands of civilians appeared in the streets with machine guns and other weapons."[67]

[64] M. Bohanar, "The Report Card of the Revolutionary Council," *Ittila'at*, 14 September 1980.

[65] The Tudeh party, which for thirty-eight years had opposed armed adventures, changed policy in mid-January 1979. Convening an emergency meeting in Eastern Europe, the Central Committee elected Kianouri, the leader of the party's left wing, as its First Secretary, and, arguing that the objective situation was ripe for revolution, called upon its members to prepare for an armed uprising. See the editorial in *Mardom*, 6 (February 1979), 1.

[66] P. Balta and D. Pouchin, "L'Action décisive des groupes de guerilla," *Le Monde*, 13 February 1979.

[67] *Kayhan*, 11 February 1979; Y. Ibrahim, "Scores Dead in Iran," *New York Times*, 11 February 1979.

The fighting reached a climax the following day, Sunday, February 11. Helped by thousands of armed volunteers, the four main guerrilla organizations, the Tudeh, and defectors from the military mounted successful assaults on more police armories, on the barracks of the Imperial Guards, on Evin prison—the notorious SAVAK interrogation center—on the military academy, and on the main army garrison, which they found completely unguarded. At 2 P.M., the chief of general staff announced that the military would not take sides in the struggle between Bakhtiyar and the Revolutionary Council. And at 6 P.M., the city's radio station declared: "This is the voice of Tehran, the voice of true Iran, the voice of the revolution." The two days of intense fighting had brought the Islamic revolution to completion and the 2,500-year monarchy to utter destruction.

Conclusion

Those intellectuals who say that the clergy should leave politics and go back to the mosque speak on behalf of Satan.

—Ayatallah Khomeini, "Speech to University Students," *Ittila'at*, 22 September 1979

Twentieth-century Iran has experienced two major revolutions—that of 1905-1909 and of 1977-1979. The first saw the triumph, albeit brief, of the modern intelligentsia, who, inspired by such Western ideologies as nationalism, liberalism, and socialism, drafted a predominantly secular constitution and hoped to recreate their society in the image of contemporary Europe. The second revolution, on the other hand, has brought to the fore the traditional 'ulama, who, inspired by the "golden age" of Islam, have sealed their victory by drawing up a thoroughly clerical constitution, replacing the state judiciary with shari'a courts, and denouncing Western concepts such as democracy as heretical. In fact, the Islamic Revolution is unique in the annals of modern world history in that it brought to power not a new social group equipped with political parties and secular ideologies, but a traditional clergy armed with mosque pulpits and claiming the divine right to supervise all temporal authorities, even the country's highest elected representatives.

The paradox is compounded by the fact that in the intervening period between the Constitutional Revolution and the Islamic Revolution Iran underwent a major socioeconomic transformation. The processes of urbanization and industrialization, the expansion of the educational and communication systems, and the creation of a centralized bureaucratic state all served to swell the ranks of the modern classes, especially the intelligentsia and the industrial proletariat, and to reduce the relative size of the traditional classes, notably the bazaar petit bourgeoisie and its clerical allies. What is more, the same socioeconomic changes on the one hand undermined patrimonial ties between traditional patrons and their clients, and on the other hand

strengthened class consciousness among the modern sectors of the population—especially among the intelligentsia and the urban proletariat. In short, the horizontal ties of class tended to supplant the vertical sentiments of clan, tribe, sect, and locality.

The paradox is further compounded by the fact that in 1941-1953—the only extensive period in recent history in which Iran has enjoyed an open political system—it was not the clergy but the intelligentsia that organized the masses against the power structure. In sharp contrast to the 'ulama, who confined themselves to their bazaar strongholds, the secular organizations—first the Tudeh and later the National Front—went into the public arena and successfully mobilized the discontented classes, particularly the urban wage earners and the salaried middle class. In effect, what inspired the discontented masses during 1941-1953 was not Islam but socialism and secular nationalism.

The prominent role played by Islam in the 1977-1979 revolution not only creates a paradox in Iranian history, but also seems at first glance to debunk the generally held notion that modernization brings secularization, and that urbanization strengthens the modern classes at the expense of the traditional ones. Thus the observer is confronted with two interrelated questions: how can the paradox be explained? and does the Islamic Revolution destroy the conventional theory that modernization inevitably helps secularization? The same questions can be posed in another way: why did the 1977-1979 revolution, whose content was predominantly social, economic, and political, take an ideological form that was undoubtedly religious? And are the factors that gave the revolution its Islamic form temporary or permanent?

These questions cannot be answered without taking into account the decisive role played by Khomeini. In fact, Khomeini is to the Islamic Revolution what Lenin was to the Bolshevik, Mao to the Chinese, and Castro to the Cuban revolutions. Two factors explain Khomeini's decisive role and widespread popularity. The first was his personality, especially his simple way of life and his refusal to compromise with the "satanic tyrant." In a country in which most politicians lived in luxury, Khomeini led a life as austere as that of a Sufi mystic, and as devoid of material oppulence as that of the common people. In an environment in which political leaders were wheeler-dealers, influence peddlers, and incorrigible nepotists, Khomeini adamantly rejected compromise, even when compromise seemed expedient; insisted that he would execute his own children if they deserved such punishment; and acted like a "man of God" who sought not worldly power but spiritual authority. Similarly, in a decade notorious for cynical, bland, corrupt, defeatist, and inconsistent politicians, Khomeini appeared to be thoroughly sincere, defiant, dynamic, consistent, and, most im-

portant of all, incorruptible. In brief, he was a charismatic revolutionary leader at a time when such leaders were in short supply and in great demand.

The second factor that explains Khomeini's prominence is his astuteness, in particular his ability to rally behind him a wide spectrum of political and social forces. In his fifteen years of exile, he carefully avoided making public pronouncements, especially written ones, on issues that would alienate segments of the opposition—issues such as land reform, clerical power, and sexual equality. Instead, he hammered the regime on topics that outraged all sectors of the opposition: the concessions granted to the West, the tacit alliance with Israel, the wasteful expenditures on arms, the rampant corruption in high places, the decay of agriculture, the rise in the cost of living, the housing shortage and the sprawling slums, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the suppression of newspapers and political parties, the creation of a vast bureaucratic state, and the gross violations of the constitutional laws. In denouncing the regime, Khomeini promised to liberate the country from foreign domination; extend freedom to all political parties, even "atheistic" ones; guarantee the rights of all religious minorities, except those of the "heretical" Baha'is; and bring social justice to all, particularly to the bazaaris, the intelligentsia (*rushanfekran*), the peasantry (*dehqanan*), and, most mentioned of all, the dispossessed masses (*mostazafin*). These promises, especially the populist and anti-imperialist themes, succeeded in winning over a wide range of political forces, from the followers of the late Ayatallah Kashani and remnants of the Feda'iyan-i Islam at one end of the spectrum, to the Liberation Movement and the National Front at the center, and to the Tudeh, Mujahedin, and the Marxist Feda'i at the other end of the spectrum.

Even more important, by vigorously championing a multitude of popular grievances, Khomeini won over diverse social groups, each of which saw in him their long-awaited savior. To the petty bourgeoisie, he was not only the sworn enemy of the dictatorship but also the guardian of private property, of traditional values, and of the hard-pressed bazaars. To the intelligentsia, he appeared, despite his clerical garb, to be a militant nationalist who would complete Mossadeq's mission of liberating the country from the twin burdens of foreign imperialism and domestic fascism. To the urban workers, he was a man of the people, eager to enforce social justice, redistribute wealth, and transfer power from the rich to the poor. To the rural masses, he was the man who would bring land, water, electricity, roads, schools, and health clinics—the material goods the White Revolution had failed to deliver. And to all, he appeared to embody the spirit of the Constitutional Revolution and to rekindle the hopes the earlier revolution had raised but failed to realize.

The backbone of Khomeini's movement, however, was the traditional middle class, especially the bazaaris and the clergy. He won their staunch allegiance in part because he spoke their language; in part because he appeared to personify the virtues of Imam 'Ali—courage, honesty, and political astuteness; and in part because the regime, by declaring war on the bazaars and the religious establishment, had driven the moderate opposition and even the apolitical clergy into his arms. The only sectors of the society still independent of the state, the bazaars and the religious establishment provided Khomeini not only with generous financial support but also with a nationwide organizational network. In short, by the eve of the revolution the state had shattered all political parties and silenced their main organs; but it had not yet taken over the bazaars, the mosques, and their pulpits. It was therefore not surprising that the bazaar became the focal point of the revolution.

Whereas the traditional middle class provided the opposition with a nationwide organization, it was the modern middle class that sparked off the revolution, fueled it, and struck the final blows. Lawyers, judges, and intellectuals began the campaign to publish open letters and form human rights associations. University students started the street demonstrations. White-collar workers, especially bank clerks, civil servants, and customs officials, crippled the economy. Finally, guerrilla fighters, most of whom were college students, brought the revolution to a successful completion.

Why was the modern middle class, which in the past had deeply distrusted the clergy, willing to follow Khomeini? There were three reasons. First, the shah refused to negotiate with the secular opposition, notably the National Front and the Liberation Movement, until December 1978. But by then the revolutionary movement had turned into a vast torrent that threatened to wash away not only the regime but also any politician suicidal enough to latch onto the shah. Second, Khomeini made timely statements to woo the secular opposition and to assure all that the autocracy would not be superseded by a theocracy. For example, the day after Black Friday, Khomeini warned that the shah planned to grind into dust not only the 'ulama but also the intelligentsia (*rushanfekran*) and the honest politicians (*siyasiun*).[1] In November, he told the press that the future government would be

[1] R. Khomeini, "Proclamation," *Khabarnameh*, special number 21 (9 September 1978), p. 1.

"democratic" as well as Islamic.[2] Also in November, he solicited help from "all organizations,"[3] and assured the public that neither he nor his clerical supporters harbored any secret desire to "rule" the country.[4] In December, he declared that in an Islamic society women would be able to vote and have the same rights as men.[5] And in January 1979, he proclaimed that the constitution of the Islamic republic would be drafted by a "freely elected Constituent Assembly."[6] Not surprisingly, intellectuals well versed in the history of the Constitutional Revolution tended to see Khomeini not as another "reactionary" Shaykh Fazallah Nouri—whom he admired for rejecting Western systems of government—but as another "progressive" Ayatallah Tabatabai or Behbehani—whom he despised for being "led astray" by Westernized politicians.

The third reason for Khomeini's success among the modern middle class was the phenomenal popularity of Shari'ati among the young intelligentsia. Although Shari'ati's works contain a great deal of anticlericalism, Khomeini was able to win over his followers by being forthright in his denunciations of the monarchy; by refusing to join fellow theologians in criticizing the Husseinieh-i Ershad; by openly attacking the apolitical and the proregime 'ulama; by stressing such themes as revolution, anti-imperialism, and the radical message of Muharram; and by incorporating into his public declarations such "Fanonist" terms as "the mostazafin will inherit the earth," "the country needs a cultural revolution," and the "people will dump the exploiters onto the garbage heap of history." By late 1978, such was Khomeini's popularity among Shari'ati supporters that it was they—not the clergy—who took the somewhat blasphemous step of endowing him with the title of Imam, a title that in the past Shi'i Iranians had reserved for the Twelve Holy Imams. Lacking both the theological concerns of the 'ulama and the sociological sophistication of their late mentor, Shari'ati's followers argued that Khomeini was not just an ordinary ayatallah but a charismatic Imam who would carry through the revolution and lead the community (*Ummat*) toward the long-awaited classless society (*Nezam-i Towhid*). After the 1905-1909 revolution, the 'ulama had protested that they had been fooled by the

[2] Committee to End U.S. Intervention in Iran, *Excerpts from Ayatallah Khomeini's Interviews* (Mountview, Cal., 1978), p. 14.

[3] Quoted in *Iran Times*, 24 November 1978.

[4] Committee to End U.S. Intervention in Iran, *Excerpts*, p. 14-15.

[5] Ibid., p. 19.

[6] R. Khomeini, "Proclamation," *Khabarnameh*, special number 27 (17 January 1979), p. 1.

intelligentsia. After the 1977-1979 revolution, it was the intelligentsia who claimed to have been fooled by the 'ulama.

If the two middle classes were the main bulwarks of the revolution, the urban working class was its chief battering ram. Oil workers pushed the state to the verge of bankruptcy. Transport and factory workers brought industry to a halt. Moreover, slum dwellers provided much of the youth that defiantly challenged the military authorities, many of the martyrs that died in the major massacres, and the bulk of the vast crowds that tenaciously marched in the streets.

A combination of elements helps explain why Khomeini managed to mobilize the urban wage earners. First, his promise to bring social justice contrasted sharply with the regime's inability to satisfy the public's rising expectations. Second, the regime, despite its distrust of the high-ranking 'ulama, had not tried to prevent the low-ranking mullas from working among the urban poor, organizing passion plays, funeral ceremonies, flagellation processions, and neighborhood prayer meetings. As one Majles deputy told a foreign social psychologist in 1973, religious ceremonies, especially Muharram plays, were politically useful in that they channeled social frustrations away from communism into harmless directions.[7] By 1978, no doubt, the same deputy would have discovered that the former part of his argument contained some truth, but the latter part of the argument was thoroughly unsound. Whatever the merits of the argument, however, it was clear that the religious networks in the shanty towns provided the clerical opposition with the means not only of disseminating information but also of organizing demonstrations and distributing food, fuel, and even clothing.

Third, religion provided the slum population with a much-needed sense of community and social solidarity—something they had lost when they left their tightly knit villages for the anomic atmosphere of the sprawling new shanty towns. As one American anthropologist discovered in the early 1970s, when comparing a stable village with a new urban slum, where the villagers took religion with a grain of salt and even ridiculed visiting preachers, the slum dwellers, who were all recently dispossessed peasants—used religion as a substitute for their lost communities, oriented social life around the mosque, and accepted with zeal the teachings of the local mulla.[8] In much the same way as early industrialization helped the growth of the Methodist movement in England, so the haphazard urbanization of the 1970s

[7] M. Good "Social Hierarchy and Social Change in a Provincial Iranian Town" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1976), p. 231.

[8] Goodell, "The Elementary Structures of Political Life" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1977), pp. 426-84.

strengthened the popular roots of the Iranian clergy. Thus, paradoxically, modernization helped bolster a traditional group.

The fourth element explaining Khomeini's success among the urban working class was the vacuum created by the regime when it systematically destroyed all secular opposition parties. Whereas the clergy were permitted to go to the poor, the opposition parties were constantly prevented from establishing any form of labor unions, local clubs, or neighborhood organizations. Twenty-five years of repression placed a heavy handicap on the secular opposition. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the clergy, who could speak in the language of the masses and portray Khomeini as an Imam Hussein willing to sacrifice himself and his family for the holy cause, the intellectuals leading the political parties were handicapped by the fact that the urban poor viewed them as kravatis (tie-wearers), dawlatis (government officials), and gharbzadehs (blind imitators of the West). Even the term *rushanfekr* (intelligentsia) was sometimes used by the public and the clergy to mean a pampered "egg-head." Thus class consciousness among the poor did undermine the regime but it did not necessarily strengthen the radical intelligentsia. Of the many secular parties active in the last stages of the revolution, only the Tudeh managed to make any inroads into the working class—especially in the textile mills of Isfahan, the oil installations of Khuzistan, and the large industrial plants of Tehran.

Although the revolution was predominantly urban, this did not mean that Khomeini had no impact on the rural masses. On the contrary, as the revolution unfolded and as Muharram of 1978 approached, many clergymen heeded Khomeini's call to go into the countryside to mobilize the rural population. Ironically, their task was made easier by the socioeconomic changes of the previous era—especially those of the White Revolution. For these changes had freed the peasants and tribesmen from the tight control of their landlords and tribal chiefs, placed the countryside in direct confrontation with the state, drawn the villages into closer commercial contact with the towns, and transformed the rural mullas from spokesmen of the large magnates into allies of the bazaar petit bourgeoisie. In the era after the Constitutional Revolution, clerical power had been restricted not only by the urban intelligentsia but also by the rural magnates who could shepherd their peasants, tribesmen, and household clients into the polling booths. After the Islamic Revolution, however, the clergy had the field to themselves, since recent socioeconomic developments had dissolved the traditional ties between rural magnates and their clients, between landlords and their peasants, and between tribal chiefs and their tribesmen. Again modernization had played the ironic role of strengthening the traditional ʿulama. It is significant that in 1979 Khomeini faced major difficulties mostly in the backward Turkoman, Baluchi, and Kurdish areas where local khans, as well as Sunni mullas and radical intellectuals, were able to establish their own ethnic organizations.

It is thus a combination of permanent and temporary forces that have brought the clergy to power. The permanent ones include the Shiʿi culture of the urban masses, the historic links between the bazaars and the religious establishment, and the recent socioeconomic changes that have swept away the powerful tribal chiefs, the large landlords, and the other rural magnates. It should be remembered, however, that during the 1940s the same popular culture did not prevent the Tudeh from mobilizing the urban working class, including the bazaar wage earners. It should also be noted that although Iran will never again see tribal chiefs and rural magnates marching into power—as they did in 1909—the possibility still exists that in future nonclerical groups will be able to mobilize the rural masses. Modernization has struck a death blow to the tribal magnates and the large landlords; it has not given the clergy permanent control over the tribal and peasant populations.

The temporary factors that account for clerical ascendency include the charismatic personality of Khomeini, the intense aversion felt by the public for the shah, and the organizational handicaps that the regime had for a quarter of a century placed on the secular political parties. The clergy are unlikely to produce another Khomeini. For, while some of his disciples have his revolutionary credentials and others have his political astuteness, none combines both to be able to emerge as a successful revolutionary leader. Similarly, the clergy are unlikely to find another public enemy as unpopular as the shah against whom they can rally the whole population—unless, of course, a foreign enemy invades the country and threatens the existence of the entire nation. Finally, the clergy will gradually lose their organizational monopoly once the secular forces catch their breath and start establishing roots among the discontented classes, especially among the intelligentsia, the urban proletariat, and the rural lower classes. But whether it will be the older organizations, notably the Tudeh and the National Front, or those of more recent origin, such as the Feda'i and the Mujahedin, or even elements within the shattered military, that will attract the discontented classes is a question left to posterity.