

ARTICLES.

■ KHOMEINI CRACKS DOWN

Making Iran Safe
For Theocracy

KAI BIRD

The Iranian revolution has been a disappointment to many of the same people who only three months ago were marching in the streets of Teheran under the banner of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. And it is not only the secularists who object to what is generally perceived as a rightward drift in the infant Islamic Republic. Even those youthful political activists in the religious camp, particularly the Moslem progressive followers of the late Dr. Ali Shariati, have become disillusioned. In their eyes, Khomeini has already squandered a valuable popular consensus by his willful intervention in political decisions properly reserved for the Provisional Government of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan.

Any number of instances can be cited—but none is more ominous than Khomeini's interference in the writing of a new Constitution. First he delayed the publication of a Constitution drafted by a committee of five jurists led by lawyer Abdul-Karim Lahiji. Then Khomeini personally rewrote portions of the document, allegedly to grant the office of the Presidency stronger executive authority at the expense of the elected Parliament. What is more, Khomeini reportedly scrawled in the margins of the Constitution a note that "neither leftists nor rightists" will be eligible as candidates for the 300-member Parliament.

If Khomeini's version of the Constitution is ratified, he and his closest advisers, a clique of ideological conservatives led by Foreign Minister Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi, broadcast chief Sadegh Ghotbzadeh and economist Hassan Bani Sadr, will have succeeded in excluding the democratic left from the political arena. Elections for a constituent assembly to ratify the new Constitution have been repeatedly promised by Prime Minister Bazargan's spokesman. But in an interview with *The Nation*, broadcast chief Ghotbzadeh said that the Central Revolutionary Council might dispense with constituent assembly elections and simply submit the Constitution to a national referendum. If this happens, the left will have no opportunity to amend a Constitution that tightens Khomeini's monopoly of political power.

Critics of the new regime can cite any number of other ill omens. A secret revolutionary tribunal has

executed some 200 alleged collaborators with the Pahlavi regime. Iranian feminists have been beaten in the streets while they were protesting Khomeini's retrograde views on wearing the chador. National minorities such as the Kurds, the Turks, the Turkomans and the Baluchis, which constitute nearly 60 percent of Iran's population, have been told that their traditional demands for internal autonomy will continue to be denied under an Islamic Republic. Clashes between Kurds and Government militia have taken hundreds of lives. Similar clashes occurred when Turkoman peasants attempted to seize ancestral lands now owned by retired Persian army officers. Khomeini's armed revolutionary komitehs (committees) intervened against the peasantry and then blamed the incident on the Marxist-Leninist Fedayeen guerrilla group. The Government-controlled radio and television broadcast only those views approved by the still secret Central Revolutionary Council appointed by Khomeini. Some of the newspapers are self-censored by joint komitehs of editors and mullahs (clerics). Newspapers that are still free—such as the mildly left-wing *Ayandegan*—are the targets of hostile mobs led by mullahs.

These eruptions of authoritarianism all have their origin in the ideological conflict between Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan's Provisional Government and the shadow Government of Khomeini's revolutionary komitehs. The Western press has almost exclusively portrayed the deep-seated ideological dispute as a simple difference between religious and secular partisans. Its fascination with the religious cast of this revolution has caused it to ignore the strong hopes for radical economic reform that the overthrow of the Shah's regime aroused among the country's impoverished majority. The slum dwellers of South Teheran may speak the language of religion, but they are quite obviously not about to be satisfied with promises of eternal salvation.

Already there are rumblings of significant left dissent—witness the recent demonstration by more than 50,000 people in Teheran on behalf of the liberal Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani. In fact, nearly all of the postrevolutionary conflicts to date can be attributed to Khomeini's exclusion of socialists, even Islamic socialists, from his network of revolutionary komitehs. "Everyone we sent to the komitehs was denied membership," says Hedayatallah Matin-daftari, the leader of the socialist National Democratic Front and a grandson of Mohammed Mossadegh. "This is only one indication of how well organized are the rightist forces in the revolution."

With the exception of those in the factories, the oil fields or other work sites, the revolutionary komitehs are all organized out of local mosques. Hundreds of these neighborhood komitehs filled the power vacuum in the waning days of the Shah's Government. When the terminal upheavals convulsed the streets of Teheran from February 10 through February 12, people freely entered the abandoned police stations and army barracks. Tens of thousands of American

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and Israeli machine guns were passed out to neighbors gathered in their local mosques. In most cases the arms were registered by a mullah and their owners given a komiteh identification card—complete with a photograph.

The komiteh system in the city of Kharaj, twenty miles outside Teheran, may be typical. A city of several hundred thousand, Kharaj is today ruled by a central komiteh with some 100 members. The executive komiteh numbers nine men, five of whom are mullahs. Its members were elected from dozens of neighborhood komitehs informally centered in local mosques. The chairman of Kharaj's executive komiteh is the city's leading mullah, and he receives his instructions from Khomeini through the Ayatollah's chief political aide, Dr. Ibrahim Yazdi. There are no workers represented on the executive komiteh; in fact, when workers from the nearby Paykan auto assembly factory petitioned to have one of their number represented on the executive komiteh, the Government intervened to prevent the nomination. "If you were to ask our mullah who represents workers on the executive komiteh," says one disgruntled komiteh member, "he would answer, 'It is I.'"

In the early months after the revolution, the 100-member central komiteh administered municipal affairs in Kharaj. There were sub-komitehs to provide free medical service, supervise the armed "nightwatch" patrols, insure the distribution of food from the private stocks of bazaar merchants and to administer a special strike fund from which grants and loans were allocated to striking factory workers. Funds contributed to the mosque were used to set up special Islamic cooperatives where the poor could buy subsidized necessities.

By the end of March, almost all these activities were being phased out, including the Islamic cooperatives. The armed nightwatch patrols have been incorporated into a national militia called the Guardians of the Revolution. They continued to take their orders from Dr. Yazdi even after he was appointed Foreign Minister.

Only the nine-member executive komiteh will remain to supervise a town council and the *firmandhar* (mayor) appointed from Teheran. Thus, political power is very quickly becoming centralized; the Shah's old administrative system is simply being staffed with new appointees. The only difference today is that the local governments will be supervised by the religious leadership residing in Qum through a watchdog *shoura* (council). The only opportunity for the left—or any other political group differing from Khomeini—to participate in the political system lies in the town council. And yet even here, Khomeini's new Constitution may prevent them from contesting these elections.

The left's exclusion to date from the real source of political power, which remains in the komiteh system, provides a revealing insight into who has benefited economically from this revolution. Khomeini

Coming Next Week

Christopher Hitchens on the British Elections

may have mobilized an entire nation against the Shah, but it is very definitely the *bazaarii* (bazaar merchants) who have reaped immediate material gains from the revolution. An illustration: a few weeks after the Shah's overthrow, Khomeini issued an edict forbidding the sale of frozen meat. He was quoted on the national radio as saying that frozen meat imported from Europe and Australia had not been butchered according to Islamic law. The price of meat doubled overnight, and some \$60 million worth of stored frozen meat was ordered dumped. Bazargan reportedly rushed to Qum and told Khomeini that if he did not rescind his edict, the country, and particularly the poor, would run short of meat. Bazargan prevailed, but in the meantime, local butchers in the bazaar made considerable profits.

The frozen meat business in Teheran had previously been a monopoly of the Shah's brother, and as meat consumption rose in recent years, frozen meat became popular, taking business away from the *bazaarii* butchers who imported live cattle from Turkey and Afghanistan. There are countless similar stories of the nouveau-riche businessmen under the Pahlavis engaging in lucrative import-export ventures that had progressively elbowed out the traditional merchant class in Teheran's downtown bazaar.

The *bazaarii* are determined to regain their share of the economic pie, which explains why the new regime quickly raised tariffs to protect local industry and trade and came down hard on business ventures dominated by foreigners. Last month, for instance, Khomeini banned further imports of fruits and automobiles.

This alliance between the *bazaarii* and the religious leadership could strongly influence the new Government's economic policies. "Land reform is not a priority," says Hassan Bani Sadr, Khomeini's outspoken economic theoretician. Instead, imports of luxury goods will be curtailed while local industry will be encouraged. The construction of high-class luxury apartment complexes in North Teheran will decline, but eventually the tens of thousands of currently unemployed construction workers will be put back to work on middle-class and low-income housing in South Teheran—bordering on the central bazaar.

These are all basic reforms aimed at eliminating the flagrant graft engendered by the Shah's reliance on foreigners. There is a need for investment policies that give priority to Iranian capabilities. "The Shah wasted so much," says one Teheran businessman, "not the least of which was our own talent. When he built a modern highway through downtown Teheran, he insisted on giving the contract to a Belgian firm. He didn't think we could do the job."

It is precisely this renascent nationalism that binds the old *bazaarii* class to the religious camp at the mo-

ment. The Iranian revolution was, among other things, an anti-colonial revolt, a political coup against a despotic ruler universally perceived as an agent of the Americans. Now that national sovereignty has been restored, economic demands are welling up into the political arena, creating class tensions and eroding Khomeini's revolutionary consensus, a national unity he fervently believes was bought with the blood of 20,000 martyrs. In Khomeini's Islamic Republic, those who challenge that consensus set themselves against the religious community.

Khomeini's own Shi'ite world view has no frame of reference that tolerates dissent. There is a deep contradiction here between Khomeini's theocratic state and the Shi'ite tradition of protest against unjust authority. "For 1,200 years the mullahs have held secular leaders as usurpers of their legitimate temporal powers," says Parviz Owsia, a prominent Teheran lawyer. "The mullahs have always been the dissenters, the martyred ones struggling on behalf of the poor masses against the authorities. But now, in an Islamic Republic, the mullahs will have so implicated themselves with the Government that political opposition becomes anti-Islamic. The traditional channels for dissent have been eliminated."

There are, indeed, some *mujtahids* (religious scholars) who recognize this contradiction and privately protest that only Allah himself can institute a true Islamic Republic—much in the same manner that Orthodox Hasidic rabbis in Israel today refuse to acknowledge the Jewish state. Ayatollah Haj Zayed Reza Nanjani, who as a young man studied with Khomeini under the same tutor and played an important role in Mehdi Bazargan's National Liberation Movement, is said by some to have serious doubts about Khomeini's day-to-day involvement in political affairs. Ayatollah Kazem Shariat-Madari, 82, reportedly has similar reservations.

It is therefore not inconceivable that Khomeini may have already overplayed his hand. It must be remembered that the hierarchy of ayatollahs is largely derived from personal popularity. Khomeini's successful leadership of the revolution against the Shah has gained him a certain inviolability to criticism. But he has already lost considerable support in Teheran by his policy of exclusion of the democratic left. And as unsettled economic conditions breed discontent among the people, as they inevitably will, Khomeini's political authority will become less sacrosanct.

The youthful followers of the late Dr. Ali Shariati, a Paris-educated theologian whose vision of a radical, socialist reformation of Islam galvanized so much of the Shah's opposition, are now emerging as the strongest potential opposition to Khomeini. Posters of Shariati can be seen in the streets of Teheran almost as frequently as those of Khomeini. The most popular of Shariati's lectures, tape-recorded on cassettes and sold by sidewalk vendors, are those in



DRAWINGS BY PETER STEINER

which the theologian warns against the establishment of an Islamic Republic dominated by a reactionary Moslem clergy. Even more disturbing are the reports that the recent assassinations of two of Khomeini's associates, Ayatollah Morteza Motahari and Gen. Vali Ullah Gharani, were carried out by extremist followers of Shariati protesting what they called "a dictatorship of mullahs."

Other signs of discord are visible among urban workers with economic grievances. Unemployed construction workers were recently promised unemployment compensation of more than \$128 per month after hundreds held a hunger strike outside the Ministry of Labor. The auto factory workers are still pressing their demands for worker management. "I am not in favor of worker interference in management affairs," says Minister of Labor Daryush Faroohar, complaining about auto workers who have shut out their managers. He adds, "But legitimate trade union activities should be protected." Sources in the national railway workers' komiteh, which represents more than 40,000 employees, predict a wave of strikes within six months unless their demands for self-management and equalization of pay scales are met.

The Iranian revolution has soured the hopes of many who expected so much more in the way of radical economic reforms and a genuinely indigenous, albeit Islamic, democracy. That the leading actors turn out to be flirting with the authoritarian ways of the Pahlevis can only arouse disappointment, but there are other, more democratic actors waiting in the wings. And they have witnessed a revolution that felled a hitherto unchallenged dictatorship. That momentous precedent will not soon be forgotten. □

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