

## New UIC(S) Document

# On Khomeini's Reactionary Class Character

The following is an excerpt of a pamphlet called "With the Weapon of Criticism — A Summation of the UIC's Past," by the Union of Iranian Communists (Sarbedaran). The UIC(S) has added the introduction and comments noted in brackets to the original text. — AWTW.

The foreword says: "This document covers the majority of the internal debates of the UIC(S) in the reorganisation period following the enemy's major attack and the organisation's disintegration . . . It sums up and synthesizes the UIC's experience in the 1979 uprising and its aftermath. This study reveals how, when a communist force not only departs from the universal science of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, but completely refrains from applying it, that force can lose sight of its basic tasks and to a great degree lose historic opportunities.

"The effective and sincere participation of other forces of the international communist movement in

the development of this critical summation adds to its importance and value. The genuine revolutionary communists in every corner of the world correctly look at the experience of defeat of the communists in Iran as their own. The lost opportunities in Iran, and the emerging ones, were and are opportunities for developing and advancing the world proletarian revolution. Thus, the revolutionary proletariat, regardless of 'national boundaries,' participated in this process of summation and rose to its proletarian internationalist tasks."

The major parts of this summation pivot around the UIC's line and views in the period of the 1979 revolution and the tumultuous years following it, up until 1981; the major questions dealt with are: state power, proletarian internationalism, the question of the party, the line of the UIC in advancing revolution, the land-peasant question, Kurdistan, the Iran-Iraq war, and the trial of a group of the leaders, cadres and members of the UIC in 1982. The final part deals with the

rupture that the revolutionary communists of the UIC made with the right opportunist line, a critical summation of the military line and weaknesses of Sarbedaran, the reorganisation of the UIC and its 4th congress (in 1983), and a conclusion.

In the section on the rebellion against the right opportunist line it is stated that this was not something accidental but had roots in the history of the UIC: "...The UIC was a product of the rebellion of the communists against Soviet revisionism and of the Cultural Revolution itself. Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, in the past, determined the direction of our theory and practice..."

The section on the military line of the Sarbedaran (armed detachment of the UIC when it initiated armed struggle in mid 1981) reaffirms the centrality of Mao's line on proletarian warfare — specifically people's war — in charting and carrying out a correct strategy for the victory of the revolution in Iran. It critically sums up the Sarbedaran's line in this regard: "What was prominent in

the military line of Sarbedaran was that it lacked clarity and was eclectic . . . Thus spontaneity was a strong aspect of it; a general military line had not been developed and it was not clear what position each armed action, culminating in the Amol uprising, occupied in an overall plan, and how they served its advance."

"From the start, the strategy of Sarbedaran was not based on protracted war and there was no clear grasp of the protracted nature of the armed struggle under the leadership of the proletariat in the oppressed countries." It is said that this was, of course, an ill left over from the UIC's departure from Mao Tsetung Thought, but it also was a reflection of the fact that the rupture had just started and was not yet thoroughgoing and had not yet penetrated into the military line, which to a certain degree could be expected. For the political line struggle to manifest itself in the military sphere required specific struggle.

The conclusion calls upon all those genuine communists who are still committed to revolution and to the teachings of the great leaders of the proletariat to rise up to the urgent task of forming the "revolutionary communist party of Iran based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung. It should be clear for them — and obvious by now — that the defence of Mao Tsetung and his pathbreaking Thought has been and still is the central question for the advance of the communist movement in the past ten years."

The section reprinted here centres around the UIC's previous assessment of the class nature of Khomeini. The UIC called him and the forces around him the "traditional petite bourgeoisie." In the central organ of the UIC — *Haghighat* — this was explained as follows:

"...primarily composed of small shopkeepers, artisans and craftsmen whose outlook is therefore somewhat narrow. It is the section of the population which is the mass base of Ayatollah Khomeini and is deeply influenced by religious sentiments and backward prejudices. It also has ties with small landowners and thus with the feudal system and can co-exist with feudal-

ism. It is on the one hand anti-imperialist, but because of its feudal ties it can quickly become a tool in the hands of internal reaction against the landless peasants and also urban workers." (*Haghighat*, March 1980, "The Iranian Revolution and Political Developments".)

Furthermore the UIC stated, "the regime which came to power after the overthrow of the royal court, is not and cannot be a regime suitable for U.S. imperialism. Because of its particular class character and position and because of the participation of different class forces in it, this regime is unable and unwilling to solve the fundamental problems of the revolution. Considering its previously mentioned class composition, it is also not a representative of imperialist interests, especially those of U.S. imperialism." (A Report from the 3rd Congress of the UIC — Spring 1980)

"From what has been said however, we can't conclude that the contradictions of our society or their manifestations have changed. Or that revolution will continue in the same form as in the past, only directed against new representatives of the same old system, or that this is already the case. The reason is that in fact, sections of the ruling class show conditional cooperation and alignment, or potential for alignment, with the people against imperialism and reaction. Therefore, it is the duty of communists, in the course of supporting and developing all the genuine struggles of the people of Iran, to establish a correct relationship between these struggles and the positions which must be taken towards different sections of the ruling forces." (Ibid.)

The current UIC(S) pamphlet points out, in a section which precedes the excerpt to follow, that:

"Who were these forces? What made this regime not representative of imperialist interests and particularly U.S. imperialist interests? The UIC analysed three basic forces in the government: 1) representatives of the old exploitative classes, of the comprador and big landlord classes, 2) the national bourgeoisie, and 3) the traditional petite bourgeoisie. The compradors

and big landlords — the representatives of the old Pahlavi alignment of forces — were considered the main target of the revolution. At the same time, the UIC's line was relatively "hard" on the national bourgeoisie, emphasizing their conciliatory nature, that its 'right wing' had already solidly allied itself with the comprador and big landlord classes. The third force was personified by Khomeini, an animal of a different nature, analysed as a representative of the 'traditional petite bourgeoisie.'

"This was fundamentally wrong, and reflected right opportunism on the question of the state and the united front. The presence of the 'traditional petite bourgeoisie' in the government did not in the least mean that there was an anti-imperialist or genuine 'people's aspect' to the government that Khomeini headed which *could not be relied on in any strategic or even short term sense by the masses*. His popularity, an extremely important element of Iran's political terrain in the wake of the February revolution, could in no way be counted on as a factor for carrying through the revolution or even to hold off the onslaught of reaction but in fact *had to be understood as primarily a problem for the revolutionary proletariat*. The UIC tailed Khomeini miserably in the anti-imperialist tasks of the revolution. In tailing the mass anti-imperialist upsurge which was mainly led by Khomeini, the UIC lost sight of not only the long-term interests of the proletariat (viewing the anti-imperialist, democratic stage as a stage toward the socialist revolution and as a component part of the international proletariat's historic struggle for communism), but also ended by metaphysically separating the key democratic tasks of the revolution from the anti-imperialist tasks.

"Our analysis of Khomeini's class nature before his ascent to power, and especially once he established his regime, was fundamentally wrong. Of course, this was not the pivot of the UIC's deviations on the revolutionary road forward in Iran. Even if Khomeini were a representative of the

traditional petite bourgeoisie (which he was not), the criticisms enumerated above [in this pamphlet] on the political-ideological line of the UIC, still hold. But addressing this question is an important vehicle for examining the complexities of the Iranian political terrain as the revolutionary crisis matured and unfolded, and for touching on some important questions of political economy and overall methodology in regard to which the UIC made mistakes, questions important for the entire international communist movement.”

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The analysis of Khomeini as a representative of the traditional petite bourgeoisie rested on three factors: 1) That he had a large and loyal base among that class. 2) As a cleric, he had been identified with the less propertied and less powerful of the Islamic clergy (mullahs who in their economic position were petit bourgeois) as opposed to those clerics who owned or controlled large tracts of land or were close cronies of the Pahlavi court. 3) Most importantly, he was analysed as a “traditional petit-bourgeois,” which, supposedly, explained on the one hand his militancy and “antagonism” with the U.S. and the Pahlavi regime and, on the other hand, his backwardness, characteristic of the traditional petite bourgeoisie, and hence his undeniable reactionary edge.

In fact all three of these criteria — especially the third one — should have been assessed differently. First, Khomeini was not a representative of the traditional petite bourgeoisie, but of the “traditional clergy” whose relationship to the array of social classes involved in the revolution was more to the point. As the crisis matured and the downfall of the regime became imminent — as well as after his rise to power — Khomeini concentrated the interests of those feudals and compradors in sharp conflict with the U.S. and especially with the existence — and further retention — of the monarchy in particular. This does not mean that the revolution in Iran was a sham, or reducible in any way to a power struggle be-

tween equally reactionary cliques. On the contrary, the February revolution was a genuine revolutionary crisis and upheaval that led to the overthrow of the puppet regime of the Shah and struck a heavy blow especially at U.S. imperialism. Overthrowing the monarchy at that time was definitely in the interests of the proletariat and the masses. While pointing out that the fundamental tasks of the democratic anti-imperialist revolution were not realised with the overthrow of the Shah, the UIC tended to reduce the struggle to a handful of old U.S.-backed reactionaries, calling for exposing, isolating and smashing them. In other words, the UIC tended to view the advancement or completion of this stage as primarily a quantitative question in an almost linear process.

Corresponding to this tendency, the UIC correctly saw the Pahlavi regime as representing and concentrating the interests of imperialism and reaction, but incorrectly treated it as if it were oppressive, parasitic and external to the fundamental contradiction of Iranian society. That is, there was a strong tendency in the organisation to reduce the economic basis for the current crisis in Iran to the “contradiction between a thwarted domestic Iranian capitalist economy and backward semi-feudal relations propped up by imperialism” (all this personified in the Shah), with this “contradiction being compounded and fueled by imperialist plunder and by the crisis of imperialism in the mid-1970s.”

In the article, “The Iranian Revolution and Its Political Development,” it reads:

“1976-77 saw the onset of the revolutionary crisis which erupted into big battles of the revolution in late 1977-early 1978. But in the final analysis, this crisis was the manifestation of a hard and crushing clash between the rapid development of Iranian capitalism and the rotten, bankrupt and decayed semifeudal relations of our society, which within the framework of dependence on imperialism in our country — which hinders and sabotages this development — reached the point of early and extreme intensification.

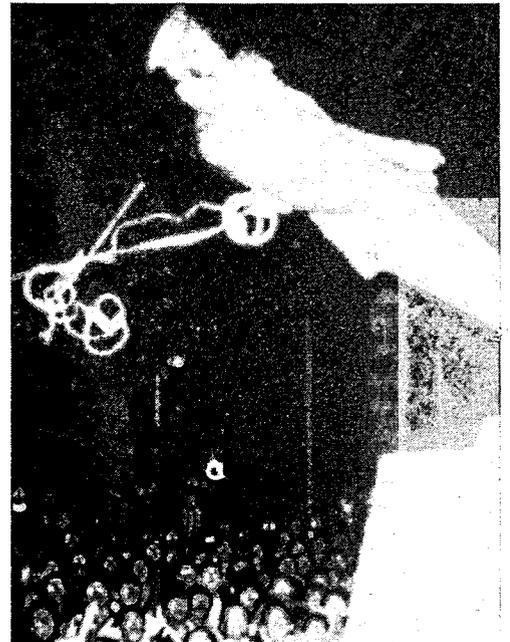
“The economic crisis of Iranian capitalism, which was connected with the assault of imperialist capital and commodities on Iran’s market and the dominance of big dependent enterprises over small and medium ones in the field of production and distribution, aggravated the fundamental contradiction in society.” (*Haghighat* No. 27, page 1)

In this analysis, the character of the economic crisis which racked Iran is defined as ultimately a manifestation of the contradiction between nascent (and thwarted) domestic capital and semifeudal relations within the framework of dependence on imperialism<sup>1</sup>. Instead, the economic basis for the crisis which racked Iran was the qualitative sharpening of the contradictions of the accumulation process of imperialist capital, which, with regard to Iran was manifested as a qualitative sharpening of the contradiction between imperialism and an oppressed nation. The UIC underestimated the degree to which the economies of the oppressed nations have been integrated into the overall dynamic of world imperialist accumulation and overlooked the depth and scope of the relations of structural dependency between imperialism and the dependent countries. This is the key in the shaping up of the production relations internal to these societies. The UIC did not recognise that while imperialism props up and utilises — actually integrates — backward semifeudal relations in the process of accumulation, it also can and must develop the productive forces in these countries (often in “breakneck” and “reckless” ways, like forcing huge dislocations of the rural population); and it does so on the basis of the needs of the accumulation of imperialist capital, in contradiction to both the welfare of the broad masses of these countries and the development of articulated national economies<sup>2</sup>. The exigencies of imperialist capital totally distort and severely disarticulate the economies of these countries (in which one finds the development of huge concentrated modern enterprises side by side with very backward modes, both dominated by imperialist



finance capital and both a source of superprofits for the imperialists), which decisively keeps these oppressed countries off any path resembling independent capitalist development. All this further intensifies the basic contradictions of imperialist accumulation, creating a situation that can and does literally blow up in their face.

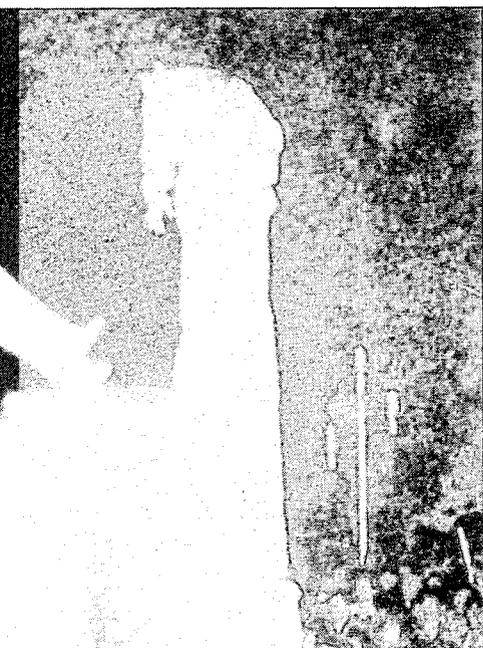
Such a situation produces very favourable material conditions for advancing the interests of the proletariat and the oppressed masses. But it also produces conditions where a complex of various forces



*Iranian youth making Molotov cocktails by the barricades during the revolutionary upsurge that led to the overthrow of the Shah.*



and classes will undoubtedly enter into the fray. It is actually not a particularly new phenomenon that obscurantists and fundamentally reactionary forces would rise up in opposition to imperialism.<sup>3</sup> In 1920, in "Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions," Lenin called for "...the need to combat Pan Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the position of the khans, landowners, mullahs, etc." (Lenin *Collected*



*Works*, vol. 31, p.149)

But what was actually quite "new" in the February revolution was how these forces rose to the head of an actual country-wide, mass revolutionary upsurge (in alliance with other bourgeois forces), toppled the central government and the existing alignment of pro-imperialist forces and consolidated their dominant position in the government. These forces established a state in the form of a theocracy, which had a comprador economic base and, on the basis of the needs of the new rulers, had forms and trappings of *shariat* (Islamic law); and in a limited period Khomeini's state tried to make Western imperialism, particularly the U.S., understand what

its relation to this "Islamic Kingdom" was to be. This had nothing to do with Khomeini being a "representative of the traditional petite bourgeoisie," but had everything to do with the various necessities imposed on the imperialists by the revolutionary crisis in Iran (or the imperialist system's failures), especially the sharpening contention between the two imperialist blocs.

Why forces such as Khomeini came to the head of the revolutionary movement was itself a product of a number of important political factors. But it also had its material underpinnings in the depth of the crisis racking Iran, the ramifications and results overall of its disarticulated and distorted economy resulting from imperialism's penetration and domination of Iran as well as specifically the major, but partial transformations brought about by imperialism. That is, major transformations took place in Iran in relation to industry and agriculture. But these transformations were incomplete, they did not thoroughly uproot old relations. Thus, aspects of semifeudal relations were preserved while at the same time other elements of semifeudal relations were being undermined. Alongside these transformations in industry and agriculture were the phenomenon of "Pahlavisation," the concentrating of land and comprador wealth in the hands of the royal court's narrow clique with a bloated and very centralised state apparatus developed to ensure its supreme authority (and protect and promote the overall political interests of especially U.S. imperialism in Iran and this region of the world). All this meant that the Pahlavi regime was extremely oppressive not only to the vast majority of the toiling masses, but also to many strata including sections which had high economic positions or positions of authority and were from the "privileged" strata (of compradors and big landowners). It was the exigencies of imperialist accumulation that had in part displaced these strata or limited their power. And given the overall crisis faced by imperialism and its

particularly acute impact on Iran at that time, these forces could no longer be contained and were drawn into the political scene and the fight for power. Thus in the ranks of those who rose up to overthrow the Shah, alignments took place with forces that were undoubtedly targets or major obstacles to the masses in carrying through the anti-imperialist, democratic revolution — although for that limited period, they were not the immediate target of revolution. This is not a unique phenomenon in history. Such was the case in the anti-Japanese period in the Chinese revolution. Another example, in some ways more analogous to Iran, is the example of the overthrow of the Somoza regime in Nicaragua. Various class forces, including some representing the compradors, rose in opposition to Somoza. Today many of these compradors are with the "contras." The Sandinistas — "Fedayin"-type forces — in Nicaragua, backed by the Soviets, have become the new compradors in command of the regime; Khomeini actually represents an Iranian equivalent more approximating the above mentioned "contras"; even in the high tide of revolution Khomeini did not represent petit bourgeois forces, such as those who have become the new compradors in Nicaragua. These contradictions among the reactionary forces are not surprising; they arise all the time, and should not be identified with contradictions between imperialism and the popular classes.

It is true that Khomeini's mass base was among elements of the "traditional petite bourgeoisie" as well as other sections of the population, but this does not mean Khomeini in power played the role of or represented the petite bourgeoisie. To equate mass base and class character would mean to contend that any political figure with a base among a section of the masses was the political representative of those masses. Even given Khomeini's broad popularity and strong support among the "traditional petit bourgeoisie," defining him as a representative of at least a significant section of the traditional clergy is different than the label of "tradi-

tional petit bourgeois.”

Historically the Islamic clergy were tied to and served the feudal base and superstructure of Iran. Even under the Pahlavi regime, the clergy as an institution (as opposed to individual or particular groups of clergy) represented the dominant class relations and served important elements of semifeudal as well as bourgeois and comprador bourgeois relations. Significant traditional privileges of the clerics [such as control over the educational and legal system] had been undermined by imperialism, especially through the much touted “Westernisation” of Iran during the regimes of the Pahlavi family. But overall, until the early 1960s, they remained a prosperous and influential group. Their religious institutions — from mosques, to shrines, to religious schools, to Islamic relief loans [to support the clergy and enable them to distribute alms to the destitute] were maintained through the mandatory religious tax on wealthy devotees (especially on the wealthier merchants and traders of the bazaar, landlords and others) and through *Moghoofat*, the religious endowments [large tracts of land owned or controlled by high ranking clerics]. Prior to the 1960s the traditional clergy’s authority had been undercut and reduced by the regime. There were sharp conflicts; but this institution as a whole (not simply that section most directly tied to the royal court or those clerics with government-appointed local positions etc.) was used in the service of reaction to help maintain the status quo vis-a-vis the oppressed. Sections of the traditional clergy most certainly had strong ties with the strata that could be described as the smaller bourgeoisie and “traditional petite bourgeoisie,” along with landlords, etc., and in a sense these clergy even “served” the interests of (and were supported by) these strata. But what the UIC tended to ignore was that this “service” remained in the context of and ultimately served the dominant social relations. While in terms of class position narrowly defined — economic status, family origins — sections of clergy could be described as “petit bourgeois,” this status had

little to do with their social role and what class relations the traditional clergy as an institution represented and served. Focusing on the economic status of the “poorer” mullah, with whom Khomeini most identified, was engaging in vulgar economic analysis and ignoring the superstructure and politics overall.

In the 1960s the regime again came into sharp conflict with important sections of the clergy as well as many other sections of Iranian society. This had everything to do with the exigencies of the “White Revolution” and other imperialist-imposed transformations in Iran. These transformations and the political measures taken to bring them into being (such as the dissolving of Parliament, the enfranchisement of women, etc.) gave rise to great turmoil and political upheaval. Many popular strata took the political stage in opposition to the regime in this period; but part of what set this stage was turmoil and contradiction among essentially reactionary classes in the face of these measures. While most of the largest landlords who initially opposed the land reform ended up being “won over” or neutralised, largely by bringing them more directly into the comprador class, etc., many landlords, due to their weaker political and economic authority, were basically cast aside. The traditional authority structure in much of the Iranian countryside began to be replaced by new rural authorities more directly backed by the regime, displacing from positions of authority and privilege many elements linked to semifeudal relations.

Furthermore, many measures were taken by the Shah which were directly aimed at undermining the traditional religious authority in Iran [for example, major religious endowments were taken over and directly administered by the regime] and measures such as the enfranchisement of women indirectly adversely affected this traditional authority. Throughout his reign, the Shah continued his direct and indirect assault on this religious authority structure, especially in the wake of the 1960s upheaval [e.g. in 1971 he set up his own alternative

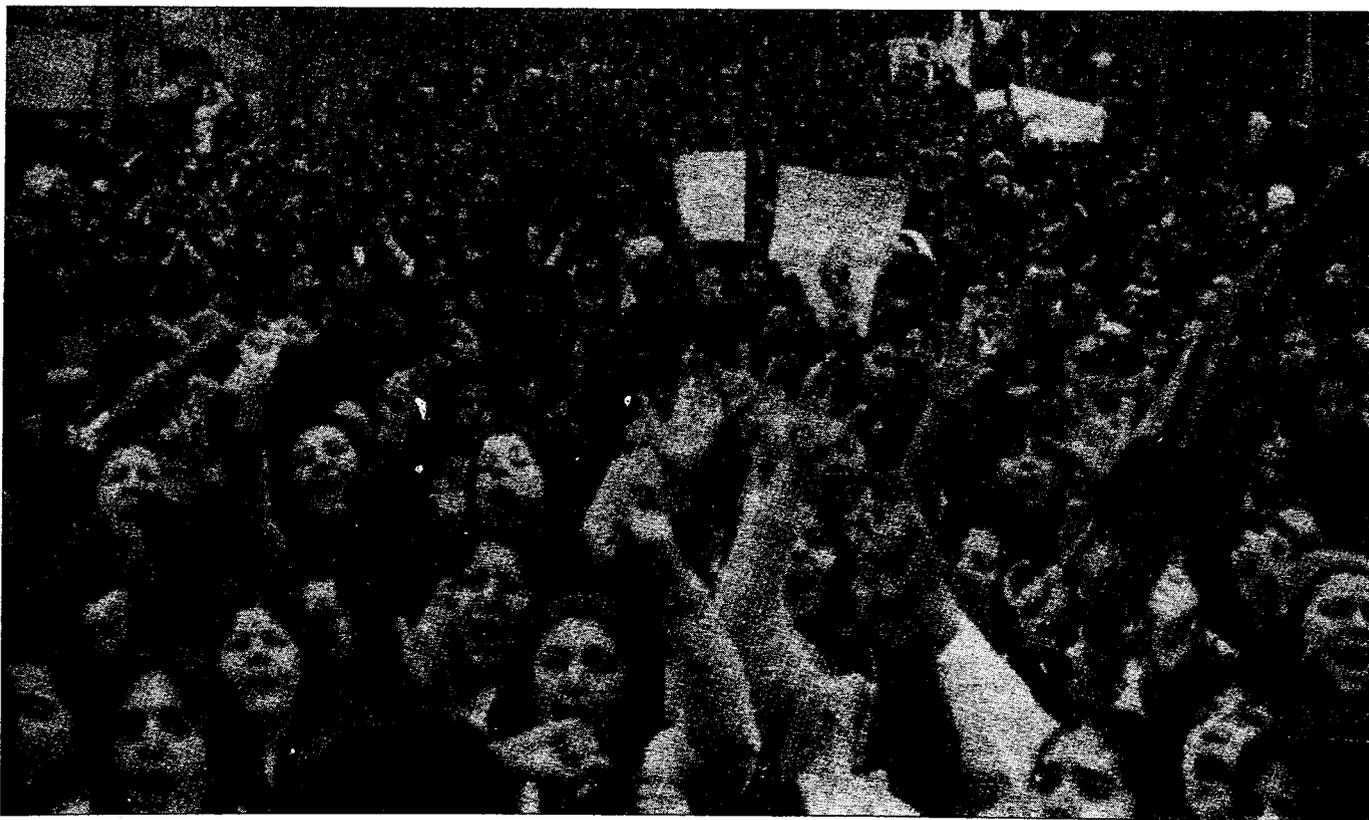
rural religious corps dubbed the “mullahs of modernisation”; the Shah’s celebration and promotion of Iran’s “Persian” as opposed to “Islamic” heritage, etc.]. The emergence of Khomeini as a significant figure on the Iranian political terrain in this period [1960s] was a product of these imperialist transformations and a reaction to the political measures which followed them.

Evaluating Khomeini as a representative of the mullahs serving comprador and semi-feudal relations (this is way before the seizure of power by them) is not mainly based on the fact that he was a high-ranking cleric [Ayatollah] but on the actual content of his programme, which calls for an Islamic Republic and for the establishment of a theocracy for the strengthening and entrenchment of the traditional clergy in government and society, as well as on who rallied to this programme. His programme was nothing more than a clerical version of bureaucrat capitalism.<sup>4</sup>

The point is not that Khomeini’s contradictions with and opposition to the U.S. and the Pahlavi regime in particular was simply demagogery. But it is a fact of history that imperialism had actually undermined large and significant sections of “traditional reactionary forces in Iran.” And as things developed to a head in Iran, a broad array of reactionaries joined the tide of opposition to the Shah to “save” Iran — to restore order and revive their lost positions — and the Islamic banner and Islamic law and order became the vehicle with which to accomplish this.

We have thus far discussed the overall foundations concerning the material basis for the emergence of the likes of Khomeini [and for his “anti-imperialism” as well as his large mass base]. There were also three very important political factors that played a role in his gaining prominence in the revolution:

1) These traditional clerics not only were organised (and rapidly organised in the wake of the maturing of the revolutionary crisis) but since the 1960s and especially with the beginning of the crisis that led to the 1979 uprising, they promoted



8 March 1979. Women were a crucial part of the revolutionary upsurge, and they were one of the first targets Khomeini chose in his clampdown on revolution.

their programme. This also took organisational expression [the role of the mosques for example in the uprisings, but also the aforementioned "charity work" by the high-ranking urban mullahs, the formation of Islamic guild associations, etc.] Khomeini's strong mass influence was also related to some of the specific hallmarks of the Shah's rule, i.e. his attacks on the traditional Islamic culture of Iran and the undermining of traditional religious authority. Consequently there was also a spontaneous pull among many popular strata to uphold and embrace Islam since it was "under attack." These forces also formed alliances with even some of the most traditional backward elements. Thus various bourgeois-democratic trends went along with Khomeini helping considerably to pave the political path for his vast popularity.

2) The international proletariat, for many of the reasons outlined in earlier sections, was extremely weak, exerting neither a powerful

material force nor a political-ideological influence on the course of Iranian revolution.

3) U.S. imperialism, faced with the revolution, "held back" from the fullest conceivable unleashing of its loyal forces in the military against the revolution in order to avoid risking a situation they could not ultimately contain (in the sense of leaving the situation too wide open for the Soviets or for a more thorough-going rupture to take place). This itself was due to the depth and scope of the crisis.<sup>5</sup>

Comrade Bob Avakian, Chairman of the RCP,USA, correctly sums this question up in his article, "Lessons From Iran on Coming From Behind to Build the Party": "The imperialists themselves took steps to see that the thing (Iranian Revolution) would sort of 'get resolved' to a certain point, in the short run, and also to see that forces that they could both work with and also undermine more easily, put pressure on and hopefully win over or partly win over, would be in the

forefront and would come to power." ("If There is to be a Revolution, There Must be a Revolutionary Party," p. 33 — *AWTW*)

Our organisation faltered in its analysis of Khomeini's relationship to the overall anti-imperialist, democratic revolution. Although it was necessary, at that time, to support and give solidarity to the anti-Shah mass movements he objectively led and it was correct to not make him an immediate target, the UIC actually denied that his programme and line were reactionary. Erroneous interpretations of facts such as Khomeini's vast popularity among the masses, imperialist intrigues and the contradictions between his government and the Western powers, influenced the line and policies of the UIC to the extent that the central task of the proletariat — seizure of political power through violence — was ignored. As a result we were unable to clearly and thoroughly delineate our programme and outlook from that of

all other classes on the political terrain, especially those with power and influence; and thus without building an independent proletarian position we lost the possibility of mobilising the masses under its banner. This sharp deviation in the UIC's approach to the historical mission of communists was not due to a wrong analysis of Khomeini's class position, because even if he really had been the representative of the "traditional petite bourgeoisie" or even more radical sections, this should not have altered our central task. The experience of the Iranian Revolution and the emergence of a phenomenon such as Khomeini at the head of the revolution is only testament to the complexity of the revolutionary process in the imperialist era and also to the importance of the class-conscious proletariat not being swept up by spontaneity at any period or stage. The UIC's tailing of the spontaneity and the leadership of the non-proletarian classes manifested itself in its thesis called the "peeling away process of the ruling power," which was based on "exerting political pressure on the ruling power" in order "to expel its reactionary factions, isolate the capitulationist ones and radicalise the anti-imperialist faction." It was on the basis of this thesis that the UIC engaged in the task of criticising "the vacillations of the anti-imperialist petite bourgeoisie in power" on this and that position and measure and giving advice to the new power-holders. For example, *Haghighat*, in an article on "The Danger of an Imperialist Coup and the Role of the Army in It," wrote: "Communists do not believe that people, groups or social classes have experience in everything from the beginning. They are never opposed to people drawing lessons from their experiences. But does history give us only this lesson? The particularity of communists and the working class is that they draw correct lessons from their own experience and from those of others as well. Because of the different experiences in our country and in others, for example the experiences of the Mossadegh period, of Allende in Chile, of Sukarno in Indonesia,

etc., revolutionaries cried out and are still crying out that these are the kinds of armies that make a coup d'état. It makes no difference whether their names are Islamic, nationalist or anything else. Where were the ears with which to hear these cries? They were busy at the time listening to the nonsense of the liberal bourgeoisie and their tongues were busy excommunicating revolutionaries. Wasn't it this way, Ayatollah Khomeini?" (from the article, "Ayatollah Khomeini, the Clergy and the Experience of Power," *Haghighat* 82).

The above quote is taken from an article whose main content is exposure and criticism of Khomeini (actually fairly rare in the UIC's literature from this period). The UIC here raises the experience of Mossadegh, Chile and Indonesia to criticise the "unwise softness" of Khomeini towards the reactionary organs left over from the Shah's period and point out the danger of a coup by the army. Although the UIC correctly pointed out some historical experiences to learn from, they actually fell down on what is a much more central and fundamental lesson. The road promoted by the UIC was essentially not that different from the grave right opportunist errors of the leadership of the Communist Party of Indonesia. Although the UIC did not promote peaceful transition or parliamentarianism, this opportunist policy revealed its particular form in a more covered way as a capitulationist approach towards state power. The UIC called upon the masses to wage struggle and maintain their revolutionary vigilance in order to encourage or force the government (or a "section" of the government) to act in the "people's" or the "nation's" interests! While this model did not stink of the putridness of the parliamentary road (though this might have had to do with the fact that there wasn't much "parliamentary" about Khomeini), it indeed spread the same identical bourgeois-democratic illusions about the nature of the state, that it somehow could represent (in the short run) both the masses and reaction, skirting the issue that the state represents social

relations and is the instrument of class dictatorship. What was identical between the Communist Party of Indonesia's line and the line promoted by our organisation at that period was eclecticism on the question of the armed overthrow of the state machinery and the necessary establishment of the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry to suppress all reactionary classes. It is not as if the UIC failed to mention the "need" ultimately of proletarian rule or leadership, but at the same time it promoted the illusion that there could be some type of phase in the process of revolution, when it would not be possible to determine the class nature of the state.<sup>6</sup>

Our organisation ignored the fact that one either unleashes revolution against the existing property and social relations or turns into the enforcer and ultimately the inheritor of those relations. Instead the UIC turned to repeatedly arguing that the stage of revolution is democratic and that there is the necessity for the proletariat to "share political power with other classes." The UIC repeated the fact that, in the anti-imperialist, democratic stage of revolution the proletariat, in a way, can "share power" with other classes — even at times with bourgeois forces — but ignored the fundamental point in this relation, i.e. that it must be on the basis of proletarian leadership. The UIC ignored that the struggle around this — who will lead whom — is a decisive one, and will actually go on fiercely and at times be bloody. Instead it reduced this struggle to the level of some ultimately peaceful criticisms.

From the UIC's point of view the new democratic dictatorship was not a form of the dictatorship of the proletariat; it ignored the fact that if the content of the revolutionary anti-imperialist democratic state is not a dictatorship of the proletariat, then how would the transition to the socialist stage be possible? It ignored the fact that with the bourgeoisie or even the "petite bourgeoisie" at the helm, one has a bourgeois dictatorship; and in actuality it denied that in today's world conditions, any bourgeois

dictatorship is bound to, and does, serve imperialism and reaction. It did not see the fact that Khomeini objectively became the political representative of the existing social relations and dominant comprador relations in Iran immediately after the establishment and consolidation of his government.

To conclude, the UIC, like many others in the history of the ICM, became the tragic example of a communist force that opted for what is called the "will of the people" at a time when revolutionary opportunities emerged. It bowed to ignorance and the influence of alien classes among sections of the masses, relinquishing its "revolutionary birthright" — leadership of the revolution. The UIC had been caught in a logic which based itself on distortions of Mao's teachings on the question of the united front; the only thing that the UIC had understood from these teachings had been reduced to this phrase: "the proletariat unites all who can be united including the patriotic bourgeoisie (and at times, even the reactionary elements) in the democratic anti-imperialist stage of the revolution." On the contrary, Mao's contribution on the national and colonial question lies more in the theory and practice of how the proletariat can lead and transform a revolution in which various forces, including bourgeois, are bound to participate, towards its own class interests. Refraining from making conscious efforts to build and implement proletarian leadership cannot result in anything but tailing the alien classes in practice and policies. And it did not have any other result for our organisation.

#### Footnotes

1. This understanding was based, to a great degree, on the Comintern's Theory of General Crisis — especially "Theory of Stagnation" — "imperialism neither can, nor wants to develop capitalism and the extraction of imperialist superprofit was dependent upon thwarting the development of capitalism in its dependent countries." While the UIC's analysis was very mechanical and nonscientific and was not based on a correct understanding of the workings of the imperialist system and its relations with dependent countries, it was also an expression of a bourgeois democratic and nationalist tendency of a Marxist-Leninist force in an

oppressed country — a tendency which influenced various movements and Marxist-Leninist forces in these countries.

2. This analysis is different from the incorrect understanding of the relations between oppressed and oppressor nations in the epoch of imperialism, which is propagated under the name of "Dependency Theory"; this widespread understanding denies the fact that the structural relations between imperialism and the oppressed nations is a production relation; instead dependency theory reduces this relation to one of plunder in the sphere of circulation.

3. [Though Khomeini's call for actually establishing a central government run by clerics, a full theocracy is somewhat unique.]

4. It was this programme that Khomeini first began to articulate in the 1940s — at that time without insinuating the elimination of the monarchy — and which he developed more fully in the 1960s. Its political thrust was rather easily embraced by a political party, the IRP, headed by well-known clerical representatives of the compradors, feudals, etc. [A great number of clergy, especially among the clerical hierarchy, gave tacit and some even quite strong support to the Shah until his downfall was imminent, and then largely — with some exceptions such as Shariatmadari — threw their support behind Khomeini. Khomeini actually stood out among the clerics in being the first to put forward a programme of theocracy, that is, actual rule by clerics. Khomeini spent a great deal of his major written work of the 1960s (Islamic Government) polemicising against the traditional Shiite interpretation of Islam — that a "divine government" was an impossibility until the "hidden Imam" revealed himself back on the earth.]

5. More than once, while in exile and at crucial junctures in the upsurge that built up to the revolution, Khomeini called on the masses to halt the uprising. Is it possible that Khomeini, if he had been able to demonstrate his control over the mass upsurge, was prepared to step into government short of a revolution, if the imperialists had allowed him to based on such a show of strength and control over the masses? This of course has to remain speculation since the actual turn of events did not allow him to put on such a display. Things had gone "too far" and the masses did not heed his suggestions to hold back. After all, immediately after the seizure of power by the Khomeini forces, while many of the forces closest and most loyal to the Pahlavi regime were imprisoned, executed or forced into exile, vigorous efforts were started by the new rulers, led by Khomeini, to save the reactionary state machinery; the royal army was "exonerated," many of its commanders reappointed, its bureaucracy left untouched. Many organs of the government were left untouched. New ministries were set up with representatives of the reactionary classes appointed to head them; generous amnesty was given to ex-SAVAK forces and these criminals were appointed the same tasks in new offices, this time reorganising SAVAK under its new name called SAVAMA. The masses were immediately disarmed ...

6. [Although the UIC sometimes discussed the question of "power" in its publications, seldom did it put forward the question of the

revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry. The omission of "dictatorship" went along with making allowances not to "offend" democratic, or possibly Islamic, sensibilities. One either unleashes revolution against existing property and social relations, or else one becomes the inheritors and enforcers of them. History has shown that the proletariat cannot rely on "potential allies" now in the government, no matter how "anti-imperialist" their intentions or how "popular" they might be, to dismantle the reactionary state machinery or somehow "rise above" the reactionary state and social relations that they have become part of to advance the interests of the people. Even genuine representatives of the revolutionary proletariat — as was the case for a while with the PKI in Indonesia — cannot "rise above" the class character of the state apparatus they have "joined," they cannot "share power" with representatives of the comprador and landlord classes, join the reactionary bourgeois state apparatus and try to "strengthen" the "positive aspect" to overcome the "reactionary aspect." This is true even if it is the case that the forces who seize state power are not the ex-comprador landlords, but revolutionary democrats — at times with "Marxist" covering. In keeping the same state apparatus and sitting on top of the same reactionary property and social relations they become the new reactionary classes serving and strengthening the old order, including through annihilation and slaughter of the genuine revolutionaries. Attempts to carry out the above discussed erroneous policy by the genuine representatives of the proletariat are not possible without departing from the fundamental interests of the proletariat and the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought.

A similar correct approach must be taken towards the "anti-imperialist" fronts. As it is correctly formulated in the *Declaration of the RIM*: "The key to carrying out a new democratic revolution is the independent role of the proletariat and its ability, through its Marxist-Leninist party, to establish its hegemony in the revolutionary struggle. Experience has shown again and again that even when a section of the national bourgeoisie joins the revolutionary movement, it will not and cannot lead a new democratic revolution, to say nothing of carrying this revolution through to completion. Similarly, history demonstrates the bankruptcy of an 'anti-imperialist front' (or similar 'revolutionary front') which is not led by a Marxist-Leninist party, even when such a front or forces within it adopt a 'Marxist' (actually pseudo-Marxist) colouration. While such revolutionary formations have led heroic struggles and even delivered powerful blows to the imperialists they have been proven to be ideologically and organisationally incapable of resisting imperialist and bourgeois influences. Even where such forces have seized power they have been incapable of carrying through a thorough-going revolutionary transformation of society and end up, sooner or later, being overthrown by the imperialists or themselves becoming a new reactionary ruling power in league with imperialists." □