

Inside the Revolutionary War in Kurdistan

During a recent trip to Iran, our correspondent traveled to Kurdistan in mid-May to report on the development of the Kurdish people's struggle which has erupted into full-scale revolutionary war. This trip took him within range of the fighting with government forces around Baneh; he also had the opportunity to conduct interviews with Sheik Ezzedin Hosseini, a respected leader of the Kurdish struggle (see page 2 of this section), and with several of the political organizations that are playing a leading role in Kurdistan today.

A brilliant white light, like a gigantic star, shot into the midnight darkness, throwing a pale glow over the surround-

ing countryside, and outlining the hills that lay directly in front of us. "Phantom! Phantom!" one of the Peshmergas whispered. The mini-bus stopped as everyone listened intently. After a moment, we continued as we had come for the last 4 hours, headlights off, down a rough dirt road. It was 1 a.m., and we were heading for the Kurdish city of Baneh, a town of some 15,000 near the Iraqi border in western Iran.

I had just come from Buchan, another Kurdish town 60 miles north and east. The fighting had not yet reached Buchan, so I hitched a ride with ten Peshmergas from the Revolutionary Organization of the Oppressed and Toiling Masses of Kurdistan—better known as Komoleh—and set out for

Baneh and the reality of the fighting in Kurdistan.

None of the Peshmergas spoke much English, and I didn't speak much Kurdish; but we managed to communicate by singing revolutionary songs and the *Internationale* to each other as the mini-bus lurched along. These Peshmergas—literally "those ready to die for their freedom"—were the front-line fighters in this war of liberation, and their spirits were high. Some looked young and fresh-faced, with glasses that made them look like college freshmen; others were older, in their 40s, with the rough faces and stubbled-beards that are the sign of combat-hardened veterans. But no one seemed to care about such superficialities; all were in the

struggle together.

As we got closer to Baneh, communication would have been nice. Another light exploded in the sky. "Rafti!" followed by "Phantom" were the only words I could make out. But the light didn't move. How could it be a Phantom jet? (Later I found out that the U.S.-built Phantoms of the Iranian air force sometimes dropped flares so they could pick out targets—like buses—on the ground. When the Peshmergas saw flares, they stopped to listen for the noise of a jet engine to determine whether they were from a Phantom or simply had been shot off from the ground.)

Suddenly the top of the hill in front of us was consumed in a white flash and a thunderous roar. "Aresh, aresh!" (the army), one said pointing to the right of the hill. "Khomeini!" Gunfire clattered as 50-calibre machine gun tracer bullets—looking like little red tail lights—flitted across our path. The Peshmergas were calm through all the shooting. They exuded the air of having been through this many times, knowing what was going on and how to deal—very scientifically—with it all. Since they didn't seem overly anxious, I just figured everything must be okay. But there was one thing I didn't need translated—we were entering the heart of the war in Kurdistan.

Within weeks after the toppling of the Shah's regime in February of last year, a series of escalating battles over the control of Kurdistan began between the central government and the Kurds. The fighting reached its height last September and October, when the government sent massive numbers of army troops and Pasdaran (Islamic "revolutionary guards") to "pacify" the area, unleashing vicious attacks on the Kurdish people and their revolutionary organizations. Hundreds of Kurds were killed and dozens of revolutionary fighters executed.

This was one thing the new government was doing that the U.S. imperialists fully agreed with. During the summer when the fighting began, the State Department publicly endorsed the Iranian government's reactionary efforts to "unify the country," and even made a special attempt to speed up shipments of spare parts for the Iranian aircraft that were being used to bomb the Kurds. The spectre of revolutionary turmoil spreading over Iran—and then to Iraq and Turkey and possibly throughout the whole Middle East—was rising to haunt the imperialists.

Instead of a quick victory, the Iranian army was dealt a string of severe political and military defeats. Battered by constant guerrilla attacks and surrounded by a hostile civilian population, the government had little choice but to sign a truce in November. The Kurdish revolutionaries agreed to the ceasefire and to negotiations for their own reasons: in order to keep fighting for their demands politically; to demonstrate to the people of Iran that reactionaries in the central government were responsible for the fighting in Kurdistan; and to prepare for the next round of fighting. On the other hand, with the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran on November 4 and the storm of anti-imperialist struggle it unleashed, the government had its hands full. Under these conditions it became more difficult for them to demagogically claim that the Kurds and the revolutionary Left were "imperialist agents," who had to be



A woman wounded in the fighting at Saqqez says she now has a new weapon for use on government troops.

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Interview with Sheik Ezzedin Hosseini,

A Respected Leader of the Kurdish People

"I'm looking for the sheik's bureau (office)," I asked the first person I saw on the streets when I arrived in Mahabad, a city of more than 50,000 in northern Kurdistan. That was all I needed to say. My new friend—enthusiastic about my visit to the sheik—escorted me to the first taxi he saw and simply told the driver, "To the sheik's bureau." I was off on a free ride to see a man whom millions of Kurds look upon as their spokesman, Sheik Ezzedin Hosseini.

From my taxi ride to my reception at the sheik's bureau, the atmosphere in Mahabad was one of revolutionary democracy. Not only did everyone know where the sheik's bureau was, but when I got there, there was no big bureaucratic mumbo jumbo, no wall of bourgeois formality or feudal status that stood between this leader and the people. I was told simply by one of Hosseini's force of Peshmergas who was on guard duty to come back in two hours and you can see the sheik.

When I returned to meet Sheik Hosseini, this impression redoubled. A tall, wiry man of some 58 years, he was warm and down to earth in greeting us. I immediately felt relaxed and in the company of friends. I was seated in his office—a simple room, with a thin blue rug on the floor and rugs and pillows around the walls. There were no chairs or desks; only a telephone and a pile of newspapers and leaflets in the corner. The room was lit by a single unshaded light bulb hanging from the ceiling.

People were always coming in and out of the sheik's office asking him things, so while he was wrapping up some business, I took the opportunity to talk with one of the members of the sheik's bureau who was going to translate for us.

"Ma Musta ('teacher,' as Hosseini is affectionately and simply known) is against all imperialism—the U.S., the USSR and Europe also," he began. "He is very knowledgeable politically. He believes in socialist economics—he believes that the means of production should be collectively owned and used for the benefit of all—but he doesn't believe in materialist philosophy and ideology. You know he has read all the Marxist books on materialism, so you have to know what you're talking about to argue with him."

He explained that the sheik believes that politics and religion should be kept separate. (In the Sunni branch of Islam, a sheik is a religious leader.) While people do come to him for advice on such questions as prayer, education, marriage and divorce, it is because of his political stands that Hosseini is widely respected among the Kurdish people. "All the left supports Ma Musta," our friend said. "He was the only spokesman for the Kurdish delegation to Tehran. He is a leader from 'inside the people.' He struggled underground against the Shah for many years and led most of the anti-Shah demonstrations that took place in Mahabad during the revolution. During last fall's fighting, he went underground once again, moving to the mountains."

Moving from town to town, Hosseini continued to speak for the Kurdish people and defend their struggle. Khomeini and several leaders of the Islamic government repeatedly denounced him as a "counter-revolutionary," even calling for his death. But as their forces suffered one defeat after another, the government was forced to call for negotiations last November and to conduct them with a coordinating council of Kurdish groups led by Hosseini himself.

RW: The first thing I want to say is that I am very proud to be able to come to Kurdistan, because many of us in the U.S., many revolutionary and anti-imperialist groups in the U.S. have been inspired by the Iranian revolution and the struggle of the Kurdish people to continue that revolution.

Hosseini simply acknowledges this greeting with a nod and a smile. With his twinkling, alert eyes, Hosseini gives the impression of having a great deal of energy.

RW: Could you explain the different plans for autonomy for Kurdistan?

Hosseini: There are basically three plans. The first is the 26-point program that was discussed with the government after the end of the war between the Kurdish people and the government last fall. There is another 6 points that the KDP gave to the government. I don't think there is much difference between these things, the 26 points and the 6 points. Maybe they have some differences in the wording, but they mainly mean one thing: autonomy. But the '6 points' that Bani-Sadr talked about is very different. We mean autonomy but the government means self-administration, or something like that. It is not the same as real autonomy. The main thing that is wrong with the government's '6 points' is that they want to keep the Kurds divided into separate provinces. We want all of



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Kurdistan in one province. For example, Mahabad and Buchan right now are in Azerbaijan. And Kermanshah (a city that marks the southern boundary of Kurdistan) is in another province. All of these cities should be in just one province. These '6 points' that Bani-Sadr has offered don't mean that. This is just one point. The government's '6 points' aren't much different from the Shah's time; it's just these same things with little difference. Our people have been tricked by the government so many times, and now we are waking up. We need to complete the revolution. We know that real autonomy is possible only when democracy is established throughout Iran, and a people's democratic government comes to power.

The sheik's position is that autonomy requires an elected provincial council with control over the political and military affairs of Kurdistan. In an interview several months ago with *The Iranian* magazine, Hosseini said, "There is no doubt that if military power is not in the hands of the autonomous Kurdish province itself, autonomy could be taken away in an instant. Local police and gendarmerie must be from amongst the Kurdish Peshmergas, which would then act as the guardians of autonomy." In addition, Hosseini pointed out that while the internal affairs of Kurdistan would be in the hands of the provincial council, "the army, monetary policy, foreign policy, and national development schemes which relate to all of Iran should obviously be in the hands of the central government." A final point of the autonomy program is that Kurdish be recognized as the official language in the schools and administration.

Hosseini maintains good relations with all groups which he believes are fighting for the freedom of the Kurdish people. At the same time, he has stated that the government should not be allowed to single out any group for negotiations. When asked, in an earlier interview, if the government was trying to split the autonomy movement and make an agreement with one of the groups with lesser demands (referring to a part of the KDP), Hosseini replied, "Yes, I think the government has wanted to create a split in the movement. At first they came to me and said they recognized only me, and nobody else, as a negotiating partner. I told them categorically that I would not talk to them in the absence of the other political groups. At the second stage they went and talked to the KDP... any group that unilaterally makes a deal with the government will suffer." In his opinion, even if one group breaks away, the other Kurdish groups would be strong enough to continue the struggle.

As we talked, people were drifting in and out of the bureau conducting business. One Peshmerga threw today's copy of *Mardom* (the newspaper of the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party) on the floor for him to read. There was an article in it claiming that Hosseini had been meeting with Oveissie and Sardjoff, two widely hated pro-Shah generals who escaped abroad during the revolution. "Now the Kurdish people have two enemies," he commented, "The Islamic government and the Tudeh Party." (Later that day I saw street demonstrations that burned the literature office of the Tudeh Party in Mahabad.) I continued by asking Hosseini about the Islamic government and Ayatollah Khomeini.

RW: What do you think the Islamic government has to gain by attacking Kurdistan? Why are they so afraid of autonomy?

Hosseini: First they are chauvinist on two accounts.

They are Shiites and we are Sunnis; and we are Kurds and they are Persians—two different nations. They are afraid that if they give us these rights they will have to give them to the other oppressed nations in Iran—the Turks, Baluchis, Turkomens. Then they will have lost their power in Kurdistan and in the other nations throughout Iran. If they do this, they won't have the power the Shah had.

RW: What role has Ayatollah Khomeini played in the struggle?

Hosseini: Khomeini is not the same man as he was in Paris. He hasn't fulfilled his promises. He was fighting the Shah then; now he is reactionary. He is cold and heartless and is being used by others in the government because he knows nothing about politics. What is imperialism? He doesn't know.

(Our translator added: Khomeini believes in the 'theory of two worlds'—Islam and everyone else. I will tell you a story. When Hosseini went to Qum to hold talks with Khomeini about Kurdistan last year, he told Khomeini about all the problems and concerns of the Kurdish people. At the end when they were about to leave the room, Khomeini told him, 'I want Kurdistan quiet, I don't want war in Kurdistan, I want you to do this for me.' Then Hosseini told him, 'If you want that, then I want autonomy.' Khomeini said nothing and they left the room.)

RW: Do you feel that U.S. imperialism is involved in trying to attack the Kurdish people in any way?

Hosseini: We know the government started this fighting against the Kurdish people, and this part of the government is very close to the U.S. So in this way we can say U.S. imperialism is in Kurdistan. For example in the Tabas attack, there must be a group of people inside the government that has relations with the U.S. imperialists. There is no way the U.S. could do this without having a group of people inside the government and the army. It is the people of Iran that are anti-imperialist.

(Sheik Hosseini went on to tell me that he does not support the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran because of the involvement of the central government, which is not anti-imperialist.)

Hosseini: We don't have any relations with overseas groups of the Iraqi government; these are the things that the government is saying about us; they want to make people believe the Kurds are dependent on imperialism or the Iraqi government or something like that.

RW: How is the fighting going now?

Hosseini: The government thought that in 5 or 6 days they could come in, get Kurdistan and keep it. But they are mistaken. We are putting a lot of pressure on the army in many different cities, and sometimes we have pushed them out entirely. In Sanandaj, people have been fighting for 22 or 23 days. This time it has become a struggle involving *all* of the people—women, children, old men, all of the people. But we know that this war is not the demand of the Kurdish people. They don't want to fight. But if the government forces them to fight they will fight to the last person. At this time we are changing our tactics. The Peshmergas may leave the cities. They will fight against the government out of the cities. They could put more force on the government from outside the cities.

RW: Have the Peshmergas actually left Sanandaj at this point?

Hosseini: They started to get out but they haven't finished yet. There are some guerrillas that will stay in the cities; the army won't know them, and they will lead resistance once the army gets into the cities.

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(Top left) Komoleh Peshmergas assemble in the morning outside their headquarters in Baneh.

(Top right) Section of a U.S.-made helicopter being used by the Iranian army, shot down by Peshmergas over Baneh.

(Right) Unit of the Peshmergas of the Oppressed and Toiling Masses of Kurdistan (Tashkilot) in Buchan.

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During several months of negotiations the Iranian government refused to make any meaningful agreements about Kurdish rights. (One participant in the negotiations described them as a single meeting for a couple of hours ending in postponement.) Many in Kurdistan saw that the government was simply trying to buy time and prepare for another attack.

In late April of this year, the government once again began moving large numbers of army units and Pasdaran towards Kurdistan; this time supposedly to guard the border with Iraq. However the fighting between Iraq and Iran was not taking place in Kurdistan but further to the south in the oil-rich province of Khuzestan. When the army headed for Sanandaj, a bastion of the Kurdish struggle, the people knew the troops were there to suppress them once again. Thousands blocked the roads from the southern city of Kermanshah to Sanandaj to prevent the army from passing. And when the troops landed at the Sanandaj airport they were blocked from entering the city. It was then that the fighting jumped off.

We arrived in Baneh about 1:30 a.m. and I awoke the next morning after a night of intermittent bombings and explosions. When we ventured out into the town it became obvious what kind of fighting had been going on. The streets were deserted, the alleys empty. We passed a bombed-out flour mill, a theatre with its roof destroyed and even a mosque that had been shelled. As I looked in a row of abandoned small shops, meat was still hanging on hooks, there was cloth in a sewing machine ready to be mended, books on desks ready to be totalled. Perhaps the owners had had time to padlock the front door



as the bombs and shells began to fall. But that was all. Nothing in Baneh had been spared from attack.

The rattling of twisted metal pull-down doors hanging over the shops along the streets, the tapping of broken wires against phone poles, and the occasional shatter of falling glass were the only interruptions to the sounds of the wind, whistling through the empty side-streets. We saw about 20 people in the town, most too old to leave. Baneh was virtually a ghost town.

We walked single file and spread out to avoid drawing fire from the nearby army base, ducking and sprinting whenever we were out in the open. "This is where I used to live," one of the Peshmergas said as he pointed to a bombed-out house. The rubble and the littered streets told us that this was not simply a clash between "anti-revolutionary" leftist groups and the government, as Tehran had been claiming. This was all-out war against the Kurdish people, even

more desperate than last fall's fighting. The Kurds showed me bomb fragments and shells that were made in the USA and other NATO countries.

In other Kurdish towns—Saqqez, Marivan, Paveh, Nosud, Rabat—the story was the same. Thousands had been made refugees—over 100,000 in all of Kurdistan. In Sanandaj between 1,000-2,000 had been killed; the exact number was uncertain because the government's shelling had prevented even the burial of the bodies. In Baneh, 62 had been killed, 120 wounded.

The destruction was massive. But did it speak to the strength or the weakness of the reactionaries in the central government that they considered the whole of the Kurdish population their enemies? Who was in the long run stronger, the government troops holed up in their base, lobbing mortars and shelling the city—or the Peshmergas who were fighting in the lead of the Kurdish people and had the support of the whole town

and the surrounding area?

From the moment I had arrived, Kurdistan was like a breath of fresh air. "This is liberated territory," one man told me happily as I crossed into Kurdistan proper. "They kill Pasdaran on sight here!" he said gleefully as he put his finger across his throat.

For three days the only evidence of a police force I saw were the revolutionary Peshmergas who boarded and checked our bus, and were patrolling the streets of Kurdish cities and towns. Even the mood in the streets was freer and more relaxed, without the tension and foreboding that is present in Tehran. The women were dressed in a plethora of color: a couple of brightly colored scarves, an equally spectacular blouse and vest—often with golden spangles or shiny beads embroidered into the cloth—and several layers of multi-

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The Kurds: A History of Oppression and Revolutionary Struggle



Refugee camp in Buchan for 3,000 people made homeless by fighting in Saqqez.

Iran's 5-6 million Kurds are a distinct nationality in Iran inhabiting the mountainous western regions of the country. There are also sizeable Kurdish populations in the neighboring countries of Turkey and Iraq. Altogether more than 20 million Kurds live in this region, and they have played an important role in the revolutionary struggles that have erupted in these countries in recent years.

While Iran as a whole was plundered and ruled with an iron fist under the U.S.-backed dictatorship of the Shah, the Kurdish people suffered the additional burden of intense national oppression. In public offices and schools, Kurds were forbidden to speak their language or to wear their traditional dress—in some cases even having the seams of their pants (which are baggy around the legs but narrow at the ankles), slit to "Iranicize" them. The local police and gendarmerie, as well as the military units stationed in Kurdistan, were intentionally drawn from other nationalities, and the provincial government was controlled by non-Kurds appointed by the Shah.

At the heart of this national oppression were the chains of feudalism fastened onto the peasants in Kurdistan. In the villages where 80% of the people lived, the peasants were held in virtual bondage by the feudal lords and tribal chiefs. Many peasants worked on the feudals' holdings while those who "owned" small plots were often forced to pay outrageous taxes to the landlords for everything from holidays to their water, animals and crops.

One mountain village I visited on my trip to Kurdistan last summer was more than 700 years old and most of the mud brick one-room homes are nearly as old. Purified drinking water is non-existent, as are hospitals. Every year thousands die without ever seeing a doctor; half the children die before the age of two. In these villages—only several hundred miles from some of the richest oil fields in the world—the peasants must still cook their daily staple of bread in home furnaces fueled with animal manure because heating oil is too expensive to purchase.

These conditions are a stark indictment of the Shah's great "modernization" plans that the U.S. government and press are so fond of talking about. "The regime of the Shah never developed anything here," one peasant told me, "no roads, no factories, no water system." There wasn't a single factory built in all of Kurdistan under the Shah. As imperialist banks and industrial projects flocked into Iran, this

only drove the people into greater misery. A flood of imports from the U.S. and Western Europe ruined Kurdistan's native handicraft industries, which many peasants had depended on for survival. The Shah's regime was so dependent on imperialism that it even imported 30-40% of the country's food and paid higher prices for it than it paid the peasant producers, further ruining agricultural production in Kurdistan as well as elsewhere. With starvation a constant reality, tens of thousands of Kurds were forced out of their homeland altogether, to work as low-paid day laborers on road building or construction projects—if they could find work at all.

The Kurdish people have a rich tradition of fierce and armed resistance to their oppressors. In the aftermath of World War 2, the Kurds, with the help of the Soviet army (the USSR was then a socialist country), rose up and set up a Kurdish Republic. Shortly afterwards it was crushed by the Shah's army, backed by the British and U.S. In 1967 there was a mass armed uprising in Kurdistan that so threatened the regime that it sealed off the area for months and secretly bombed it, killing an unknown number. And even before the insurrection that finished off the Shah in early 1979, armed detachments of Kurds had overrun many army barracks and liberated large areas of Kurdistan.

With this great victory, the Kurdish people thought their day had finally arrived. Under the slogan "Democracy for Iran, Autonomy for Kurdistan," the Kurds demanded control over local government, police forces, education and cultural affairs within the framework of a democratic, unified Iran. New administrations in many cities and towns were set up in the face of the central government's attempts to impose control.

At the same time, the peasant movement in Kurdistan grew rapidly. In many areas, peasants stopped paying their debts and exorbitant taxes and began to take over the fields of absentee landlords. After the February uprising, the Shah's gendarmerie and army units had often handed over their weapons and ammunition to the feudal landlords in the area, which emboldened them to demand back taxes from the peasants, seize their crops, and even drive them off the land. Numerous armed clashes broke out. Tens of thousands of peasants began to get organized into peasants' unions and armed themselves,

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As a part of their revolutionary fight for autonomy within Iran, the Kurdish people are demanding control over all of Kurdistan (shown by the grey area on the map). The new Islamic government, like the Shah's regime before it, has kept the oppressed Kurdish nation split up into three provinces (marked by broken lines on the map).

with revolutionary organizations leading some of them.

The peasants soon found out that the new Islamic Republic's promises of land reform were worthless. Instead, the army and the local komitehs set up by the government (which were heavily infiltrated by landlords and ex-SAVAK agents) consistently sided with the landlords, especially when the peasants "illegally" seized the feudals' land. For example, in the area around Marivan near the Iraqi border—where over 60 villages, representing between 35,000 and 40,000 peasants, formed a peasants' union and succeeded in driving out the landlords' armed thugs—the government tried to suppress the struggle by moving heavily armed troops into the area.

This peasant movement was linked closely to the struggle for autonomy, the cutting edge of the Kurdish struggle. By politically arousing and mobilizing tens of thousands of peasants, the autonomy struggle was greatly strengthened and given a more clearly revolutionary thrust—particularly in opposition to the maneuvers of various feudal and bourgeois nationalist forces, who have tried to steer the struggle into

reformism in order to gain power for themselves in an "autonomous" Kurdistan.

Casting off centuries of feudal enslavement, the Kurdish people were taking the road of fighting for their liberation; revolutionary and Marxist-Leninist organizations were increasingly leading the struggle. This could not be tolerated by Iran's new rulers. A revolutionary, autonomous Kurdistan by itself would be a mortal threat to their plans to bring to a halt the revolutionary struggle of the Iranian people as a whole and consolidate their power. More than that, an example like this could inspire the other oppressed nationalities of Iran (making up nearly one-half the total population) to demand similar forms of autonomy and political power; workers and peasants throughout the country could also be emboldened to take matters into their own hands; in short, a revolutionary Kurdistan could be a key base area for pushing the Iranian revolution forward. Beginning in the spring of last year, the central government set out to crush the Kurdish struggle—only to suffer one defeat after another at the hands of a conscious and determined people. □

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colored and patterned skirts and petticoats. And they dared to walk with their heads up, not looking down through a narrow slit in a black chador. Men with guns and grenades, bandoliers and pistols were a common sight.

The way the fighting was going in Baneh, the Kurdish people showed no signs of letting this territory go. The 600-700 troops at the army base on the

edge of town remained confined to their barracks. Only two days before I arrived, the Peshmergas had attacked the base at night, broken through the perimeter and destroyed half the base before pulling back. This was one of the first times the Kurds had really threatened to capture a big base in head-to-head fighting. In earlier battles they had shot down 3 helicopters, one Phantom F-4, and captured many guns—including

heavy cannons and mortars. "For every Peshmerga they kill," I was told, "we kill 10 government soldiers."

The fighting in Sanandaj was even more intense. The government troops were confined to a couple of bases and subject to constant attack. And to make matters worse for them, a large number of Iranian soldiers had deserted when they realized that they were being used to suppress the Kurdish people—not

SAVAK agents and "infidels" as they had been told. One friend told me of over 40 soldiers executed in the Sanandaj airport for refusing to fight. In one company alone over 80 had deserted and scattered into the hills. There had been strikes of air force personnel in Isfahan and Shiraz who were protesting the war in Kurdistan. One pilot who had refused to go on a bombing mission had

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been executed.

Late that afternoon we drove to a camp at Abasabad, some 25 kilometers outside Baneh, to talk to some of the refugees from the town. It was a beautiful drive, through low green hills, and lush grassland that covered the valleys between them. Several rivers wound through the area and the soft blue sky and the blooming red and yellow wild flowers spoke of the arrival of spring. But even this beautiful area had become a battleground between the Kurdish masses and the forces of reaction in Iran, and the harsh realities of revolutionary war were not far off.

The refugee camp had been converted from an army barracks and now housed about 1500 people, all from Baneh. All gasoline shipments to Kurdistan had been stopped by the government, nearly all the electricity had been cut off and cooking fuel was in short supply. Of course, no food was allowed in either—one reporter even had a sandwich taken away from him by the army when he entered Sanandaj—so the refugees lived on a simple diet of rice, potatoes, bread and cheese that was donated by neighboring villages.

One doctor in the camp explained that their hospital had only 3 beds, so they had to convert a meeting hall to make more space. But even so most of the wounded had to be transferred to the outlying villages where they could rest, but where there was no medical care. Medical supplies had also been blockaded and were in short supply. "We have no running water, except the river," the doctor explained, "so we have to wash the dressings from the wounded there. But we know that sooner or later the dressings will infect the water and it will come right back to the village. It's a vicious circle from the wounded to the river back to the wounded."

"My brother was 19," one young man told me. "They arrested him one day and brought us his body the next. Now we've had to leave our homes and everything we had to come to this place. Is this a place human beings can live in?" Others told of a young child who remained sucking at the breast of his dead mother during the fighting, stopping only to cry out that his mother was still alive.

No one had remained untouched by the war. People's whole lives had been dramatically transformed: in their home town one day, and thrown together in



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One of many Marxist study groups outside Abasabad refugee camp.

camps without belongings the next. But those who mourn for the oppressed and pity their conditions should take heed from the Kurdish people. Something far more powerful was taking hold among the people than anything the government could unleash against them; something far more moving than any suffering they had endured.

When one member of our group tried to express sorrow for the suffering the Kurdish people had endured, a Peshmerga immediately replied, "Don't say you're sorry. This is revolution. There's nothing to be sorry about." A doctor told us a story of a boy who was killed in Baneh. As his sister began to weep for him, her father slapped her, "Why are you crying," he demanded. "We are fighting for our freedom. This is our sacrifice!" In Sanandaj one man saw his three sons blown to bits in front of his eyes. With their blood he wrote on the wall of his home, "We will shed our blood for the liberation of Kurdistan!"

A tremendous spirit of cooperation

permeated the camp. "We have more volunteers than we can handle for washing, cooking, cleaning," the doctor told me. "We can't keep blood," he continued, "for we have no refrigeration. But we never have a short supply; people are always willing to donate."

Political consciousness was exploding. There were 10 study classes a day of between 20-50 people each. Hundreds of men and women were studying Marxist politics, history, economics and philosophy. The only times the classes stopped were when those who could read had to travel to the surrounding villages to read the peasants the latest news. They too wanted to be politically educated and well informed of developments in the fighting and the revolutionary struggle.

Young children no more than 10 or 11 years old loudly declared their allegiance to one revolutionary group or another. "I am a Komoleh supporter," one shouted. "Down with the Democrats (the compromising, revisionist leaders of

the KDP)." "We want a revolution led by the working class for the benefit of the toiling masses of Iran," another added. We met a 40 year old Peshmerga and his 12 year old son. "He's already a Peshmerga," the older man explained proudly. "He comes everywhere with me."

Hardly confined to this particular refugee camp, this spirit was spreading across the whole of Kurdistan. When the fighting first began in Sanandaj, 70,000 of the 100,000 that lived there remained in the city to fight, demanding that the revolutionary groups either stay and fight or leave their weapons behind. Komoleh members told us that hundreds were coming into their office to demand to be armed, sometimes refusing to leave until they were.

When I was in Buchan the streets were a hot-bed of political discussion and struggle. The town was choked with 20,000 refugees from nearby Saqqez. Dozens hung around the kiosks reading

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The women's society of Baneh led by Komoleh.

"Our main purpose is to organize women into our committees, give them political education, and help them join the overall struggle for the liberation of Kurdistan and all of Iran. We link the struggle of women to the class struggle and fight them together. But before getting to the stage of liberation we will have to struggle against all the old feudal customs—especially old-fashioned family relations—which hinder us from fully participating in the struggle. . . . Most of our families have left the city due to the fighting, but we have stayed here together independently; and since we are more independent we have gotten more involved in the resistance movement. You can see we are here!"

"The Kurdish women didn't participate much in the fighting last year, because most of it was done by the Peshmergas in the mountains. But in this new round of fighting we are much more involved. And if the fighting continues for a long time, certainly we will participate in the fighting as a women's Peshmerga group. We are ready!"

—From an interview with the Komoleh Women's Committee in Baneh.



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An auxiliary committee responsible for supplying the Peshmergas with food and other supplies.

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the latest news of the fighting. Revolutionary leaflets were snatched up, and people congregated eagerly around the sound trucks that passed up and down the streets.

There was growing awareness of just who are the compromising forces within Kurdistan. These are the organizations that talk as though they are "friends of the people" only to sell out the struggle from within. They pose one of the big dangers to the Kurdish movement. In Buchan we witnessed a spontaneous demonstration of 2,000 people against the Tudeh Party (the pro-Soviet revisionist party in Iran which has shamelessly supported every reactionary attack on the masses of Kurds by the Islamic government). Shouting "Mergaba (Death to) Tudeh!" the people burned the Tudeh literature booth and littered the streets with scraps of the Tudeh paper *Mardom* (People). Just that morning *Mardom* had reported that Sheikh Ezzedin Hosseini, a widely loved and respected revolutionary democrat and religious leader in Kurdistan, had been meeting with some of the Shah's generals. When Hosseini saw the paper he commented, "Now the Kurdish people have two enemies: the Islamic government and the Tudeh Party." It seems the people of Buchan felt the same way.

But a more serious threat to the liberation struggle is the Kurdish Democrat Party (KDP). Though the KDP claims to be a revolutionary nationalist group, it is actually a bourgeois political organization (it even has landlords in it) with close ties to the Tudeh Party. As the oldest and best-known group in Kurdistan, the KDP still has a signifi-

cant mass base, which they cynically use as a bargaining chip with the government to catapult themselves into positions of power.

Over the last year people have begun to see through them. During the fighting in Sanandaj in April, there was a demonstration of over 2,000 people against the KDP's attempts to withdraw from the battle. While I was in Kurdistan in mid-May, the KDP, along with the Fedayeen, had pulled out of the intense fighting that had continued to rage in and around Sanandaj, leaving the revolutionary fighters of Komoleh and Tashkilot (the Peshmergas of the Oppressed and Toiling Masses, which is politically close to the Union of Iranian Communists) on their own. Since then, the bulk of the revolutionary forces have moved out of Sanandaj to continue the struggle in other ways. As was shown in the fighting before, this is a very shaky "victory" for the government.

For the Kurdish people, talking about politics and revolution is like breathing in and out. Everywhere I went, I soon found myself swept up in a whirlwind of non-stop political discussion. When Kurdish revolutionaries asked me about the U.S., they didn't want to know about the 1980 presidential elections or the new Secretary of State—they wanted to know when the American people were going to make revolution. "There's a group in the U.S.," one Komoleh Peshmerga began tentatively, "called the RCP. Have you heard of it? I've read some of their literature." (He had seen a recent copy of *Revolution* magazine in Buchan, hundreds of miles away from



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Throughout Kurdistan revolutionary posters line the walls and are attentively studied by thousands for the latest developments in the struggle.

the nearest big city in Iran.)

From then on there was no rest. "What is the political line of the RCP?" "What is the state of the working class movement there?" "Do the American people support the struggle of the Kurdish people?" "What is your line on Mao Tsetung and Enver Hoxha?" "Do you consider the Soviet Union revisionist or a social-imperialist country?"

Everywhere I went I discussed and learned more about the many political questions that were being thrashed out and hotly debated within Iran's revolutionary movement. "Is Iran semi-feudal and semi-colonial, or is it a dependent capitalist country?" "What is the nature of the Islamic government: is it completely reactionary or have some elements within it taken anti-imperialist stands?" "What is the relationship between the struggle in Kurdistan and the overall revolutionary movement in Iran?" "How is a new vanguard communist party going to be formed?" And on and on as long as I could stay around or stay awake.

As I was preparing to leave Baneh, discussion turned to the significance of the struggle in Kurdistan. "This is a struggle for the continuation of the revolution in all of Iran," an older veteran of the struggle and former school teacher said in a steady, serious manner. This thought was undoubtedly terrorizing the central government. I had heard the day before on the radio that President Bani-Sadr, Ayatollah Beheshti (the leader of the Islamic Republic Party) and Ayatollah Khomeini had all issued calls for stepped-up attacks on the Kurdish people, declaring there would be no more negotiations. Only a fight to the finish.

The struggle in Kurdistan is indeed

erecting a mighty barrier in the path of the reactionary plans of the government in Tehran. But more than that, I could not help but think that at this very moment—in the White House and the Kremlin as well—Carter and Brezhnev were receiving alarming reports on the spread of the revolution in Kurdistan. They must have been saying, "What the hell is going on here? This revolution won't stop"—and desperately making plans to suppress it.

They have good reason to be alarmed. Right in the midst of the imperialists' criminal war preparations, which are bringing them eyeball to eyeball in this oil-rich strategic area of the world, here are the Kurdish people waging a revolutionary war, independent of both superpowers. And while the struggle over which political line and which organizations will lead the struggle in Kurdistan and in all of Iran is continuing to rage, it was clear to me that the Kurdish people are more than ever seeing through compromising forces and demanding and supporting genuine revolutionary leadership.

The Kurdish revolutionaries I met were intensely concerned with the worldwide struggle against imperialism. When I was in Mahabad, Sheikh Hosseini had told me that "the governments of all countries of the world should be in the hands of the people." And when we turned to the possibility of revolution in the U.S. itself, one comrade said simply, "That is a dream of oppressed people all over the world."

As I was leaving Iran, I heard BBC announce the latest news on the fighting in Kurdistan. "Baneh has fallen to the army. Soon all of Kurdistan will be liberated by government forces." I could only laugh. □



The Kurdish people demonstrate their feelings toward the revisionist pro-Soviet Tudeh Party—torn up copies of the Tudeh newspaper litter the streets of Buchan after their literature booth was destroyed.

Hosseini

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RW: Are you confident of victory in the war with the government?

Hosseini: We can not say whether or not we will win in the near future. That is because the Kurdish people's struggle is only one link in the chain of struggle of all the other nations within Iran. It will take time. But in the future we will win.

RW: How do you think the land and peasant question in Kurdistan should be solved?

Hosseini: In terms of the land reform, the Shah's land reform was no good. But first we should struggle for our demand for autonomy in Kurdistan and then give a very good answer to the land question after getting autonomy.

RW: Could you explain how you see the struggle in Kurdistan in relation to the class struggle throughout Iran?

Hosseini: We are fighting to continue the revolution. For the groups fighting in Kurdistan it is not simply a national question, they are waging class struggle. In fact the two main pillars in the struggle of the Kurdish people right now are the toilers—that is the workers and secondly the peasants. And women have a great role in the fighting; this is new. Many groups in Iran

and in Kurdistan are demanding a working class government, working class rule in Iran.

When we talked about May Day and what it means for the workers and oppressed world-wide, Sheikh Hosseini said he knew how May Day had begun in Chicago many years ago after the capitalists had martyred several workers, and how he himself addressed the May Day rally in Mahabad. As we left I thanked the sheik for his time and reiterated that we shared a common revolutionary struggle with the Kurdish people. Hosseini replied, "We have a great duty to fight against U.S. imperialism. The governments of all countries of the world should be in the hands of the people."