

# *Iran and Beyond*

Essays in Middle Eastern History

in Honor of

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330

Edited by

Rudi Mathee

and

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MAZDA PUBLISHERS, Inc.  
2000

theme of Jewish hostility to Islam was meshed with the principal shibboleths of modern European anti-Semitism, notably the idea of a Jewish conspiracy to control the world. This fusion of elements of Islam with bits and pieces of Western ideologies is typical of Islamism in general.<sup>31</sup> It is typical of the transformation of piety into polemic that can be found in most religious reformist responses to Western domination.

The defense of religion entails its transformation. Beliefs that were once taken for granted are transformed into weapons with which to fight a threatening enemy. In the case of those movements that defend religions in the face of Western domination, they typically absorb elements of the culture they reject. And they politicize concepts that were previously apolitical. This process of politicization often results in an apologetic ideology that bears little resemblance to the religion it is designed to defend.

*Author's note:* I would like to thank Beth Baron, Samuel Eisenstadt, and Rudi Manthe for their comments on earlier versions of this paper.

<sup>31</sup> See Munson, *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East*, 120-21; idem, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, 159-79; idem, "Muslim and Jew in Morocco: Reflections on the Distinction between Belief and Behavior," in John A. Hall and Ian C. Jarvie, eds., *The Social Philosophy of Ernest Gellner* (Amsterdam, 1996).

## The Iranian Revolution and the Failure of the Left

Maziar Behrooz

During the first two years of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the question of leftist political parties and organizations associated with Marxist ideology and their influence on the course of the revolution seemed pivotal. This importance emerged from two perspectives. The first was the role of the left in domestic developments of revolutionary Iran. Finding ways to neutralize the appeal of the left, as post-revolution social and economic problems mounted, seems to have been of prime importance to the new leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). The tension between leftist and Islamist activists and leadership could be seen even before the victory of the revolution. A friend once told me that a few days before the collapse of the imperial regime, in February 1979, while he was standing in front of the University of Tehran campus listening to different groups, mostly Marxist, discussing issues related to the revolution, he was approached by an Islamist activist. The Islamist activist, bearded and wearing a standard green military jacket, came up from behind, pressed his hidden pistol to my friend's lower back and asked "in your opinion, is Mr. Marx telling the truth or the Prophet Mohammad (Praise of God be upon him)?" (*beh nazar-e shoma aqa Marx rasi mitgeht ya Hazrat-e Mohammad, salavallah alayhi?*). While my friend answered in predictable fashion—he immediately suggested that the Prophet was telling the truth one hundred percent (*sad abateh*)—the episode illustrates the tension between the Islamist and the Marxist left, a tension that was soon to translate into confrontation. Second, the role of the left was important within the context of Cold War geopolitics and the competition between the adversaries of the day over strategically important Iran. Up to the 1979 Revolution, imperial Iran was a close client state of the United States. The revolution, however, put an end to this and opened Iran to new Soviet activity designed to keep the IRI at least neutral in the Cold War rivalries. Hence, the role of the generally anti-American Marxist left in relation to Iran's mighty northern neighbor and the question of Western

interests in Iran became important.<sup>1</sup>

The popularity of Marxist groups in post-revolutionary Iran came at a heavy price. Since the 1953 coup, the left had been suppressed systematically by the imperial regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, resulting in hundreds of deaths. Leftist groups were a prime target of the shah's notorious secret police or *Sa/PAK*. Nevertheless, the left had managed to survive and was even able to attempt an offensive against the imperial regime in the form of the guerrilla activities of the 1970s. Some leftist groups were able to play a role in the eventual downfall of the imperial regime. Part of the attraction of post-revolution leftist groups lies in the prestige they gained fighting the imperial regime in a heroic but uneven struggle against what many left activists referred to as the shah's dictatorship.

The left's conduct after the revolution, however, did not live up to the expected "communist threat." Instead of constituting a real destabilizing force to the IRI and Western interests, the Iranian Marxists proved too weak institutionally to survive the challenges of the 1980s. The period under study may be divided into two distinct phases. First, 1979 to June 1981, when some relative freedom of political activity existed for all political groups in Iran, and, second, from June 1981, when the IRI moved to eliminate the activities of most of its opposition, to the mid-1980s, when the last serious organized underground activities ceased.

Unlike that in 1953, the left's defeat in the 1980s came in the aftermath of stiff resistance. As a result, an important element in the analyses of post-1953 Iranian Marxists became historically irrelevant. The young Marxists of the late 1960s and the 1970s pointed to the Tudeh Party's inability to resist the 1953 coup and the cowardly fleeing of its leaders as important reasons for the movement's defeat in the 1950s. They argued that defeat in spite of action would have been preferable to demise as a result of inaction and, furthermore, could have provided the foundation for future resistance. In the 1980s, despite resistance by various Marxist organizations and the death of many cadres, the movement was effectively and strategically defeated. Another important observation about the defeat of Marxist groups in Iran is that it occurred before the age of Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union, and, therefore, did not have much to do with the eventual demise of the USSR. This is important because the left was defeated not due to some kind of ideological crisis that was about to engulf international communism, but due to its inability to understand and cope with the internal dynamics of the 1979 Revolution in Iran.

This paper is a study of a single major cause in the left's failure in Iran, namely its relationship to the working class and the question of the left's popular base.<sup>2</sup> The left in Iran, both theoretically and in practice, appealed to the working class to carry the burden of a socialist revolution and to accept the left as its vanguard. This single factor, therefore, makes the relationship between various left organizations and the working class pivotal. For if the left was to survive the seemingly inevitable confrontation with the IRI, its ability to mobilize the working class would have been a determining factor in the impending confrontation.

In this study, three major Marxist organizations are taken into consideration. The three represent as many major categories of Marxist groups in Iran, each different in its perception of Marxism and of the Iranian Revolution. Therefore each organization's approach to the IRI was different. The three are the Tudeh Party of Iran (*hezbe Tudeh-ye Iran*), the Organization of Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas (*sazman-e cherkha-ye Fada'i-ye Khadaq-e Iran*), and the Organization of Paykar in the Path of Liberation of the Iranian Working Class (*sazman-e Paykar dar rah-e azadi-ye tabaqeh-ye kargar Iran*). All three considered themselves to be Marxist-Leninist, looked to the Russian Revolution of 1917 as the beginning of a new epoch in the struggle of the working class, and drew many theoretical lessons from it.

The Tudeh was Iran's version of pro-Soviet fraternal communist party. Established in 1941, the Tudeh became the main target of the 1953 coup, was disbanded and moved abroad. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Tudeh operated out of Soviet-block countries and was based in East Germany. It did not have much presence inside Iran until after the 1979 Revolution. After the revolution, the Tudeh became the chief proponent of the radical clerical wing of the new IRI (also known as the *maktabi* or doctrinaire) leadership against its more moderate "Islamic liberal" wing. In this context, the party policy generally disregarded the disappearance of democratic rights in the country and opted for support of the IRI's anti-American policy in the hope that a closer alliance between the IRI and the Soviet camp might be forged.<sup>3</sup>

The Fada'i guerrilla movement (henceforth referred to as the Fadayian) was established in 1971, at the peak of the shah's power, and constituted an independent Marxist organization which came up with some original ideas on how to confront the imperial regime. The foundation of the Fadayian was laid inside Iran as the organization began to engage the

<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger wrongly assumed that the well-organized nationwide strikes that were

organized by the students in the fall of 1978 were orchestrated by communist

<sup>2</sup> This study is based on the author's dissertation research and due to space limitations will focus only on one factor in the left's demise. For further information see Maziar Behrouz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For a critique on the Tudeh before the revolution, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, 1982), 450-73.

regime in intense urban-based guerrilla warfare in the 1970s. As for international communism, the Fadayian considered both the USSR and China to be socialist, their shortcomings notwithstanding. The Fadayian was the only Marxist group organized enough to play an effective role in the final days of the 1979 Revolution. After the revolution, the Fadayian rapidly became the most popular leftist organization in Iran and as such moved to center stage as socioeconomic problems mounted and created a social environment for a confrontation between the IRI and its opposition. In June 1980, the organization went through a major split. The "Minority" wing held on to most of the organization's original views and took a confrontational course vis-à-vis the IRI, while the "Majority" wing adopted the Tudeh Party's analyses on Iran.<sup>4</sup>

Paykar was an offshoot of an organization called the Mojahedin (Marxist-Leninist), and was established during the early days of the revolution. The latter was the Marxist wing of what was originally the Muslim Organization of Iranian People's Mojahedin. The Muslim Mojahedin was established in 1965, borrowed from Marxism in order to adapt Islam to modern challenges, and went through a major bloody split in 1975. As a result, a major part of the organization changed ideology and came to be called the Mojahedin (Marxist-Leninist). Paykar, similar to the Mojahedin (Marxist-Leninist) before it, can be considered a Maoist organization which supported China and later Albania (as China normalized its relations with the imperial regime and the IRI). At any rate, Paykar was vehemently anti-Soviet and therefore anti-Tudeh.<sup>5</sup>

#### The Left and the Working Class

The inability of various Marxist organizations to create a strong popular base among the working class was perhaps the single most important cause of the movement's failure. The importance of the working class in the left's performance and survival was based on two elements. First, in the realm of theory, the Iranian Marxists, similar to Marxists everywhere, claimed to be the vanguard of the working class and considered it to be the main social class which would bear the burden of social change. Therefore, the question of what kind of theoretical and political relationship should exist between the movement and the working class was important to the left's ultimate survival. The second element is the profound change the working class had gone through as a result of reforms implemented by the shah and the role it played in the final downfall of the imperial regime.

Under the shah, the Iranian working class grew tremendously. Asef Bayat's study of the working class before and after the revolution suggests that the workers made up "well over 50 percent of the economically active population."<sup>6</sup> Industrial workers were among the last to join the revolutionary struggle (in the second half of 1978) but after they joined, and as a result of their mass nationwide strikes, the Iranian economy was effectively crippled.<sup>7</sup> It may be suggested that although workers were latecomers, their nationwide strikes dealt the strongest blow to the imperial regime. The main reason behind the slow involvement of the working class in the revolutionary movement may be that the imperial regime paid special attention to this class and ensured its economic grievances were answered promptly, for it feared that otherwise the Marxists would be able to agitate more aggressively among this class.

Because of the lack of independent trade unions in Iran since the 1953 coup, the workers spontaneously turned to the *shura* (council) as their main vehicle of exerting control in the factory and organizing.<sup>8</sup> According to Bayat "the *shuras* also differed from syndicalism, which fought a political battle to change the social structure through industrial activities. The *shuras* lacked a clear political objective. . . . They restricted themselves to demanding workers' control and transformation of power relations in the industrial arena."<sup>9</sup> Bayat suggests that the *shuras* were a spontaneous development among the working class and that their leadership came from within that class during the early stages of the strikes. Only in late 1978 did outside political groups find significant representation in the *shuras*.<sup>10</sup> His study clearly shows the absence of the Marxist vanguard among the working class until immediately before the collapse of the shah's regime. While each of the three leftist organizations under study here claimed to be the rightful vanguard of workers in Iran, all had different approaches to the subject of how to organize the working class after the revolution. It is important to note that all three organizations were introduced to Marxism through the experience of the Russian Revolution as transmitted by Stalinist propaganda. Yet, even here the three were different in that the Tudeh had accepted the changes brought about by the post-Stalin period while the other two still clung on to the image of Stalin as the iron will of the international proletariat.

The role of the working class in the 1979 Revolution was noted by the Marxists early on, and they set out to harness this force for a second

<sup>4</sup> For more on the history of the Fadayian, see Maziar Behrouz, "Iran's Fadayian 1971-1988: A Case Study in Iranian Marxism," *Jasur* 6 (1990): 1-39; Nikkai R. Kaddic, *Revolutions of Revolution*, (New Haven, 1981), 231-39.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the Paykar's background, see Eryand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The*

<sup>6</sup> Asef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran* (London, 1987), 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse, 1985), 239.

<sup>9</sup> Bayat, *Workers and Revolution*, 100.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

revolution. This was done while all of the advocates of Marxism in Iran failed to produce a single serious study of the prevailing situation with an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses. While all three of the organizations under study acknowledged the decisive role played by the working class in bringing down the imperial regime, they differed on what weight this class had vis-à-vis other classes and, thus, what role the Marxists should play. The differences between the three centered on their different interpretations of the revolutionary stage. Below, the differences between the three and the relevance of these differences to the working class will be examined.

### The Revolutionary Stage and the Tudeh

The Tudeh Party of Iran, the oldest among the three, had an extensive network and social base, especially among the working class party, between 1941 and 1953. The party called itself the sole working class party of Iran and did indeed enjoy considerable support among workers' organizations before the 1953 coup. According to Habib Ladjevardi, by 1945 the Tudeh affiliated workers' organizations had a membership between one hundred thousand and one hundred fifty thousand.<sup>11</sup> In a country with a pre-industrial based economy, such numbers undoubtedly included the bulk of the country's work force.

The 1953 coup effectively uprooted the Tudeh and from the 1950s until the days of the revolution, the party functioned more as an opposition party outside Iran, protected and supported by the Soviet Union and its allies. The Tudeh did not play a role in the overthrow of the imperial regime other than using its propaganda machine outside Iran and agitating to a small degree inside the country. But after the revolution, it moved back to Iran and put the experience of its cadres and its international support toward rebuilding its organization.

Since 1975, the Tudeh considered the Iranian revolutionary developments to be at a "national democratic" stage.<sup>12</sup> This meant that the proletariat and other democratic classes (the petty bourgeoisie, the progressive intellectuals, the small and medium bourgeoisie) would have to unite in a coalition in order to confront the imperial regime. According to the Tudeh, the proletariat could not immediately take on the leadership of this union because of its weakness both in terms of numbers and consciousness. Yet, the Tudeh believed that such a coalition should have a socialist direction despite the lack of working-class leadership. How would this be possible? How could the coalition have taken a socialist direction without a working-

<sup>11</sup> Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions*, 48-49.

<sup>12</sup> See the party's platform drafted after its thirteenth plenum in 1975 in *Asnad va dirichah* (Tehran, 1979), 667-98, and *Namch-ye mardom*, 107, 109 (May, June, 1975).

class leadership? The Tudeh filled this apparent gap with the theory of non-capitalist path of development. As far as the Tudeh was concerned, getting close to the Soviet Union was the key to passing from a national democratic stage to a socialist stage.

After the victory of the revolution, the Tudeh put this theory to work. While carrying the self-proclaimed title of the New Party of the Working Class (*hezbe tarz-e novin-e tabaqeh-ye kargar*), the Tudeh put its support behind the new Islamic leadership in the hope that such a coalition could be worked out. When the Islamic leadership began to polarize and the Islamic liberal faction opposed the more doctrinaire faction headed by the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), the Tudeh sided with the latter because of its more anti-American and radical views.

Hence, from 1979 to 1981, the role of the Tudeh, despite its claim of being the party of the working class, was one of appeasing the state and trying to reconcile the differences between it and the working class.<sup>13</sup> The Tudeh's analysis of the revolutionary stage depicted the party as the sole party of the working class and gave it the responsibility of entering coalitions on behalf of that class. In March 1981, the party supported the rules set by the revolutionary prosecutor-general on which parties might be active in the IRI and how they might operate. In this declaration, the prosecutor-general forbade political parties from inciting strikes. The Tudeh supported this stand and claimed that any type of move to organize strikes and other activities were anti-revolutionary and could only help American interests in Iran.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, this policy put the party on a collision course with the other Marxist groups. Despite its claim of being the party of the working class, this policy made any effort to gain supporters among the proletariat irrelevant since its strategy was one of appeasing the state at a time when the working class was confronting it. Indeed, the Tudeh's distance from the working class became readily apparent when in 1983 the IRI turned against the party, dismantling its organizational network which was extensive only in the IRI military and administration. The Tudeh's evaluation of its role among the working class speaks for itself. In a chapter concerning the party's role among the working class, which is part of a report commemorating the Tudeh's fortieth birthday, the party does not have anything to show for its post-revolution activity among the working class.<sup>15</sup>

The Tudeh policy toward the IRI delayed the party's suppression but it

<sup>13</sup> In many cases the Tudeh opposed workers' strikes and suggested the creation of bodies designed to protect the workers' rights while keeping the anti-revolutionary elements, i.e. the IRI opposition, out of the factories; see: *Ettelaat-e mardom* (2 Dec. 1981).

<sup>14</sup> *Namch-ye mardom* (March 1981).

<sup>15</sup> *Chehel sol' se sangar-e mobarezeh* (N.p., 1981).

did not prevent it. While the rest of the opposition was declared illegal in 1981, the Tudeh and the Fada'iyan Majority were tolerated until 1983. After their disbanding, both organizations were hit hard and their networks were dismantled. Outside Iran and obviously in the opposition, both groups tried to formulate a new analysis of their role in society and the place of the working class. In 1986, the Tudeh's national congress, which was held in the Soviet Union, revised its perception of the revolutionary stage. While still maintaining the national democratic formula, the Tudeh claimed that the middle bourgeoisie played no progressive role and that, while the small bourgeoisie had to be encouraged to join the coalition, it could not serve as its leader.<sup>16</sup>

### The Revolutionary Phase and the Fada'iyan

As noted, soon after the success of the revolution, the Fada'iyan emerged as the largest Marxist organization in Iran. The number of the organization's enthusiastic supporters was so great that its pre-revolution structure was simply overwhelmed. From 1979 to 1981, the prestige and popularity of the Fada'iyan combined with the relative freedom of this period provided the organization with a unique historical opportunity for agitation and expansion. Indeed, in every social confrontation from 1979 to 1980, be it the Kurdish war for autonomy or the Torkman agrarian workers seeking control over land, the Fada'iyan were conspicuously present. The Torkman case is perhaps a good example of the Fada'iyan's overall potential for finding a base among rural laborers. The Torkman land confiscation was followed by the establishment of Torkman peasants' *shuras* or councils, which soon took charge of the new socioeconomic order in the area. The Fada'iyan were the main organizers behind these *shuras* for the duration of their brief existence. The differences within the ranks of the Fada'iyan, which resulted in the breakup of the organization, helped weaken the Torkman *shuras* when they ran into confrontation with the IRI.

In June 1980, at the height of social tensions and at a time when unity was an essential part of any political organization's success, the Fada'iyan began to break up. The split also divided the Fada'iyan's working class base. The defeat of the Torkman *shuras* was an example of how the breakup of the Fada'iyan paralyzed the organization in an area where it was strong. From June 1980 on, the Fada'iyan Majority took a path which put it on a parallel course to that of the Tudeh on every social issue, including on how to organize the working class. It seems that between June 1980 and early 1981, the Majority faction still had its own independent interpretation of the situation and, therefore, of how to approach the working class. Initially, while admitting the weakness of the working class because of a

lack of any nation-wide organization (i.e. working-class party) to press its demands, the Majority pursued a policy in support of establishing worker's unions at a time when the working class was engaged in the *shuras*.<sup>17</sup> Simultaneously, the Majority faction attacked the Islamic liberals for seeking to contain the spread of unions, and the radical clerical faction of the IRI for wanting to eliminate them, and the rest of the left organizations for mixing up the duties of unions and *shuras*.<sup>18</sup> The Fada'iyan Majority's insistence on unions was related to the organization's gradual acceptance of the Tudeh's overall analysis of the situation. According to the Majority faction, if the radical clerical faction was in fact revolutionary, then the working class needed institutions to work within the system. For this purpose, the *shuras* were found unsuitable as they were perceived as instruments of revolutionary change. After the June 1981 crisis, the Majority made two basic changes in its approach. First, the organization dropped its insistence on unions, and, while accepting the fact that the *shuras* were the order of the day, insisted that it be allowed to agitate freely among them.<sup>19</sup> Second, the organization came to accept the Tudeh analysis completely and moved to coordinate its strategy with that of the Tudeh. From this point until its suppression in 1983, the Majority faction's policy, as far as the working class was concerned, was to reconcile this class and the state. In sharp contrast to the Fada'iyan Majority's earlier suggestion that the greatest weakness of the working class was its lack of nationwide organization, seldom did the organization mention anything about the weaknesses of the working class. It even began calling itself by the odd name of the "new organization of the working class" at a time when it admitted that the Tudeh was the "new party of the working class."

The Fada'iyan Minority went through the split with the Majority faction primarily over the issue of confronting the IRI. On the working class, the Minority believed that in the absence of a communist party, i.e. a working-class party, the workers continued to confront the IRI without a central command. The Fada'iyan Minority viewed the revolutionary phase as being "popular-democratic." According to this view, the phase was one in which the leadership of the proletariat was an integral part of any political coalition against the IRI.<sup>20</sup> The main question in this equation was how this leadership could be asserted at a time when the working class's biggest problem was the lack of a communist party. How could the job be done when the self-proclaimed vanguard organization admitted to its weak

<sup>17</sup> Kar, Publication of OIPIF (Majority), 64 (July 1980).

<sup>18</sup> Kar, Publication of OIPIF (Majority), 101, 102 (March, April 1981).

<sup>19</sup> Kar, Publication of OIPIF (Majority), 121 (July 1981).

<sup>20</sup> For the Organization's views on this subject, see the results of its first congress, especially the resolution on the stage of revolution, in Kar, Publication of OIPIFG 142 (Jan. 1982).

working class base? In a report on the struggle of the working class from February 1979 to May 1981, the Minority tried to show the direction the working-class struggle was taking.<sup>21</sup> The report clearly showed the spontaneous nature of strikes and the minimal role played by the vanguard organizations. Indeed, before the major blows which resulted in disruption of the Minority's underground network in the winter of 1982, the organization could produce many reports on the activities of the working class (which showed its presence among the workers) but nothing on its own role as the active vanguard.

From 1979 to 1981, and after its split from the Majority, the Fadaïyan Minority's activities were devoted to trying to forge a coalition with other Marxist groups, and to participation in the day-to-day events, while at the same time trying to overcome theoretical and organizational shortcomings which had resulted from the split. The result of these activities was that by the end of this period the organization emerged as the largest Marxist organization in opposition to the IRI, but without a strong foothold among the working class. In the second period, 1981 to the mid-1980s, the organization began to disintegrate. The blows dealt at the Fadaïyan Minority by the IRI security forces disrupted the organization's underground network and killed most of its central committee members. The effects of such actions were evident in the disappearance of reports on the activities of the workers from the pages of *Kar*, the organization's main publication. Ironically, as the Minority lost its organizational capabilities, its assessment of its own role in society grew more unrealistic. In view of other Marxist groups' disappearance from the scene, the Minority began to portray itself as the largest and most popular of all Marxist groups.<sup>22</sup> This sectarian view meant that the Minority demanded that other groups accept its leadership at a time when the organization had nothing to show for in terms of its power base.

### Revolutionary Phase and Paykar

Similar to the Fadaïyan Minority, Paykar viewed the lack of a revolutionary and popular communist party as the working class's biggest weakness and admitted that Marxist organizations did not have much of a base among the workers.<sup>23</sup> Paykar also viewed the revolutionary stage as being "popular-democratic" with the working class playing the leading role. But a striking difference between Paykar and groups in the other two categories was the former's lack of a strong theoretical base for its claims and analyses. For

<sup>21</sup> *Kar* (Special Issue on International Worker's Day) (May 1981).

<sup>22</sup> See the article "Do ruh bishar vojud nadarad," known to have been written by the Organization's chief ideologue in this period, Akbar Kamiyabi, in *Kar*, Publication of OIPFG 166 (April 1983).

<sup>23</sup> *Do ruh bishar vojud nadarad*, Publication of Paykar 3 (May 1980).

example, while the second congress of Paykar, held in August 1980, made statements about general social conditions, in sharp contrast to either Fadaïyan factions, it lacked a minimal theoretical backing for its claims.<sup>24</sup> Despite their common goal in opposing the IRI, one of the problems that prevented Paykar and the Fadaïyan Minority from coming up with any meaningful alliance was their differences on how to approach the working class on the factory level. The Minority accused Paykar of anarchism in its actions and suggested that because of Paykar's behavior, the workers had thrown its members out of the factory on a number of occasions.<sup>25</sup> Paykar disintegrated after the end of the first period as a result of the repression, and its role as a political organization among the working class disappeared.

All the evidence with regard to various Marxist organizations and the working class suggests that, despite a relatively long history and the unique opportunity of relative political freedom caused by the collapse of the imperial regime, Iranian Marxists failed to gain a strong foothold among the working class. There were many factors involved in the failure. Certainly, the repression of Marxist groups was one important factor. There were, however, reasons more internal in nature, which clearly emerge from a study of the three mentioned groups. One ironic reality about all three groups was that none produced any serious and comprehensive study of the working class. The Iranian working class had changed profoundly since the 1940s when the Tudeh was able to agitate among it. By the time of the revolution, the working class had grown in numbers, yet the social background of a large section of it was still very much affected by its peasant past. The essential questions the Marxists failed to address were how this peasant background affected the political consciousness of the workers and why the working class joined the revolution later than other classes. Did the shah's reforms and the fact that he accommodated the working class have anything to do with this? If so, how did this affect the revolutionary nature of the working class?

While the three groups shared some aspects of their failure, other aspects were related to each individual group. The Tudeh had the most experience in working among and organizing the working class. But after the revolution, the party started to reorganize, adopting a different agenda a quarter of a century after its establishment. The Tudeh's strategy was not to organize the working class for the capture of political power from below. At best the party wished use the workers as bargaining chips for dealing with the state in hope of initiating to change from above. The uncovering of the Tudeh organization by the IRI clearly showed much emphasis placed

<sup>24</sup> *Paykar*, Publication of the Organization of Paykar 71 (Aug. 1980).

<sup>25</sup> *Kar*, Publication of OIPFG 99 (March 1980).

on penetrating the IRI administration and military, but very little effort devoted to the working class. The Fadaïyan breakup and the Majority's adoption of the Tudeh strategy only contributed to the weakening of the Marxist base as the limited Fadaïyan working class base was given two conflicting strategies. Next, there were self-indulgent titles such as the "new party of the working class" and the "new organization of the working class," which helped satisfy the true believers but also showed an unrealistic self-evaluation.

The same flaw was also evident in both the Minority and Paykar. Thus the Minority concluded that it alone was the real vanguard of the working class at a time when most of its underground network and a good number of its cadres had been eliminated. As for Paykar, the Militant Workers should provide a good example. This cell joined Paykar in the summer of 1979. When writing about their own history and the reasons behind joining Paykar, the Militant Workers wrote that, despite its name, it originated among university students struggling in the mid-1970s.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the history of this cell, there is no indication of any development which made the name Militant Workers an appropriate title for this group.

Finally, while Marxist groups admitted that the working class, for the major part, struggled for its economic interests, the presence of various Marxist groups in the workplace perhaps added to the already confusing situation. Imagine, for a moment, a group of workers getting ready to strike. One group among them is arguing against the whole idea (Tudeh), while another group proposes such unrealistic ideas that it has to be ejected from the meeting (Paykar), and a third group is more concerned with isolating the first group than with organizing the strike (Fadaïyan Minority). All this occurs at a time when workers and management loyal to the factory owners (IRI supporters) are doing their best to stop the whole venture altogether.

Any study of Marxist groups and organizations in Iran makes it clear that, from a theoretical point of view, none of them approached the working class realistically. Those Marxists who were in support of the IRI had no intention of mobilizing the class for social change or confrontation and in so far as they were effective, acted as a disruptive element vis-à-vis workers' organizations. Those Marxists in opposition to the IRI ultimately proved unable to mobilize the working class in their confrontation with the IRI because of their inability to address the worker's demands which itself was caused by theoretical and organizational fragmentation.

If Marxist organizations lacked a strong working-class base, then what was their social base? Studies such as Asef Bayat's book or Ervand Abrahamian's study of the Tudeh before 1953 and examination of what

little information is available on the social background of the Marxist cadres may shed some light on the problem. From a limited study conducted before the revolution and a list available on the fallen members of various groups opposed to the IRI, some understanding may be reached on the social background of some groups. Research done on Marxist organizations before the revolution suggests that the majority of members were non-working class. Abrahamian's study of the Tudeh suggests that of 2,419 former rank and file members, 1,276 were from the modern middle class, 169 from the traditional middle class, 860 from the urban working class and 69 from the peasantry. The author concludes:

Thus the intelligentsia, who formed less than 8% of the country's labor force, constituted more than 53% of the party's rank and file; and urban wage earners and town peddlers, who together totaled as little as 15% of the labor force, made up as much as 36% of the rank and file. Conversely, the rural masses, who totaled over 54% of the labor force, contributed only 3% of the rank and file.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, Abrahamian's study suggests that during the pre-1953 coup period, when the Tudeh was able to function openly, the party appealed to the middle class, and was able to create a base among the working class. Abrahamian's study of the guerrilla groups in the 1970s was based on information available on 172 Fadaïyan and thirty Marxist Mojahedin members killed during the anti-imperial regime period.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, out of 172 Fadaïyan cadres, only twelve were workers while seventy-three were university students. Out of thirty Marxist Mojahedin cadres, only one was a worker while fifteen were university students. Abrahamian's study, limited as it is, leaves no doubt that the guerrilla movement appealed to the more educated sector of the society.

The social base of the Marxist groups after 1953 gets farther away from the working class despite the early popularity of some organizations. According to information available on forty-four fallen Tudeh members, while six were workers, nineteen were university students and four were high school students.<sup>29</sup> Information on the Fadaïyan includes 160 fallen members belonging to various Fadaïyan factions (not including the Majority).<sup>30</sup> Of these, twenty-one were workers while thirty-eight were univer-

<sup>27</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 328.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 481.

<sup>29</sup> Information on the Tudeh was taken from Ali Mirzpassi-Ashiani and Valentine M. Moghadam, "The Left and Political Islam in Iran: A Retrospect and Prospect," *Radical History Review* 51 (1991): 27-62.

<sup>30</sup> Information on post-revolution Fadaïyan and Paykar was extracted from the following source: *Shohada-ye javidan-e azadi, parhamdaran-e-anglab-e novin-e khalq-e qalbenqay-e Iran* (N.p., 1984); this source contains 12,028 names and identities of



sity students and fifty-seven were high school students. The information available on the Paykar includes sixty persons. Of these, twelve were workers, while fifteen were high school students.

A comparison of the information available on the social background of the three Marxist groups under study suggests the following conclusions: the data on the Tudeh supports the notion that these groups were most successful when they were able to organize in a less repressive political environment. The Tudeh of the pre-1953 coup period proves the most successful in terms of establishing a base among the working class and growing in numbers. The information also suggests that Iranian Marxists never managed to establish a firm base among the working class after 1953 and among the peasantry for the duration of the second half of the twentieth century. The appeal of Marxism seems to have been limited to more educated, modern middle-class strata, especially the students. If this is correct, then clearly Iranian Marxists failed to link up with the major class that they perceived as the only social group which could both comprehend their ideology and had the power to bring about social change.

### Conclusion

This study has tried to shed some light on the failure of the left to organize among the social class that it considered its natural ally. The lack of an organized and strong presence among the working class was only one aspect, albeit a major one, of why the left was defeated after the 1979 Revolution in Iran. It is also clear that the appeal of the left in Iran was, for the most part, limited to the middle strata of the society. With such a social base, the left had little chance of surviving, on a large scale, the IRI's attempt to consolidate its position by eliminating the opposition. However, the left might have been able to survive on a much smaller scale, similar to the level of activities conducted by the guerrilla movement in the 1970s against the imperial regime. The left's inability to function even on this minimal level also had to do with its analysis of the working class. Here, the role of the industrial working class in crippling the imperial regime led to an overhaul of how the left perceived the concept of revolution. Before 1979, Third-World views of revolution (e.g. mass armed revolution, surrounding of urban areas from rural bases, and guerrilla warfare) were prevalent in the left's perception of revolution. These views were populist in nature and while they paid lip service to the role of the working class in any future revolution, they were more at ease with the classless notion of "people" rather than any particular class. The role of the working class in the 1979 Revolution changed all this. From this point on, all Third-World

activists killed while opposing the IRI. The Mojahedin, as well as many other opposition groups, did not consider the Majority factions part of the revolutionary movement and did not include their fallen members in their publications.

models gave way to the October Revolution model whereby the Russian Revolution and the role performed by the working class became the model of choice for most Iranian Marxists. Clearly, in such an approach the limited resources of various organizations were devoted to publication, propaganda, organizing among the working class, and involvement in the day-to-day events. Hence the left, particularly those groups whose history went back to the guerrilla movement of the 1970s and whose prestige and popularity were solely dependent on their past activities, gave up an organizational structure which was suited for underground activities and replaced it with one which was more suited for open or semi-open mass based activities. Once the latter failed, there was not much left of the former to return to. Both in theory and in practice, the left had dismantled its achievements of the past while it was utterly unable to replace them with any type of theoretical and practical framework.