

LEFTISTS AS POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

It's still commonly believed that a theocratic dictatorship was the inevitable conclusion of the 1979 Iranian Revolution due to decades of authoritarian secularization and westernization alienating the population. Scholarship reflecting the ad hoc nature of the Revolution and diversity of participants is increasing, but the former opinion still persists. This paper will illustrate that the 1979 Revolution was a pro-democracy movement that was later coopted by the religious right, and that a theocratic dictatorship was not at all the initial goal of the majority of revolutionary participants. It wasn't until February 1979 that Khomeini's political maneuvering began to form the political and legal nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Pahlavi regime, moderates/liberals, and even other leftists had consistently considered leftists as a more pressing political threat than the religious right, and Khomeini's and the Islamic Republic Party's dominance came as a surprise to many revolutionary actors.

This paper provides a brief background on the foundations of leftist organizations in Iran, discusses Feda'ian and Mojahedin participation in the revolution and post-revolutionary government, and explains how leftists were ultimately eliminated by the religious right.

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INTRODUCTION

It is often quipped that history is written by the victors, and at times it seems that despite strong efforts to understand history in its fullness, it is difficult to see past the slanted reporting of history's victors. Many current interpretations of the 1979 Iranian Revolution are in line with this tendency. Although an increasing number of scholars are recognizing the diversity of actors in the Revolution and its ad hoc nature meant that the establishment of theocracy was far from inevitable, it's still common to recognize only the radically conservative religious elements of the revolution and maintain that the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran was the only logical conclusion to the 1979 Revolution. The fact that the 1979 Revolution is often referred to as the "Islamic Revolution" serves as evidence that this approach still enjoys an unwarranted level of support.

Before 1979 leftists were perceived as the most dangerous opposition groups by both the Pahlavi regime and the leftists themselves. Religious opposition was largely quiet until 1963, and even after its appearance, neither the Pahlavi regime nor leftists considered it a substantial threat. Even up to the late 1970s, leftists fought among themselves and liberal reformists for revolutionary leadership. The desire for revolutionary unity prompted many to accept Khomeini as a symbolic leader of the revolution, but leftists and moderates assumed that Khomeini and the populist clerics would once more fade into the background after the revolution. However, it soon became painfully evident for the leftists that the religious right had no intention of giving up its power, and it even quickly moved to further increase their power. Leftists went from being major contenders for post-revolutionary leadership to being systematically targeted

and suppressed. By the mid-1980s the religious right had effectively eliminated leftist opposition, and more than ten thousand dissenters were killed in the process.

Because this paper is limited in length, it describes the history of three major leftist organizations in Iran: the Tudeh Party, and the Feda'ian and Mojahedin guerilla groups. I argue that the 1979 Iranian Revolution was a general pro-democracy movement; Khomeini and the populist clerics were better able to take advantage of circumstances as they arose, and that is what led to the creation of the Islamic Republic and its specific nature. The Revolution was ad hoc in its nature, and no particular outcome was inevitable.

FOUNDATIONS (1900-41)

Often the main focus in histories on Iranian politics concentrate on the central provinces. It is easy to forget the largely marginalized Northern provinces and the growing influence of socialism and communism there, largely outside the already limited Qajar control. The fact that an Iranian province briefly declared itself part of the Soviet Union and was even drawn into the Russian civil war is largely glossed over. However, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, commonly referred to as the Republic of Gilan, and the related *Jangali* movement, serve as important foundations for later Iranian political movements.

While the Republic of Gilan was short-lived, slightly more than a year from 1920-21, it serves as an important illustration of democratic movements in the constitutional period. More relevant to this paper, it served as the political awakening of much of the early Iranian leftist leadership. This republic could not have been founded without the

preceding *Jangali* movement. Named after the founder, Mirza Kuchek Khan's forest (jangal) fighters, the *Jangali* movement was at its inception in 1915 a nationalist and anti-imperialist response to the influence of foreign powers in Iran, particularly Russia's occupation of northern Iran. While attacking Russian commercial establishments in the region, the *Jangalis* also confiscated the land of large Iranian landowners, and at times held the owners themselves for ransom. This in addition to mobilization of peasant soldiers disquieted the landed class of Iranians in the area¹. These practices earned the *Jangalis* the support of nearby socialist and communist groups, although the *Jangalis* themselves conformed to neither ideology.

As Russian troops withdrew in the course of World War I, the *Jangali* movement made more progress, controlling the areas of Rasht, Lahijan, and Tavalish in addition to Fumanat, their initial base of operations². Throughout the movement, the *Jangalis* enjoyed increasingly widespread support among the peasants. Austria, Germany, and Turkey too supported the *Jangali* in their efforts against their mutual enemy—Turkey even providing the *Jangalis* with arms and officers.

Russia's own revolution in 1917 led to the complete withdrawal of Russian troops, and by 1918 the *Jangalis* controlled the whole of Gilan and parts of surrounding provinces³. They formed several ministries and improved local infrastructure. Despite their goal of national independence, the *Jangali* movement was drawn into Russia's civil war when the British moved support troops for the White Russian forces through

¹Janet Afary, "The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration," *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (1995): 5-6.

²Janet Afary, "The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration," *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (1995): 4.

³Janet Afary, "The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration," *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (1995): 6.

northern Iran and attacked *Jangali* troops en route to the Caucuses in 1918⁴. This attack coincided with a rare show of force from the central government, and the *Jangalis* suffered several setbacks and were forced to make concessions to the British. However, in turn the Soviets arrived in Gilan in pursuit of White troops in order to bolster the *Jangali* position in 1920. It was at this time that the Soviets and Kuchek Khan negotiated the formation of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran. In his pursuits Kuchek Khan had formed an alliance with the Iranian Communist Party (ICP); difficulties between the two ensued due to their ideological differences—Kuchek Khan had been a theology student, and Islam had been integrated into the *Jangali* movement⁵ enough to cause tension with the ICP.

The tensions between Kuchek Khan and ICP grew insurmountable, and the former left the government of the Republic of Gilan only a few months after its founding. The ICP subsequently used its increased power to implement policies that alienated the population. The ICP confiscated property in order to abolish the “feudal land relations”, but said property was never redistributed. A burdensome tax on wealthy individuals was adopted, and the ulama’s harsh criticisms further diminished the popular support Kuchek Khan had cultivated. However, the potential effects of an alienated population never came to fruition because Reza Khan (later to be Reza Pahlavi) attacked and defeated the

⁴Janet Afary, “The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration,” *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (1995): 7.

⁵Janet Afary, “The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration,” *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (1995): 5-7. Afary also discusses the Islamic Republic’s claiming Kuchek Khan as a forerunner to the specifically *Islamic* revolution, so much so that a 10 hour television program on Kuchek Khan was approved and broadcast throughout the 1990s (21).

Republic of Gilan shortly after, in 1921; Kuchek Khan fled to the mountains, and was later found frozen to death⁶.

Reza Khan had been a low ranking officer in Iran. When encouraged by British agents, who desired a more centralized and orderly government, he staged a coup. In 1921 he had only attained the position of president. It was in this period that he quashed the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran. Henceforth, Reza Khan would view communists/Marxists as enemies of the state. After the founding of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, Reza Pahlavi was able to use his increased authority to continue combating the influence of communism in Iran.

In 1929 to 1930 around 200 communists were arrested for participation in labor strikes. The 1929 May Day strike at a refinery in Abadan halted production at what was the largest refinery in the world at the time⁷. The Shah would not allow such challenges to his authority to go unpunished, and the harm the strikes did to British oil interests must have been particularly embarrassing. While the majority of strikers were quickly sentenced to exile within Iran, labor organizers and party leaders were imprisoned for more than a decade, until they were granted amnesty when Reza Pahlavi was forced to abdicate. Those who were released did not maintain party organizations, and many of those who had been active in diaspora were caught up in the coinciding Stalinist purges in Russia and Eastern Europe. Effectively, the entire communist organization of Iran

⁶Janet Afary, "The Contentious Historiography of the Gilan Republic in Iran: A Critical Exploration," *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1/2 (1995): 8.

⁷Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 36.

consisted of the thirty-eight communist prisoners in Block 7 of Qasr prison from 1930 to 1941⁸.

Initially, the public had been led to believe that the political prisoners of 1929 and 1930 were charged with espionage when in fact they were not charged at all until 1938-39, and tried retroactively under a 1931 law (passed without *Majles* approval) banning all parties and organizations promoting collectivist ideology⁹. This farce was made even more believable because thirty-two spies for the Soviets were also arrested in 1930 when Georges Agabekov, head of Soviet secret service in the Middle East, defected to France and gave up the information on his agency. The Pahlavi regime always suspected communists as Soviet spies, but when the two groups met in prison the communist prisoners actually despised the spies as mere sellouts, not committed to any ideology, let alone communism or socialism¹⁰.

Of the thirty-eight communist prisoners of 1930-41, three are of particular note: Jafar Pishevari (original surname was Javadzadeh), Yousef Eftekhari, and Ardashir Ovanessian. Pishevari was an ethnic Azeri that grew up in Baku. He participated in the above mentioned *Jangali* movement, and had actually been Interior Commissar of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran¹¹. Eftekhari was also an Azeri from Baku, who

⁸Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 29.

⁹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 29.

¹⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 29-30.

¹¹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 31; 36.

established a teachers' union in Tehran, and organized the Abadan oil refinery strike¹². Ovanessian was an ethnic Armenian from the city Rasht. The British described him as one of the foremost thinkers and intellectuals of the Iranian communist movement. As an interesting aside, he had been apprenticed to the pharmacist Alexander Atabegyan, who would later become one of Russia's most famed intellectual anarchists¹³. All three studied at KUTIV (Communist University of the Toilers of the East) in Moscow, where they were further educated in Marxism and even had lectures from such notables as Trotsky, Bukharin, Kamenev, and Zinoviev¹⁴.

While these three would later vie for leadership of Iranian communism, they are still representative of the body of Iranian communists in the early period. Northern Iran was the heartland of communism in Iran. Most of the party members arrested were from the provinces of Azerbaijan or Gilan, and the majority were Azeri. Other minorities included Armenians and Jews. Only five of the thirty-eight jailed in Qasr were ethnic Persians. Most were semi-skilled artisans or teachers, with very few intellectuals or highly educated professionals¹⁵.

The next group to be targeted by the Pahlavi regime is known as "The Fifty-Three", not to be confused with its contemporary trial of the same name in Stalinist Russia, which likely influenced Reza Pahlavi. Abrahamian asserts that the fifty-three

¹²Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 36.

¹³Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 36-37.

¹⁴Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 36.

¹⁵Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 32-34.

were actually comprised of two very distantly connected groups: veteran labor organizers and young intellectuals. Unlike the arrests and trials of previous political prisoners, this was widely publicized to serve as an example to other would-be dissidents¹⁶.

The trial focused on Doctor Taqi Arani, who was a professor at two universities in Tehran, and who had the habit of forming conversation and book groups. These groups discussed a wide variety of subjects from psychology, the sciences, literature, and Marxism. Many of the participants were unaware of the other conversation groups, and the defendants were largely unfamiliar with each other. When border control caught two men illegally crossing into the Soviet Union in 1937, a string of bizarre and distant links led them to discover Arani's conversation groups. Arani also published and wrote for the journal *Donya*. In order to slip past censorship, *Donya* featured mostly articles about literature and science and avoided impassioned or inflammatory tones. The Fifty-Three later mocking their accusers, claimed the language was so dry and academic they probably struggled to read it. However, when the trial came, the occasional Marxist article was damning evidence. While Arani never denied he had Marxist leanings (he asserted there was no law limiting freedom of thought), he and all the group members firmly held that these conversation groups were not organizations or parties—vocabulary alone could be the difference between legal and illegal gatherings, and were, therefore, not breaking the 1931 law banning collectivists parties¹⁷. Despite their assertions, they were found guilty and sentenced to relatively severe sentences.

¹⁶Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 48-49.

¹⁷Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 65.

The meeting of the original 1930 communist prisoners and The Fifty-Three in Qasr prison was not without friction. The former condemned the latter as Trotskyists, and the latter the former as Stalinists blindly accepting of Soviet policies¹⁸. Additionally there were demographic differences between the two groups. The original prisoners were largely ethnic minorities from the north, with some, but not extensive education. The Fifty-Three, on the other hand, were mainly intelligentsia and ethnic Persians from central provinces—elites that looked down on their hopelessly provincial comrades¹⁹. The Fifty-Three reflected the changing direction of communism and socialism in Iran from the later 1930s on. While leftists still had some base of support in the north, particularly Azerbaijan, organizations were largely focused in the central provinces and increasingly Persian in their membership.

TUDEH PARTY

In 1941 Reza Shah was forced to abdicate when the British and Soviets invaded and occupied Iran because of the Shah's too friendly attitude towards Germany in World War II. His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, succeeded him. Shy and reserved, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi lacked many of the authoritarian and micromanaging tendencies of his father. A period of drastically increased freedom in politics and journalism ensued; habeas corpus, right to legal counsel, defendant's access to media, and public, civilian

¹⁸Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 69.

¹⁹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 50-54.

trials were restored²⁰. Accordingly, most political prisoners were granted amnesty in that same year.

After being released, many of the prisoners reunited to form the *Hezb-e Tudeh Iran* (Party of the Iranian Masses) in 1941. Their early platform focused on individual rights, and was much more similar to that of a liberal reformation party than a communist party. They maintained many traditional practices, including, barring women from membership, prayer rooms in party club houses, and marching in *Muharram* processions. However, as more and more political prisoners were released and joined Tudeh, the party shifted leftwards²¹. Abrahamian describes Tudeh as, "...initially a hybrid of socialism and communism, parliamentary liberalism and revolutionary radicalism, Marxism from Western Europe and Leninism from the Bolshevik Revolution."²²

Tudeh was the first mass organization in Iran; In 1947 Lenczowski estimated Tudeh membership from 50,000 to 200,000 members, and Abrahamian believes that with affiliated labor organizations' membership it was around 275,000. While Jahanpour provides the number 400,000²³. The truth most likely lies between Lenczowski's and

²⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 74. Despite the general freedom of this time the Shah had established a civilian surveillance program and spent most of his time modernizing the military.

²¹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 77-78.

²²Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 81-82.

²³Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 82.

George Lenczowski, "The Communist Movement in Iran," *The Middle East Journal* 1, no. 1 (1947): 82.

Farhang Jahanpour. "Iran: The Rise and Fall of the Tudeh Party." *The World Today* 40, no. 4 (1984): 153

Abrahamian's figures, but Tudeh's popularity is quite notable. However, certain Tudeh policies disenchanted the population. Tudeh disfavored oil concessions to the British, as it would conflict with their anti-imperialist ideology, yet saw no conflict when it came to supporting concessions to the Soviets. Understandably, many found this double standard disingenuous at best or as evidence of cronyism. In addition, Tudeh support for minority autonomy movements received criticisms and proved to be damaging for the party.

In the period of 1944-46, Tudeh had supported autonomy movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. Both succeeded, largely due to the continued Soviet occupation since their initial invasion in World War II. Unfortunately for the Tudeh party, both of the ethnic republics collapsed almost immediately after the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the Shah's move to regain control of the regions. Around 7,000 Tudeh members fled to the Soviet Union while Tudeh leaders Ovanessian (veteran communist) and Iskandari (of the Fifty-Three) were sentenced to death for armed insurrection²⁴. Despite the setbacks of 1944-46, Tudeh was able to woo back members relatively quickly, and things seemed on the mend by 1949 when they were planning to hold their first public event since the Shah's retaliation. Inopportunistly, an attempt on the Shah's life was made on February 4th, 1949, and the would-be assassin was found to have tenuous ties to the Tudeh party. Mohammad Reza Shah banned Tudeh, its publications, and arrested two hundred members—citing his father's 1931 law outlawing communal ideology²⁵. However, the majority of those arrested were soon released, and the official ban had little effect on reality. Of the two hundred arrested fifty were tried in military

²⁴Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 83.

²⁵Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 83-84.

courts, but unlike the trials under Reza Pahlavi, the media was allowed access to the proceedings²⁶.

Despite the efforts of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Tudeh continued to be active in politics after 1949. One of the most important of their contributions was the support of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. Although Mossadeq was from the National Front Party, Tudeh provided a very large base of support for him (prior to 1952 the parties were in competition)²⁷. At a pro-Mossadeq protest outside parliament on July 1953, Tudeh members even outnumbered National Front participants ten to one²⁸. Unfortunately for Mossadeq and the fledgling democracy, the association with communist, pro-Soviet Tudeh, in addition to the nationalization of oil and the subsequent end of concessions to the West, led the British and Americans to sponsor the 1953 Coup that ousted Mossadeq. But the 1953 Coup was more damaging to Tudeh than to the National Front. The National Front accused Tudeh of doing nothing to counter the coup, costing them public support²⁹. Additionally, the Shah's return marked a dramatic increase in in despotic suppression of Tudeh.

²⁶Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 85.

²⁷Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fada'i Period of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 2.

²⁸Farhang Jahanpour, "Iran: The Rise and the Fall of the Tudeh Party." *The World Today* 40, no. 4 (1984): 153.

²⁹Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fada'i Period of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979* (Syracuse New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 2-3. Tudeh had 600 members in the military in the covert Officers' Organization. The National Front claimed they could have provided intelligence or even have staged a counter-coup after the events of August 1953.

Anxious to augment his control after being forced to leave the country in 1953, the post-1953 Shah resembled another man. The young and permissive man that ascended in 1941 was replaced by an autocrat desperate to suppress opposition. He formed SAVAK to suppress opposition, and it was at this time that torture was implemented against political prisoners for the first time since Qajar days. Tudeh had gone underground and adopted measures to protect organizational information, such as devising a code. Yet they had not prepared themselves for torture, and many members gave up information under duress. SAVAK quickly uncovered the organization of the party, and 4,121 members were arrested³⁰. Despite the fact that it was well known that Tudeh was involved in illegal activities like arms and human smuggling and embezzling, the charges against Tudeh defendants were instead publicized as espionage and treason; Tudeh, and most communist parties, would be accused as Soviet lackeys time and time again³¹. However, Iranian communists generally had no knowledge whatsoever of Soviet intelligence—Tudeh itself had been subject to Soviet spying, and the agent had gone undetected for roughly thirty years³².

2,844 pro forma letters praising the Shah and condemning Tudeh were signed by Tudeh prisoners³³. After signing these recantations, prisoners were released. In the

³⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 89-90. While Tudeh's code was sophisticated, SAVAK broke it, it's believed with CIA assistance. This isn't unlikely since the U.S. distrusted Tudeh, and was eager to do what it could to damage communism in Iran.

³¹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 93-94. One member of the Officers' Organization did confess to disseminating information, but interestingly enough it was to an American officer.

³²Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 94. The Soviet agent had entered the military academy in the 1940s and was not discovered until 1977.

following decade nearly all Tudeh prisoners were released, and the majority never returned to political activism. It should be noted that those who signed the letters or had given up information under torture were never condemned by the party, and if they so wished, were welcome to reunite with it. Those who were believed to have been too cooperative, or active collaborators, were never welcomed back to the fold. Tudeh was no longer a force to be reckoned with, and its existence was largely nominal.

Although Tudeh had a greatly diminished role after 1953, its voice could still be heard in the few years preceding the 1979 Revolution. It put forth no real leadership, but it did release statements of support for Khomeini and other clergy despite the inevitable conflict between communism and political Shiism. This odd alliance is initially baffling. The explanation is that Tudeh never considered Islam as an ideological threat, or even entertained the possibility that the religious right would succeed in homogenizing their power in a landscape of extremely diverse political participants. When explaining this unexpected union in a 1976 issue of *World Marxist*, Nuraddin Kianuri, secretary of the Tudeh party, was much more concerned with Maoists than the religious right³⁴.

Kianuri explained that the first goal in the revolution was to overthrow the monarchy, and that wide-based support across society would be necessary. Kianuri acknowledged that conservative and religious segments of society would likely never support a socialist revolution, but they would be willing to support the clergy and the overthrow of a dictator. After this initial stage, the revolution would shift towards

³³ Ervand, Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 95.

³⁴ Nuraddin Kianuri, "Alignment of Class Forces at the Democratic Stage." *World Marxist Review* 19, no. 2 (1976): 93.

liberalism and socialism, and the real struggle would be between leftist parties fighting for leadership. In his justification Kianuri stated,

In the fight to overthrow the reactionary regime, the working class can cooperate with forces not interested in democratic revolution, and with forces, let me add, which potentially might become enemies of that revolution. How realistic this is only the future will show. But we believe there are social forces in Iran which, though far removed from the left, even from anything democratic, are eager to see the present regime done with³⁵.

The alliance with the religious right was then one of convenience, and the clergy would simply be done away with once they had served their purpose. Yet as events unfolded, it became clear this was a gross miscalculation, and quite the reverse came to pass. Even as Kianuri saw the Islamic Republic Party make a sudden, blunt, and successful power grab that resulted in the systematic targeting of leftists, he did nothing to oppose them. Up until his arrest in 1983, Kianuri supported Khomeini. His loyalty bought him only a couple more years of survival than the leftists that had always opposed Khomeini and the Islamic Republic Party³⁶.

GUERILLA MOVEMENTS

While it is readily apparent that the Shah's westernization and modernization policies embodied in the White Revolution alienated the religious and conservative elements of society, it must be understood that liberals and leftists were also alienated by his policies. While many liberals and leftists may have agreed with the goals of the Shah,

³⁵Nuraddin Kianuri, "Alignment of Class Forces at the Democratic Stage." *World Marxist Review* 19, no. 2 (1976): 93.

³⁶Farhang Jahanpour, "Iran: The Rise and Fall of the Tudeh Party." *The World Today* 40, no. 4 (1984): 154.

they certainly didn't agree with his authoritarian and anti-democratic means. Years later the Shah admitted this fault and justified his actions, saying,

To carry through reforms, one can't help but be authoritarian. Especially when the reforms take place in a country like Iran, where only twenty-five percent of the inhabitants know how to read and write...If I hadn't been harsh, I wouldn't even have been able to carry out agrarian reform and my whole reform program would have been stalemated³⁷.

This attitude united the majority of Iranians of varying political leanings to support the 1979 revolution. This is why I argue the 1979 Revolution was a pro-democracy revolution that through circumstances of history ended in the creation of the Islamic Republic rather than an Islamic revolution from its inception. Too often the role of the left is deemphasized, if not neglected.

After the Shah's shift towards despotism, numerous groups expressed opposition to the regime outside the law. As more political parties were banned, some came to the conclusion that armed struggle was the only means of overthrowing an autocratic monarch. In the 1960s a number of guerilla organizations were founded that would torment the Shah all the way up to his abdication in 1979. Because the scope of this paper is limited, only *Feda'ian-e Khalq*, *Mojahedin-e Khalq*, and relevant interactions with other groups will be discussed.

Feda'ian-e Khalq

Feda'ian-e Khalq (Self-sacrificers of the People) was founded in 1971 at the merging of two groups originating in the 1960s, and various smaller groups were absorbed thereafter. The two groups were the Jazani-Zarifi group and the Ahmadzadeh-

³⁷ As quoted by Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fadai period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 4.

Puyan-Meftahi group (referred to as the first group and second group respectively hereafter), both named after their founders.

The first group's fame is based on the 1971 Siahkal operation; its objective was to capture the gendarmerie post in Siahkal, Gilan in order to free a fellow guerilla imprisoned there. The prisoner had already been moved so the objective was not met, but the operation served as a success in other ways. While the majority of guerillas in the Siahkal operation were from the first group, one member from the second group participated when the police came too close to finding him in Tehran—the first instance of a joint effort between the two groups. Secondly, while the actual operation had been very small (8 guerillas), the fact that the Shah declared a state of emergency in Gilan Province led the public to believe the guerillas were a much greater force and more intimidating than they were in reality. Additionally, it reawakened the national memory of Kuchek Khan and the *Jangali* movement, and more people were inspired to join the guerilla organization in the struggle against the Shah. The operation would always engender a sense of respect for Feda'ian in later years.

The two groups had significantly different backgrounds and ideologies that would later create conflict within Feda'ian, but at the time of the merger both were willing to overlook these differences for the sake of revolutionary unity. The first group's leaders were older, and had roots in Tudeh; the second group was younger, and inspired by Che Guevara and Latin American socialism more than Soviet experiences³⁸. Jazani and Ahmadzadeh also differed on the extent to which guerilla movements should be used in revolutions as well as clashing urban versus rural views.

³⁸Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Secularism and the Iranian Militant Left: Political Misconception or Cultural Issues?" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011) : 36

After Siahkal, the majority of Feda'i operations were to obtain funding for the organization, mostly through bank hold ups, and there were significant casualties. SAVAK was also successfully tracking down the guerillas, and their numbers were decreasing faster than could be replenished. To limit the amount of information SAVAK could obtain through any one arrest, Feda'ian restructured its organization. Lateral ties were cut so that cells had limited interaction with each other and even members of the same cell had decreased interaction. Commands came from the cell leader to each guerilla. This allowed cells a high amount of autonomy which may have contributed to factionalism, while it also may have helped keep the group in existence by providing flexibility.

From its inception, Feda'ian allowed latitude in its ideology. The first group had been founded by those who believed armed struggle was ideal only as way of resistance until legal, political means could be used. The second group, however, believed armed struggle was the only way to bring about revolution, and was much less interested in politics. The first group was also more interested in inspiring rural citizens to unite and create a peasant army, whereas the second group emphasized urban guerilla conflict. Despite these differences, the two groups merged, and attempted a stance of neutrality on other hot-topic issues, such as being neither pro-Soviet communism nor pro-Chinese communism. While this attitude helped them in absorbing smaller guerilla organizations, the internal conflict between Jazani and Ahmadzadeh factions would always persist. Even though leadership was decentralized so that each cell could choose its own position, a small number of groups would break off, and many members would later become disillusioned by violent internal purges.

The years 1973-76 were the most active for Feda'ian; they assassinated six notables—mostly linked to SAVAK, bombed several government and military buildings, and continued street clashes with the police. Those assassinated were: Mohammad Fateh Yazdi (tycoon), Major Niktab (SAVAK interrogator), Hossein Nahidi (Assistant Director of SAVAK in Khorasan Province), Major Yaddollah Noruzi (University Guard), Abbas Shahriari (SAVAK agent), and Ebrahim Nushirvanpur (suspected collaborator)³⁹.

Abbas Shahriari is a particularly interesting case because of his connections with Tudeh. Shahriari had been a member of Tudeh before becoming a secret agent for SAVAK. He was later asked to arrange an arms trade on the Iraqi border, where he collaborated in setting up a sting operation in 1969⁴⁰. Not only were members of Tudeh arrested, but there were also arrests from the Palestine Group and the Jazani-Zarifi group (before the 1971 merger). Needless to say, these groups resented the fact that the traitor had come from Tudeh ranks. Feda'ian took full advantage of his assassination in 1974 by using it to smear Tudeh as well, emphasizing that Shahriari had been a Tudeh member as well as criticizing the Tudeh for its continued refusal to join the armed struggle. In the existing political climate, such attacks hit their mark, and the already struggling Tudeh's support was further decreased. This assassination was also especially embarrassing for the SAVAK, seeing as Shahriari had been under their protection at the time. Additionally, the assassinations demonstrated that Feda'ian had greater stealth and surveillance than SAVAK had suspected. While these assassinations shook the confidence of SAVAK and

³⁹Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 37.

⁴⁰Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 13; 40.

encouraged other guerrilla groups to join Feda'ian, it also provoked harsh retribution from SAVAK. Not only were interrogations made even more brutal, but seven Feda'i prisoners were murdered, including Jazani⁴¹.

When their increasing boldness increased casualties, Feda'ian attempted to counter its losses by absorbing new groups, but this also led to information leaks. At the same time SAVAK had improved its counterterrorism training, and the combination of these factors was taking a heavy toll on Feda'i numbers. In 1976 much of Feda'i leadership had been killed, and the Tehran branch had lost around eighty percent of its members⁴². The reliance on vertical communication instead of lateral that was meant to protect information made regrouping and organizing more difficult within the country. Additionally, pro-Jazani and pro-Ahmadzadeh factionalism among the leadership outside Iran made them largely absent in reorganization efforts⁴³. Fortunately for Feda'ian, pressure on the front of human rights from the Carter administration in 1977 and 1978 led to the Shah releasing prisoners that had been detained after serving their sentences in full. Consequently, some of the old Feda'i leaders were released and began reestablishing Feda'ian. This time also marks a shift towards pro-Jazani sentiment, and leadership even went so far as to adopt Jazani philosophy as the official philosophy in December, 1977⁴⁴. The movement towards politics and away from militancy was complete after the 1979

⁴¹Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 37.

⁴²Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 51.

⁴³Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 52-54.

⁴⁴Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 55.

Revolution. Feda'ian became not only a legitimate political party, but the most popular leftist party. May Day 1979 saw around 500,000 rally under the Feda'i banner, the Feda'i journal, *Kar*, had a weekly readership of 100,000 to 300,000, and in 1980 ten percent of *Majles* seats were filled by Feda'i members⁴⁵.

The culmination of revolution also served as a wedge in the ranks of Feda'ian. While there had been increasing divisions, like the ever-present conflict between pro-Jazani and pro-Ahmadzadeh factions, differing opinions on Khomeini compounded tensions—ending in a rupture. After the schism Feda'ian-Majority joined Tudeh in providing conditional support for Khomeini, but Feda'ian-Minority was vehemently opposed to it and more interested in quickly steering the revolution in a communist direction.

Mojahedin-e Khalq

The Mojahedin have their roots in the Liberation Movement, an organization established by Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Taleqani in 1961. Bazargan promoted harmony between science and technology and Islam. While Bazargan actively opposed Marxism, Taleqani admired some of its ideas, and synthesized them with his traditional religious education. The result was an Islam that heavily stressed social justice—championing the rights of the oppressed and attacking feudalism and capitalism. The Liberation Movement was allowed to continue because the Shah was much more concerned by Marxist opposition, but was banned after the June 5th Uprising (discussed in more detail in the next section). At this point the Mojahedin splintered off, and inspired by Bazargan's and Taleqani's theories adapted them for armed struggle. The two

⁴⁵Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerilla Odyssey: Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and The Fada'i period of National Liberation in Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 67.

maintained good relations, and Taleqani even said, “The founders of the Mojahedin were true Muslims. They were gems—or beacons—that glow in times of darkness. It was they who began the heroic struggle that culminated eventually in the Islamic Revolution.⁴⁶”

The Liberation Movement’s influence, particularly Taleqani’s, is easily seen in Mojahedin ideology. The Mojahedin believed God had created the mechanisms for social evolution, and it was God’s will that ultimately a classless world governed by equality would develop. They accused the ulama of getting bogged down by traditionalism, and they maintained that by denying the dynamism of Islam the ulama had reduced Islam to a banal list of commands. Khomeini and other clergy would later attack them on this point. In their manual *Cheguneh Quran biamuzim* (How to Study the Quran) they explained religious texts must be understood in their contexts. Slavery and gender inequality, both common in traditional texts, were condoned by God; they were simply faults that existed in that time, but society would later evolve past that⁴⁷. They were among the first to interpret the history of Shiism as a protest movement against injustice and state corruption; this protest against injustice continued, and motivated them in their opposition to the Shah⁴⁸.

Their initial focus was in opposing the imperialism practiced by the U.S. and the capitalism propagated by the Pahlavi regime in addition to the corruption of the regime. Because the Shah had refused to listen to peaceful protests, violently responding to the

⁴⁶As quoted by Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 81.

⁴⁷Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 92-95.

⁴⁸Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 103. Ali Shariati is more well know proponent of Shiism as a protest movement, but he actually developed these ideas after the Mojahedin. Abrahamian even provides an anecdote in which Shariati refers to himself as the Mojahedin’s ‘Zaynab’, a survivor left to tell the tale.

June 5th, 1963 protests for example, the population had been silenced by fear. The Mojahedin argued armed struggle was the only means left to them, and the power that came with it would counter the public's fear. They claimed inspirations from a long list of those who had struggle for justice before them—Imam Hossein, Kuchek Khan, Mossadeq, and those who died on June 5th⁴⁹.

The years of 1965-68 were devoted to developing ideology and publication. In 1968 they began training members for armed operations, mostly in PLO camps. By 1971 they had around thirty members that had been trained. Operations were planned for later in the future, but Feda'ian's Siahkal operation in February inspired them to begin operations sooner than planned. They chose to blow up an electrical plant to disrupt the celebrations of 2500 years of monarchy. However, in their attempt to procure dynamite they unknowingly solicited help from a SAVAK informant, which led to the arrests of thirty-five members before they could realize their goal, and an additional seventy shortly after⁵⁰. After military tribunals in which they passionately defended the Mojahedin position, eleven were executed—including the founders Hanifnezhad, Mohsen, and Badizadegan⁵¹. Even after the loss of half of their organization, the Mojahedin were able to reorganize fairly quickly. The executions had also kindled growing admiration that helped in recruiting new members. With prompting from widows and sisters and help from Ayatollah Taleqani many senior clerics even mourned them as martyrs. Khomeini was not among them⁵².

⁴⁹Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 99.

⁵⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 128.

⁵¹Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 135.

Their efforts continued within prisons as well. Inspired by Feda'ian's *komunha*, they set up communities inside so members could socialize and refine the ideology. They also cooperated with the parallel Feda'ian *komunha* to smuggle letters in and out as well as to organize escapes (for being the product of an authoritarian regime, Iranian prisons had a surprisingly high escape rate at the time)⁵³. Also like Feda'ian, Mojahedin used prisons as recruiting grounds and actively courted and absorbed smaller resistance groups.

The years between 1972 and 1974 were highly productive for the Mojahedin. In 1974 they successfully completed their first operations outside of Tehran. They and Feda'ian were the poster-children of armed resistance. During their highpoint of success, the schism in 1975 seemed to be incredibly abrupt. The public was shocked when Mojahedin published an intensely anti-Islamic piece. The piece had actually been published by a faction within Mojahedin who fully adopted Marxist philosophy, including atheism. The differences were irreconcilable, and the purely Marxist faction formed its own organization. After a series of name changes and a merger, this organization became known as *Peykar*. However, those within Mojahedin had seen divisions growing. Abrahamian explains that quite a few Mojahedin became disenchanted with their religious ties, particularly because of Khomeini. Some were frustrated with their lack of progress amongst the intelligentsia of Iran. Mojahedin were also in communication with secular opposition groups, notably Feda'ian, and some members were won over by external ideologies—it must have been significantly

⁵²Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 137

⁵³Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 139

disheartening that secular leftist were outperforming the Mojahedin in terms of operations and martyrs by a factor of two to one⁵⁴.

The two factions did not part ways on good terms⁵⁵. They attacked each other's ideologies, and didn't cooperate in joint operations. When the Marxist Mojahedin suggested a merger with Feda'ian, Feda'ian accused them of sharpening the divisions between Muslims and Marxists. Feda'ian was also strongly opposed to a union because the Marxist Mojahedin had a Maoist slant in their opinion. Pro-Khomeini clerics jumped on the chance to declare Marxists 'unclean' and any mixture of Marxism and Islam as a contaminated ideology doomed to failure.

Like Feda'ian, Mojahedin numbers were bolstered from 1977 to 1979 when the Shah released large numbers of prisoners due to international human rights pressure. Most of the Mojahedin prisoners returned to the struggle, and with all the buoyed opposition organizations, revolutionary momentum reached its highpoint. In the days surrounding February 1, 1979, the media credited Feda'ian and Mojahedin guerillas in the armed clashes with the military and praised them as revolutionary heroes.

Immediately following the revolution, the Mojahedin walked a thin line between the Provisional Government and Khomeini's parallel government. While both sides reached out to the Mojahedin, in a process that came to be known as 'martyr stealing', the Mojahedin focused on increasing their popular support instead. They formed several sub-organizations that catered to the youth, women, workers, and other sections of society.

⁵⁴Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 149; 152

⁵⁵Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 162. When two Muslim Mojahedin attempted to take supplies from Marxist Mojahedin it sparked a confrontation. One of the Muslim Mojahedin was killed, the other shot and wounded. The event obviously soured relations between the two factions.

They had set up a clandestine network as well to protect themselves from foreign intervention or loyalist coups in the future; they also remembered their strained relationship with Khomeini and his followers, and unlike many groups prepared for the possibility of an attack from the religious right. Nevertheless, the Mojahedin avoided confrontation with Khomeini. When leftists and liberals staged demonstrations, the Mojahedin either remained silent or warned against the possibility of imperialists taking advantage of divisions. Despite their suspicion of Khomeini, they believed the country must remain unified until settled to avoid a repeat of the 1953 coup.

Their first criticism of Khomeini and his parallel government surfaced in April of 1979 when two of Ayatollah Taleqani's sons were arrested and detained by a *komiteh*. However, after Khomeini and Taleqani had a sit-down to resolve the situation, the Mojahedin returned to their non-confrontationist stance. A similar instance in June, in which a Mojahedin was arrested after visiting the Soviet embassy, also blew over quickly, and the Mojahedin dropped their criticisms after they had been told the situation was resolved⁵⁶. Unlike most leftist groups, they even chose to campaign in the election for the Assembly of Experts, therefore, legitimizing it to some extent. This quietism continued until they boycotted the referendum for ratifying the constitution at the end of 1979, and the presidential election of 1980 when they put up the Mojahedin leader Masoud Rajavi as a candidate. Khomeini quickly barred Rajavi, claiming someone who had refused to support the constitution could not be trusted to uphold it. Some among the Mojahedin supported the candidate Bani-Sadr, who ended up being the surprising winner.

⁵⁶Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 192-93. The Mojahedin arrested near the embassy was never released, and died with many others after the crackdown in June 1981.

During the following *Majles* elections the tension culminated in violence. *Hezbollahis* supported by the IRP would regularly attack Mojahedin offices, publications, and rallies. Khomeini began vaguely criticizing the Mojahedin, raising the charge of hypocrites. Besides the unfair election practices outlined by the constitution, there were also accusations of outright fraud, including burning ballot boxes. Despite all of this, the Mojahedin still applauded Khomeini for leading them in the fight against tyranny. Yet in a private meeting between President Bani-Sadr and Rajavi, Rajavi came to the conclusion that the Mojahedin must oppose the government, and that they had the popular support to do so⁵⁷. This meeting also was a prelude to a relationship of support between Bani-Sadr and the Mojahedin.

Thereafter relations between the IRP and the Mojahedin grew increasingly violent. *Pasdars* and *Hezbollahis* encouraged by the IRP amplified their violent interference by attacking rallies and damaging Mojahedin printing centers. When the Mojahedin explicitly accused the IRP of monopolizing power and hinted that they may resort to armed resistance in the future, numerous organizations beseeched them to reign in the conflict. Bazargan exhorted the Mojahedin to moderate their criticisms, hoping the old ties between the Liberation Movement and Mojahedin might convince them, but the Mojahedin refused to back down⁵⁸. When Mojahedin detained and searched *Hezbollahis* that had attacked the crowds at Bani-Sadr's commemoration of Mossadeq's death, the government, now firmly in IRP hands, banned Mojahedin demonstrations. Bani-Sadr and the Mojahedin then encouraged the public to take back democracy and overthrow the

⁵⁷Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 204-05.

⁵⁸Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 215.

IRP. This heated the atmosphere for the June 20th Uprising of 1981 and the subsequent Reign of Terror.

Khomeini's and the IRP's hatred for Marxists is easily understood, but their hatred for the Mojahedin is less obvious, and arguably, more intense. Khomeini strongly disliked them before the Islamic Republic. In 1971 his voice was noticeably absent from among those of the senior ulama who had praised the executed Mojahedin martyrs, as previously mentioned. In 1972 Mojahedin leaders went to Najaf to ask for Khomeini's assistance. They said he instead quizzed them on theology and admonished them for insulting pro-regime clerics. The Mojahedin may have been more dangerous to Khomeini than Marxists because it would be more difficult to simply discredit them as immoral atheists, even though he later tried that. Mojahedin offered a different interpretation of Islam, and more critically, they believed there was little need for clergy and were accepting of pluralism. Their message was likeable, and in direct opposition to Khomeini's narrow, absolutist interpretations. Khomeini would charge them with hypocrisy, those who only masqueraded as Muslims, and in prisons, they were executed more often than any other opposition groups.

THE REVOLUTION AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC⁵⁹

Despite leftist involvement and contribution in the 1979 Revolution, leftists were never recognized as revolutionary leadership, and were even effectively marginalized from the government. Several factors led to their rapid fall from power. Their inability to

⁵⁹Due to limited length, this paper skips the Premiership of Shapour Bakhtiar who was appointed by the Shah at the end of 1978 as a sign of compromise. Bakhtiar believed the revolution had become too radicalized and that a reconciliatory government was a safer choice. He had virtually no support among the opposition and his own National Front expelled him. His only hope came from military backing, but that quickly crumbled. His premiership lasted thirty-eight days.

cooperate or create a united front contributed largely to their downfall. Tensions preventing cohesion arose at several levels: leftists would not cooperate with liberal reformers because they viewed them as reactionary tools of the West. Trust among leftist parties themselves was rare (e.g. communist Feda'ian and communist Tudeh were by no means at all allies), and even in individual parties schisms were common place. While the left suffered from factionalism, the religious right was able to capitalize revolutionary momentum and through quick maneuvering, continually commandeered state institutions. Those who opposed them had increasingly fewer resources to utilize. Khomeini's political shrewdness must be acknowledged. Without him, the Islamic Republic, very well may have not come into being.

The Appearance of Populist Clerics and Khomeini

As the revolutionary movement was picked up by the public, the clergy emerged as a natural source of leadership. While leftists may have been more experienced in opposition, they didn't have the means to mobilize crowds for demonstrations. Leftist groups had already been banned and forced underground by the time protests became popular. Since the Shah could not ban religion in a traditional country such as Iran, the ulama inevitably had much more significant public presence. Despite their efforts, militants could never produce the destabilizing effects that mass protests did⁶⁰. It was this advantage that led many leftists and liberals to accept clerical leadership.

Paidar explains that even as late as the summer of 1978 leadership was heterogeneous, and even among the religious leadership there was a diversity of ideology. However, Khomeini's deportation from Iraq at the behest of the Shah, and his move to

⁶⁰Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth-century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199

Paris set in motion the rise of the populist clerics and Khomeini's domination of the revolutionary scene. In Paris he had access to mass media, and communication with the opposition within and outside Iran was facilitated. Khomeini also found it prudent to temper his message; Khomeini's broadcasts revealed a man that had become considerably more moderate and palatable since the 1960s and public support for him grew rapidly. He convinced the general opposition that he could provide disinterested, spiritual leadership. He even explicitly eliminated the possibility of clergy rule, and so his previous views were largely neglected⁶¹. The leftists, relieved that the public had finally joined the process, didn't oppose his leadership, especially since they didn't find the religious right to be particularly threatening. One wonders if Khomeini would have emerged as the leader of the Revolution had he never gone to Paris.

The June 5th Uprising of 1963 first brought Khomeini to the limelight. During the Ashura procession crowds in the streets of several cities started shouting "Imam Hossein, protect us from injustice." The Shah responded violently. Authorities reported 200 had been killed, an American observer estimated a couple thousand, and the opposition claimed 20,000 casualties⁶². Khomeini had previously been absent from the opposition, but his incendiary attacks on the Shah following the bloodshed of June 5th won him admiration. Soon after the Shah exiled Khomeini, and the latter moved to the holy Shī'a city of Najaf. It was here that Khomeini developed his arguments for *Velayat-e faqih*, or rule by the ulama.

⁶¹Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201

⁶²Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 21.

It should be stressed that *Velayat-e faqih* was never popular among the ulama, and even among the clergy of Iran, it sparked suspicion and even claims of too severely overstepping tradition. Although ideologically opposed to monarchy, most Shī'a ulama traditionally accepted monarchy as a necessary evil. As such, many believed the clergy should stay away from the corrupting influence of governing, and were very opposed to the idea of a government run by the clergy. At the time, incorporating the *Velayat-e faqih* would seem implausible, certainly not the main goal of the revolution. Even when people were shouting for an Islamic Republic, the majority most likely pictured something much less radical. More moderate groups, including many clerics, pictured a country where law would not grossly contradict *shari'a* or popular beliefs. Khomeini was an extreme radical, and his ideas did not represent what the majority of Iranians believed. Even after the 1963 increased visibility of religious opposition, theocracy was still far from the obvious conclusion.

Like the June Fifth Uprising revealing opposition among clerics, the violence of Black Friday, September 8, 1978, caused another shift among the opposition. Previously the majority of the population had relatively moderate demands—limiting the Shah's power and returning to the 1906 constitution. Conversely, Khomeini and the populist clerics called for the removal of the Shah. However, the bloodshed of that day led many to believe that reconciliation with the Shah was impossible, and the violent trauma radicalized the public. Instead of bolstering the numbers of the left, Black Friday led to mass support for Khomeini and the radical clerics that had always called for the Shah's removal⁶³.

⁶³ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 34-35.

As opposition against the Shah grew, even ministry workers began to hold strikes. Soon the country was brought to a standstill, and state institutions were inoperable⁶⁴. Religious organizations stepped up to fill the void of state services. They provided food for those who had been out of work due to prolonged strikes. More ominous, they established a civilian militia of *pasdars* to maintain order and established religious courts in the absence of civil courts⁶⁵. Clerical charity obviously stimulated support among many people, and the organizations they had created would continue after the revolution, putting them a step ahead of other groups in the Provisional Government.

Shortly after returning to Iran in February of 1979, Khomeini began organizing the Provisional Government to govern the country until elections, and secretly created the Revolutionary Council, populated by his supporters⁶⁶. Mehdi Bazargan was appointed Prime Minister due to his respected reputation and political experience. Despite his experience, Bazargan's premiership was largely ineffective, and his hands were tied again and again by the parallel government set up by Khomeini and the Islamic Republic Party (IRP). For example, one of the first institutions annexed by the IRP was state media. When Bazargan tried to publicize the actions of the IRP and explain the detriments of the parallel government, he was given the less than desirable time slot of eleven at night⁶⁷. The following month, March 1979, a referendum with the options of either an Islamic Republic or not was held. Understandably, the vagueness was worrying,

⁶⁴Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in tweteith century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 195.

⁶⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 37-38.

⁶⁶Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 40.

⁶⁷Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 50.

and in an attempt to avoid anarchy, many organizations encouraged voting yes. Feda'ian was among the groups that boycotted the referendum, and the move did not put them in Khomeini's good graces.

Additionally, when Bazargan and his supporters favored the continuation of secular law and the protection of human rights, Khomeini contradicted him and encouraged the continuation of revolutionary *shari'a* courts. Within the first few months after the revolution, over one hundred addicts, prostitutes, homosexuals, adulterers, and rapists were executed for sowing corruption. An additional five hundred members of the Pahlavi regime were executed for "having declared war on God" under the direction of these courts⁶⁸. None of the defendants had access to council or the public, and there was no possibility of appeal. Within months the entire secular justice system was taken over by the Revolutionary Council, and religious law became the only law.

Bazargan's support was continually eroded: within the government political jockeying pushed out his Liberation Movement, the continued economic crisis cost him public support, and Bazargan and leftists tried to weaken each other's positions repeatedly. Leftists still viewed the liberals as an obstacle to true social revolution and justice, and Bazargan criticized them for being antirevolutionary. When secular women protested the abolishment of the 1967 Family Protection Law, Bazargan called it antirevolutionary leftist agitation, and blamed fifth-column leftists for the assassination of a prominent cleric⁶⁹. Bazargan, more concerned by the potential threat of leftists,

⁶⁸Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 53.

⁶⁹Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 52. Ayatollah Motahari was the chairman of the Revolutionary Council when he was killed by another

overlooked the possibility of a theocratic dictatorship, even while the IRP was in the process of consolidating power.

The religious right, the IRP in particular, had several advantages. They were able to use pre-existing religious networks as a springboard. Through the Revolutionary Council, the IRP was able to appoint *imam jom'ehs* throughout the country. When elections came around, these mullahs were likely to return the favor by promoting IRP candidates and policies, and the IRP message could be easily disseminated throughout the country. They established large welfare organizations which further increased their support. Populist clerics and the IRP frequently were endorsed by Khomeini, and due to the influence of the Revolutionary Council in drafting the constitution, elections heavily favored them as well (the whole constitution favored clerics above all other classes). State media was also known to favor IRP candidates at the expense of others, as illustrated by Bazargan's failed national address. Most ominous, the IRP was able to obtain intact SAVAK files on opposition groups⁷⁰.

The drafting of the constitution would prove to be the tipping point. Not only did the clergy gain virtually complete control of the government, but government was expanded to encroach on the public's lives more than ever before. In June, the Provisional Government put forth their draft. With the exception of Shiism being adopted as the state religion, it was a secular constitution. Originally Bazargan and Khomeini had suggested a large elected committee would adapt and approve the final constitution. But Khomeini instead convened a seventy-three member Assembly of Experts. Sixty-six of

competing radical Islamic group, Forqan. Despite the power struggle between Bazargan and the Revolution Council, Bazargan praised him as a martyr in the struggle against communism.

⁷⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 46-50.

the members elected were from the IRP, all but eleven of those were either ayatollahs or *hojjat al-Islams*. A myriad of clauses was added to shift power away from the public and towards the clergy, and presidential powers were greatly diminished. The *marja' taqlid* became the ultimate source of power in the absence of *Imam al-Ghayib*, and the twelve membered (six spots reserved for clergy) Council of Guardians ensured the Majles' laws conformed with *shari'a* and screened candidates⁷¹. Legislation and elections were firmly in the hands of the ulama, and specifically, the IRP.

Bani-Sadr's Opposition and Suppression of the Left

Frustrated over Khomeini's and the IRP's political maneuvering and their support for the students holding the American hostages, Bazargan resigned on November fourth. Khomeini's supporters hailed this as the "Second Islamic Revolution" and were thrilled to have removed the few remaining liberals from the government⁷². It seemed clear that the IRP was going to have a landslide victory in the 1980 elections. While the IRP candidate was unexpectedly disqualified, the winner, Abol-Hasan Bani-Sadr, had an impeccable religious record—a student of law and theology at Tehran University, an advisor to Khomeini in Paris, and on the Assembly of Experts⁷³. It came as quite a shock to the IRP when Bani-Sadr adopted the difficult position of being both the president and opposition leader. Bani-Sadr's commitment to democracy and his religious background

⁷¹Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 53-54. The constitution and the adoption of *velayat-e faqih* received wide criticisms. Ayatollahs Shariatmadari and Tabatabai-Qommi condemned both as infringing on Shiism and the true role of clergy. Khomeini was swayed by them.

⁷²Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 57.

⁷³Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 58-59.

won him the support of the Mojahedin, both of whom would suffer at the hands of the IRP.

Bani-Sadr opposed Khomeini and the IRP on several fronts: the American hostages, the handling of the Iran-Iraq War, and preference of piety over ability in government positions. Bani-Sadr realized that because the Iranian military was equipped with American supplies, they needed to maintain a civil relationship to ensure access to replacement parts. Additionally, an estimated thirteen billion dollars in Iranian assets had been impounded by the U.S as a result of the hostage situation⁷⁴. Bani-Sadr was in favor of quickly resolving the hostage situation, and thought the hefty settlement would have been significantly less if it was resolved more quickly. In the case of the war, Bani-Sadr concluded that relying on the regular army, instead of Khomeini's preference for *pasdars*, would decrease casualties and shorten the war. Bani-Sadr, like much of the country, was furious at Khomeini's decision to prolong the war by invading Iraq after Iranian forces recaptured all lost Iranian territory⁷⁵. Finally, the economy was in shambles. Unemployment was still incredibly high and oil production had plummeted from pre-1979 levels. Bani-Sadr claimed it was the appointment of the pious over the capable that led to mismanagement. Bani-Sadr's main effort would be continuing the struggle between the *maktabi* and the *motakhassesin*, or the devout and the experts.

The conflict between Bani-Sadr and the IRP reached its climax in June of 1981. Bani-Sadr demanded a referendum giving the people the choice between himself and the IRP controlled government. A few days later the President's Office was closed, and a

⁷⁴Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 66.

⁷⁵Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 305-06.

week later Khomeini dismissed him from the Supreme Defense Council. By June twelfth Bani-Sadr had gone into hiding with Mojahedin leadership. Mass demonstrations on June 20th in support of Bani-Sadr were bloodily suppressed. Protesters were called the enemies of God, and Ayatollah Khalkhali claimed courts had a sacred duty to execute at least fifty people a day⁷⁶. The next day Bani-Sadr was impeached and removed from office for incompetence⁷⁷. The bombing of IRP headquarters in Tehran on the 28th provided all the excuse the IRP and Khomeini needed to blame the Mojahedin and to launch a full scale and ruthless suppression of the left. Within nine weeks, 2,200 were executed, and by November, the number of verified executions reached 2,665⁷⁸.

LIFE IN PRISON

During the Qajar period of Iran there were no prisons to accommodate prison sentences. Instead brutal executions and corporeal punishment were favored. It was much quicker and cheaper than housing inmates for extended periods⁷⁹. Torture was also extensively used—either to obtain the location of stolen goods or self-incriminating testimony. Under the *shari'a* based law system of the time there was no allowance for circumstantial evidence. The burden of proof was quite high, and only exceptionally reliable testimony could be used in serious cases. Consequently, confessions were highly sought after in the courts. Testimony had to be given orally and publicly, and the public

⁷⁶Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 67.

⁷⁷Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 68.

⁷⁸Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 68.

⁷⁹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 19-20.

generally did not realize that these confessions were restatements of what had been said under the pain of torture⁸⁰.

The enlightenment ideals of the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) brought reform to the judicial and penal systems of Iran. Some cases were tried in civil courts instead of *shari'a* based courts, judicial torture was banned, executions made less brutal, and the first prison was built⁸¹. Ironically, the cartoons made by constitutionalists highlighting the barbarity of the Qajar penal system were reprinted in 1980 by the IRP to illustrate the injustice of monarchy⁸².

Reza Shah furthered judicial and penal reform, appointing a council of three European educated men—Ali-Akbar Davar, Firuz Mirza Farmanfarma, and Abdul-Hossein Timurtash—to write a civil law code heavily influenced by civil law codes of Italy and Switzerland, but laws related to marriage, divorce, and custody were still based on Islamic law⁸³. Farmanfarma and Timurtash would later be subject to their reforms when Reza Shah arrested them a decade later. Davar committed suicide to avoid arrest⁸⁴. However, Reza Shah's reforms should not be mistaken for an interest in individual rights. As usual, the Shah was more interested in adopting European models he believed would

⁸⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 18-19.

⁸¹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 24-26.

⁸² Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 24.

⁸³ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 25-26.

⁸⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 44.

empower Iran to progress and modernize. Penal reform was much more for appearances than for the sake of the prisoners themselves.

Political prisoners during Reza Shah's rule actually lived a relatively comfortable life, especially if they were from the upper class. Interrogations were later called polite, and Ovanessian even claims he had long lasting cordial relationship with one of his interrogators⁸⁵. Prisoners were allowed five hours of recreation in the prison yard, and many spent the rest of their time studying languages or subjects of interest⁸⁶. The prison system made no attempt to reform their ideologies either, simply isolating dissenters and agitators from the public was sufficient. When a prisoner pledged unfailing support for the Shah in return for release, a guard reportedly answered that the regime wanted "...not active citizens, but obedient and apolitical subjects⁸⁷." Prisoners were even permitted to hold commune dinners to commemorate May Day and The October Revolution⁸⁸. However, criminal prisoners were still subject to torture and several political prisoners died of illness while in prison. After 1941, the infamous Lieutenant "Doctor" Ahmadi of Qasr prison was tried for the murder of political prisoners and executed⁸⁹.

⁸⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 38.

⁸⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 67-68.

⁸⁷ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 41.

⁸⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 42-43.

⁸⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 71. "Doctor Ahmadi" was a self-made pharmacist in Qasr prison. He was charged murdering political prisoners that had formerly served Reza Shah and the communist Arani of The Fifty-Three, but was only convicted of the murders of the Shah's

The Islamic Republic of Iran, like all ideologically based states, Abrahamic asserts, uses torture to obtain public recantations⁹⁰. While it is widely known that the Islamic Republic tortures prisoners, the authorities still do what they can to keep it from public view. Instead, recantations are supposed to be seen as the result of repentance, not coercion. Like recantations in Stalinist Russia and Maoist China, public recantations contain phrases like: “came to the light”, “lost my way”, “cautionary tale”, and “redemption”. When the regime is headed by God’s representative on earth, any opposition is necessarily a sin against God. The regime and the confessions equate political dissent with moral infractions. These recantations serve as propaganda encouraging ideological conformity and loyalty, and therefore, morality among the population⁹¹. Prisoners are unlikely to voluntarily attack their own ideology, betray their comrades, or destroy their reputations. The regime argued that like all sinners, the path back to true religion for political prisoners would be difficult and painful—that redemption would be won through mortification of the flesh.

When first arrested, dissidents were taken to local offices called *komitehs* spread throughout the town. Here preliminary interrogation would begin before prisoners were taken to interrogation specializing prisons, such as the infamous Evin just north of Tehran proper. While prisoners were abused in these *komitehs*, conditions were significantly

former allies. He was charged and tried alongside three other leaders of Qasr prison, but the other three were pardoned by Mohammad Reza Shah.

⁹⁰Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 6. While a significant portion of the population did initially believe these public recantations, they increasingly became more suspicious. By the mid-1990s the practice of public recantations was discontinued as the regime noticed that the public no longer gave them much credence.

⁹¹Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prison and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 5-6.

better there than in official prisons. Whereas the prisons were horrendously overcrowded, in *komitehs*, prisoners may get a cell to themselves or share it with a few others for a brief period before their transfer⁹². One prisoner recalls being forced to write a will and being taken to a fake execution while detained in a *komiteh* in Iran⁹³.

The early part of a prisoner's time after transfer was interrogation. During this time prisoners were unaware of the charges against them in an effort to force as much information from them as possible. At this stage they were kept apart from the general prison population in incredibly overcrowded and unhygienic conditions. Evin prison was originally built by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, and after the revolution used by the Islamic Republic. Despite the rapid expansions in prison infrastructure, Evin prison couldn't house the massive influx of prisoners. One prisoner reported twenty people in a cell that was originally purposed for solitary confinement. The cell was approximately two by one and a half meters⁹⁴. Prisoners were forced to sleep on their sides belly to back across all the available space. If one had to get up in the middle of the night, they inevitably lost their space. Prisoners also describe the cells as unbearably hot and stuffy.

To further exacerbate the problems due to overcrowding, providing for the hygiene of prisoners ranked very low on the prison administration's list. Prisoners arrived with the items they were arrested with, so very few had soap or tooth brushes.

⁹²Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 154-56. While Agah and Mehr don't make their political affiliation clear, they allude to being leftists of some variety; Parsi clearly defines herself as a communist.

⁹³ Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 156-59.

⁹⁴Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranina Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 131.

Occasionally, a prison store order form would be passed around so inmates could order goods. However, the circulation was sporadic, and oftentimes prisoners missed it because they were out of the cell for interrogation. A single toilet inside the cell had to serve all the cellmates, and access to showers during the initial interrogation was sporadic at best. Prisoners might also miss their meagre meals while out for interrogation. Poor hygiene and nutrition in addition to torture took extreme tolls on physical health, and there were also the tolls of psychological torture.

Prisoners were generally held for six to twelve months for interrogation before their trials. They had no previous knowledge of the scheduling of their trial nor the charges beforehand. Shadi Parsi reports she was so shocked by the charge of “teaching karate in schools” that she found it comical, and even had to stifle laughter⁹⁵. They were allowed no legal representation. Their fate was decided by a single *mullah* in a trial that generally lasted a quarter hour. Prisoners were then moved to the general population and conditions that were a modicum more bearable. Several weeks to several months later prisoners would receive their sentences—no credit for time already served⁹⁶. Some prisoners would never be given formal notice of their sentence. These were the prisoners that were to be executed. While many suspected their fate, they would not be sure until the day they were called to report to the office with all their belongings.

Prisoners were subject to a wide range of abuse and torture, both physical and psychological. Prisoners felt the massive overcrowding, noise, and boredom were torture enough, but guards employed a wide variety of tactics. Fake execution was mentioned

⁹⁵Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 171.

⁹⁶Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 110.

above, but prisoners were also forced to listen to guards torturing other inmates in the same room in which they were being interrogated. Depending on the year and prison, all diversions including, reading, sewing, singing, writing, and drawing were prohibited. There is a wide variety of ingenious contraband crafts made in the prisons as a form of distraction. Embroidery from old socks and improvised needles, carved date pits and stones, and crafts using adhesives made from food or toothpaste provided diversion for the prisoners. The guards would seize all of these crafts whenever found. Guards would also intentionally break up friends and family members in an attempt to make life as unbearable as possible. Prisoners were additionally subject to flogging of the feet, whipping of palms, being hung from the ceiling, having hands tied behind backs, and beatings—all for hours on end⁹⁷.

While Evin is the most famous political prison, reports from the prison Qezel Hassar are particularly brutal. Women report being forced to stand facing the wall for thirty or more hours at a time⁹⁸. Those who routinely angered prison officials were separated from the prison population and forced to sit in wooden boxes with only three breaks of a minute each to use the bathroom (they were beaten if they went overtime), denied of all visual and audio stimulation except the recorded confessions of other prisoners, and denied any sort of contact. They were allowed back into the population

⁹⁷Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 165-66.

⁹⁸Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 132.

only after they confessed their sins and reported on their friends. Some women remained in these conditions for months⁹⁹.

CONCLUSION

Leftists have provided a long history of political opposition in Iran. From the *Jangali* Movement and Republic of Gilan in the early twentieth century, to mid-century Tudeh, and Feda'i and Mojahedin guerillas in the years surrounding the revolution. Instead of recognizing their contributions in the 1979 Revolution, many historians offer a simplistic emphasis on Khomeini and the religious right has shaped history's understanding of this event. Throughout the decades both Pahlavi Shahs, moderates/liberals, and leftists themselves considered the left a major political threat.

Even as late as 1978 clerical opposition was largely in the background. When they did gain notice and leadership, they still were not considered a substantial threat, and it was assumed by the liberals and leftists they would not even factor into a post-revolution power struggle. Inside actors, like Mehdi Bazargan and Nuraddin Kianuri, were so concerned about a leftist takeover in Iran that they were largely surprised by the creation of a theocratic dictatorship led by Khomeini and the IRP. This overlooking of the religious right by virtually the whole opposition precisely demonstrates that Khomeini's Islamic Republic was by no means an inevitable outcome.

It was, however, the shrewd political maneuverings of Khomeini and the IRP that allowed them to quickly coopt the revolution and monopolize state power. In February of 1979, Khomeini set up a parallel shadow government that institution by institution appropriated government power. Bani-Sadr's short lived presidency was the last obstacle

⁹⁹ Agah, Azadeh, Mehr, Sousan, and Shadi Parsi, *We Lived To Tell: Political Prison Memoirs of Iranian Women* (Toronto: McGilligan Books, 2006), 136.

to the IRP's complete domination of the government. Khomeini and the IRP then unleashed unbridled, violent suppression of all opposition, particularly the left. Even in the midst of their power grab, the majority of leftists continued their support for Khomeini out of revolutionary unity. By the time leftists and moderates/liberals noticed IRP hegemony, they had little means left to them for opposition.

If leftists had been in a prominent role for the majority of the revolution, why didn't they become the post-revolution leadership, or even effectively resist the IRP? Decades of suppression by the Shah had severely weakened all opposing party organizations, and leftists in particular were forced underground. Although several leftist guerilla groups were formed and executed operations to destabilize the Shah's regime, they never were able to prompt the general public to revolt. The clergy, on the other hand, could use extant religious organizations to mobilize crowds for mass demonstrations. Demonstrations proved more damaging to the regime than guerilla operations ever did, so those who could bring in the largest crowds became viable leaders in 1978 and after. Organizations with access to the public would, therefore, be in a better position than clandestine leftists¹⁰⁰.

It seems that after the IRP began its ruthless oppression of the opposition in 1980 and 1981 the left would have banded together in resistance. However, the left had a long history of factionalism. Tudeh was never forgiven for its association with the SAVAK informant Abbas Shahriari or its refusal to join the armed struggle, and Feda'ian and Mojahedin both had irreparable schisms. This factionalism led to the decline of socialist

¹⁰⁰Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199-200.

and communist influences and the decline of the public visibility of the left in Iran....., b
101.

The biggest threat to the left was political binarism. Anti-imperialism was a common factor across nearly all the groups in the revolution¹⁰². From Communists to clerics, deep resentment towards the West, especially the U.S., for economic and cultural domination and their unforgivable role in the 1953 coup was a large pillar in revolutionary ideology. A deep fear of the repeat of a 1953 style coup led many to emphasize post-revolution unity above all else. A prime example is the women's protest against the abolishment of the 1963 Family Protection Law. Despite the leftists' ideological support for women's rights embodied in the law, the main leftist organizations universally criticized the women protestors for creating divisions that imperialists and foreign powers could later exploit¹⁰³. You were either with Khomeini and the IRP, or you were against them. The charge of being an anti-revolutionary or imperialist was serious enough to convince many leftist groups to support Khomeini.

¹⁰¹Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 256

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¹⁰²Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 249-51.

¹⁰³Parvin Paidar, *Women and the political process in twentieth century Iran* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244; 249-51

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