

# Khomeiny's two front war

By Ben Johnson, South London Big Flame

**IMAGINE GLASGOW** at New Year. Masses of Scots out on the streets celebrating. Then Maggie Thatcher sends in troops to take over the city and hundreds of Scots are killed. The city is stunned and bodies lie untended on the streets for days before friends and relatives are able to throw blocks of ice over the decomposing corpses.

Absurd? Outrageous? Yet this is pretty much what happened in Mahabad and the other towns in Kurdistan at the hands of the Iranian troops in August, during the Kurds' annual festival.

What's more, there is a direct relationship to the present stage-managed 'crisis' at the American Embassy in Tehran. Both are symptoms of the very real — if still fermenting — crisis facing the fanatical Khomeiny regime.

## KURDISTAN

Led by a radical Sheikh, Sheikh Moseini, the Kurdish nationalist movement incorporates a wide range of forces from the far left (Maoists and fedayeen guerillas) to liberals who simply support the right of self-determination. The main organised force is the broad-based Kurdish Democratic Party. Originally a Communist Party front, it is now more of a hotch-potch.

Still, it is a movement with massive support. In Saqqez, barricades went up and the army was fought in house to house battles before the town fell to the Iranian army. Eighty per cent of the inhabitants left. Mahabad fell to planes, helicopters, and troops, but guerillas have since recaptured all but the

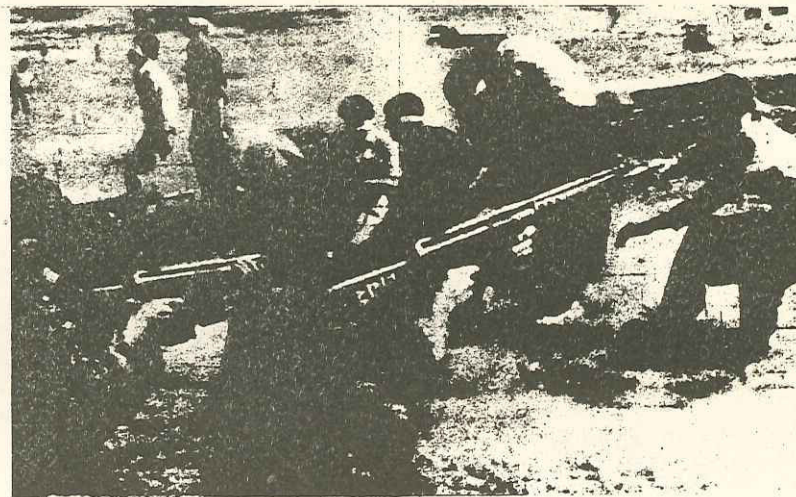
garrison, and effectively control the town.

## DICTATES

The guerillas — the 'pesh mergas' — move amongst the people in classic fish-through-the-sea style. Kurds, who have never had autonomy, and whose only experience in self-government was the short-lived Mahabad republic of 1946, have always known oppression, and their struggle against it has been kept alive in at least one country (besides Iran, the Kurds live in parts of Iraq, Turkey and the USSR), whatever the level of repression directed against them. If a socialist consciousness is not widespread, there is a strong anti-imperialist awareness, reinforced by a commitment to mutual support and collective struggle. At the same time, the Kurds — especially women — have refused to accept many of Khomeiny's Islamic dictates, including wearing the chador (the black cloak or veil) or the banning of contraceptives.

## JOHN WAYNES OF ISLAM

Why did Khomeiny send in troops to massacre the Kurds? The reason is not entirely clear, but there is no doubt that Khomeiny was nervous because of the effects that democratic and pro-feminist tendencies in Kurdistan may have in the rest of Iran and because of the growing discontent amongst Iranians and the effect of this on the



Iranian regime — where a conflict was brewing between the clergy (headed by Khomeiny) and the pro-capitalist forces represented mainly by ex-Prime Minister Bazargan.

You have to realise that Iran is still in a state of semi-anarchy. Gun-toting Islamic John Waynes roam the streets, freely interpreting the will of God and Khomeiny. Anything up to one in four Iranians are out of work, and prices are shooting up at the rate of about five per cent a month. Living conditions, bad enough under the Shah, are getting worse, and only Islamic remedies (like holding a period of 'religious' fasting when there's a food shortage) help out.

## WAR

Khomeiny's Islamic clergy imagine themselves at war with capitalism and socialism, but they have no economic policy of their own. Oil may be Iran's life line, but it may not be equal to the strains of a costly war against the Kurds and a break

in Iran's trade relations with Western imperialist countries.

The occupation of the US Embassy was a stunt, stage-managed and probably without any deep commitment to cutting Iran's connections with imperialism. But, as happened in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the actors may take things beyond the wishes of the stage manager. If so, Khomeiny may have created more problems for himself than he started with.

In short, Khomeiny's regime does not know where it's going. But this does not mean that there is any kind of popular awareness of socialism as the alternative. A growing anti-imperialist consciousness exists side by side with open repression of radicals. Many leftists, including a group of Iranian Trotskyists, are under threat of execution.

As long as Khomeiny's religious nationalism retains the loyalty of a large majority of the Iranian people, things will be very difficult indeed for his left-wing critics.

that strand of Marxism that sees socialism as a development out of capitalism. They approvingly refer to Marx's quote; that with the development of capitalism "grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in number and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production." (Capital Vol 1 pp 762-3 emphases added).

## ECONOMISM

Given the history of the 20th century, it becomes more and more implausible for Marxists to continue to argue that it is some sort of accident that all revolutions have taken place in under developed countries and none in the "advanced" capitalist countries Marx predicted would become ripe for socialism. Tragically for revolutionaries it seems to be the case that in those countries where the development of the forces of production place the (revolutionary) transition to socialism on the agenda, other forces inhibit the development of a revolutionary consciousness and organisation that can bring about this transition. Put another way, where the "objective" conditions for revolution (e.g. forces of production) are present, "subjective" factors have not matured. And this is a fundamental problem for Marxists which Fantham and Machover refuse to face up to. They remain within a perspective of economic determinism that is also part of Marx's legacy.

## STIMULATING

Love it or hate it, "Century of the Unexpected" is a stimulating pamphlet that takes up some of the main issues facing revolutionary socialists today — including the key issue of the relationship between socialism and democracy. By publishing it Big Flame hopes to revive a debate that has become cold with dogma.