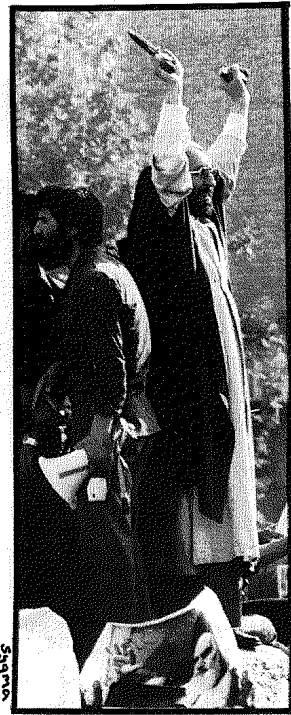


# IRAN CLERICAL FASCISM



Iranians are now witnessing the most dramatic and significant events since the overthrow of the Shah. On the surface, there's a struggle over the succession to Khomeiny, whose death is imminent. On a deeper level, there's a struggle taking place with enormous implications for the future of Iranian working people, women, gays, the urban poor, the national minorities and the organised Left. Joining battle are politicians, the army, the forces of the Left, the shock troops of the clergy and the Kurds (who have been at battle since before the revolution started). The stakes are enormous.

The ousting of Bani Sadr followed a conflict between his faction and the Islamic Republican Party that began with his election to the Presidency in January 1980. For a while Khomeiny mediated, switching sides frequently — after all, both sides supported the goals of the Islamic revolution and Bani Sadr was a long-time associate. But as the regime's crisis intensified, with 25-30% jobless, prices rocketing and production at 10-20% of capacity; as the setbacks in the war with Iraq further undermined both people's confidence and the functioning of the economy; as the release of the hostages removed one of the main boosts to the IRP's prestige — so the pressure grew on Khomeiny, the regime, and mainly the IRP to find a new scapegoat and a new diversion.

Bani Sadr, the chosen victim, is no hero. Given half a chance he too would have cracked down on his

foes, the Left included. Nevertheless, his avowed commitment to liberal pluralism, against the IRP's espousal of a repressive one-Party state, did allow certain openings for the Left at a time when repression was closing in all around. While Bani Sadr was there to confront the Islamic fundamentalists, doing his "best" to keep newspapers alive, prevent executions and attack repressive laws, the Left was able to operate semi-legally, to sell its papers and even to grow. Not any more.

The crackdown was swift and hard. With Bani Sadr gone the IRP sought to impress upon the Left that it meant business and that they were the real target. Various radicals, including a number of teenage girl members of the Mujahadeen (see below), were simply taken from their prison cells and shot. Another victim was Saeed Sultanpur, a leading poet and revolutionary who was also imprisoned by the Shah — only the latter never dared shoot him!



Fundamentalist demonstrators burning a flag with Banisadr's portrait

## NEW FASCISM

Iran now, two and a half years after the Shah, is seeing the insidious growth of a new fascism. We have seen the imposition of the veil on women, and their expulsion from jobs, the execution of prostitutes, the repression of unorthodox sexuality. We have witnessed the banning of Leftist organisations, attacks on mass demonstrations, restrictions on working class organisation, the 'purification' of the regime's bureaucracy, the removal of 'dissident' figures from the leadership. Bani Sadr's expulsion is not the end, it simply opens the door to still further repression.

The shock troops of Iranian clerical fascism are the thousands of Islamic Guards, the tens of thousands of unemployed youth recruited with payment, and a new force called Basij, or 'mobilisation'. The secret police, says a leading mullah, is the '30 million people who support us'. The new law of Quissas re-introduces some of the most horrific antique Islamic laws of retribution and revenge against wrongdoers. The administration is there, thoroughly purified up top and penetrating right down to the local level, where the 22,000 mosques will play a more

In Manchester at the end of June, Iranian leftists were attacked by fundamentalists after picketing the Iranian embassy. 6 of the leftists were arrested, along with 2 of the regime's supporters. If convicted, they could face deportation. And if deported, they are likely to be executed in Tehran airport. Trials take place on 15 July.

With Begin, the two camps are more or less brought together. Only the hypocrisy has been shed. Israel assisted South Africa in the development of the atomic bomb that the South Africans exploded in 1979. Attacks on the Lebanon were renewed, together with military assistance for the Christian Phalangists in the North. And then came the Syrian 'missile crisis', which Begin now insists was a sideshow designed to distract world eyes prior to the attack on Iraq.

But what now? If Israel can enjoy a period of nuclear monopoly, will its overseas adventures become even more daring and belligerent? Or will we see a far more determined attempt by the Arab countries to secure their own bomb, thus escalating the Middle East conflict to a new level? Either way, the Iraqi attack signals a new era in Middle East politics, with nukes no longer kept secretly or neatly packaged in IAEA and Non-proliferation Treaty wrapping paper. From now on its nukes or nothing.

by Ben Lowe and Moshe Machover.

# Israel's Nuclear Monopoly

THE ISRAELI attack on the nuclear reactor outside Baghdad represents a radical break in Israeli nuclear strategy. For nearly two decades now Israel has more or less pursued a policy of an 'atomic bomb in the cellar'. It has secretly developed its own nuclear capability, always insisting that any Arab threat would be answered with a rapidly-assembled bomb.

But Begin has now recognised that Israel's nuclear capability is well known and has opted for a strategy of Israeli nuclear monopoly. While no longer pretending it has no nuclear capability Israel will prevent any Arab nation from acquiring one.

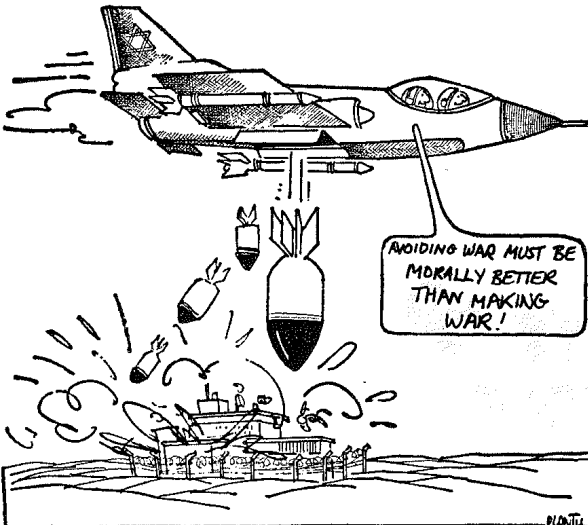
And it is not just Begin. The nuclear hawks have tended to come historically from the Israeli Labour Party, starting with none other than Ben Gurion.

## IN THE BEGINNING

Ben Gurion favoured the development of a nuclear capability following the Suez War of 1956. Soon after the notorious nuclear plant was being constructed at Dimona in the Negev Desert. Technical assistance came from France, the same country that helped build the Iraqi reactor.

By 1962, when the reactor, disguised as a textile plant, was first discovered by the Americans, Dimona was in the final stages of construction. They had 19 years on the Iraqi reactor they destroyed at the same stage. Dimona is a natural uranium reactor, with a 24 megawatt capacity and a capacity to produce enough plutonium each year for a 20 kiloton bomb (twice the size of the Nagasaki bomb). Israel has never allowed the plant to be inspected by international inspectors, and it has not signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

With the Test Ban Treaty to be signed in 1963, with an implicit agreement between the prevailing nuclear monopolists that the Middle East should be a nuclear-free zone, the Kennedy administration exerted pressure on Israel to allow American supervision. Major rows ensued behind closed doors, Ben Gurion resigned, the plant remained secret, and America committed itself to a dramatic increase in conventional military aid. At the same



time, the new Israeli premier declared that Israel would henceforth be able to respond immediately if there was an Arab bomb. By concurring with this Israeli 'atomic bomb in the cellar', America was given supervision rights.

In 1967 a well-armed Israel defeated Egypt at war and dramatically expanded its territory.

## GOLIATH AND GOLIATH

Since 1963-64, there have been two main camps in the development of Israel's nuclear programme. The one camp, dominant within the Labour Party, followed Ben Gurion and favours the development of nuclear weapons, while also allowing the Arab countries to have either nuclear weapons or the protection of a major nuclear power. The resulting 'deterrence' will supposedly guarantee Israel's future—a view

that remains unchanged in Peres' Labour Party, despite the belligerent turn in the Superpowers' game of 'deterrence'.

The other camp is one represented by a minority in the LP (led by Rabin and the late Allon), and —until recently—by Likud, Begin's party. This camp, which has tended to be dominant over the years, favours an 'atomic bomb in the cellar', rapid growth in conventional arms, and territorial expansion. Both camps were gung-ho over the 1973 war. When this was followed by a rapid expansion in Israel's conventional weapons, the CIA reported conclusively (in 1974) that Israel had nuclear weapons. Open military aid continued unabated. It is largely American weapons that have been used to pummel Lebanon and its resident Palestinians (in particular) over the last five years.



A nuclear research facility that is closed to international inspectors: Israel's center at Dimona in the Negev Desert

prominent role in governing and repressing. And the remains the classic pretence of democracy, held up as an example while nearly every semblance of democratic procedure is systematically dismantled.

## THE OPPOSITION

If the necessary ingredients for fascism are present, the system is far from being consolidated. The Army, much of which remains loyal to Bani Sadr, may attempt a coup or at least organise against the mullahs to secure Bani Sadr's return. There is the danger of a massive blood-bath should this happen, but the assassination of Bani Sadr would leave the forces without any obvious leader, and significantly weakened.

The main organised opposition grouping is the Mujahadeen, the former guerrilla organisation which combines Islamic and Marxist rhetoric with a very active street politics. With 300,000 members upwards they are a major force, but their political programme is vague and they have concentrated over the last year on supporting Bani Sadr. They reckoned that, because Bani Sadr lacked any organisation behind him, while the IRP had a huge one, he would eventually be forced to either support them (his only consistent supporters) or give up. Either way, millions of people who supported Bani Sadr would have to take the Mujahadeen very seriously, and many would join. And if that's not the stuff of radical politics, it's certainly survival politics, which is also why the Mujahadeen have pledged themselves to armed defence in the face of attacks (they have no policy of assassination however).

The Fedayeen emerged as the second largest ex-guerrilla organisation from the revolutionary upheaval, but have suffered a number of splits recently that have reduced their numbers. The Fedayeen-Majority has moved close to the Moscow-oriented Tudeh Party in supporting Khomeiny and encouraging the regime along the non-capitalist road, Nasser-style. They have welcomed Bani Sadr's downfall and would fight for the regime in a conflict, but have also been repressed along with the rest of the Left.

The Kurds, fighting for autonomy in Western Iran, remain the major stumbling block to any consolidation of an Islamic regime, and have been unable to hold their position since the onset of the Iran-Iraq war (which the regime used as an excuse to escalate the war against the Kurds!). The women's movement is tiny, and the unemployed organise over immediate issues. As for the smaller left groups, including the Fedayeen-Minority, Peykar, Rahai and others, they fight for survival and for a Marxist politics that is more or less divorced from the IRP-Bani Sadr conflict. Maybe there lies more hope.

Iran increasingly resembles the Iran of the Shah, making it crucial for anti-imperialists and anti-fascists in this country once more to work to defend those who seek basic democratic rights and freedoms. Most strongly under attack will be anti-clerical forces on the Left and in the workers' movement, but in supporting these we must not neglect the national minorities and those women and gays willing to stand up for their rights.

by Ben Lowe