

# Peyke Anternasionalisti and the Critical Current inside the Workers Movement

Translated from *Internationalist Messenger* No. 2, published in *Internationalist Communist* 17

Half a century after left capitalist ideology came to dominate over the workers' movement in Iran, *Peyke Anternasionalisti (PA)* (*Internationalist Messenger*) is the first revolutionary publication to be circulated with a clear Internationalist outlook and policies.

Stating this fact is not to neglect the efforts of the individuals and various political tendencies that have marched on this path. The important point is that these efforts, for many reasons, such as the absence of a true communist tradition in Iran and the isolation of the workers' political movement on a global level, could never free themselves from the nightmare of the left capitalist framework (i.e. Stalinism, Maoism and Trotskyism).

With the passage of time after the 1979 uprising, the left in Iran has acquired a clear and specific place in Iranian politics. Today the events which led to this have become part of the historical memory of a people who have paid a heavy price through the storm of painful wars and mass murders and who are still experiencing the oppression of an obscurantist Islamic state. A generation that is still deeply disappointed at following the clergy will never forget the part played by the Fedayeen, the Tudeh Party and the Mujahedeen in acclaiming and giving credence to the "Militant Clergy" at the dawn of the 79 uprising.

To what extent have the exploited masses of this generation forgotten the part played by such parties in the oppression and mass murder of those opposed to religious dictatorship, and all this under the banner of Communism?

Not only did the Stalinist organisations and parties — such as the Fedayeen Majority, the Tudeh Party, the Maoist Toilers Party and the Trotskyist group known as "The Revolutionary Workers Party"— begin a day and night co-operation with the frightful intelligence services of the Islamic Republic, they also did not hesitate to grass on their own party members who wanted to stay in opposition, albeit within the same ideological framework. Those who did remain in opposition to the Islamic State did so, not because of their attachment to the proletariat, but from opposition to dark religious despotism and defence of bourgeois democracy. The barbarism and savagery of the Islamic State became an alibi in the hands of these groups, allowing them to portray themselves as a revolutionary alternative. However, there is hardly an example of a capitalist left party which has not formally advertised foreign policies of this or that bourgeois state or which has not openly or secretly conspired with this or that organ of the capitalist state.

The pseudo-affection and inclination of bourgeois intellectuals to Marxism in peripheral countries such as Iran, decorating their needs and slogans with communist propaganda, is testimony to the feebleness of bourgeois liberalism in these countries and thus their weakness and impotence when faced with playing their historical role. This historical phenomenon has always managed to act as an effective obstacle to the formation and growth of an independent working class movement in its struggle against capital. For these types of organisations resorting to Marxism (on a theoretical level) is to perform a role for their class that has been denied to them in the real history of their motherland.

In addition, one should not ignore the fact that the naked and semi-fascist dictatorship has been able to obscure the interests of opposing classes and pave the way for the domination of different capitalist tendencies over the working class movement. The conception that a dictatorial or fascist regime is fundamentally different from capital's dictatorship in general has particularly caused great damage to the world proletariat in the aftermath of the defeat of the first wave of the internationalist workers revolution in Europe and the fall of the workers state in Russia.

The history of our class is not short of groups and tendencies that have been the fruit of collective working class struggle. However, in the absence of a communist party tradition and illusions which have led towards capitalist left parties, these either joined the ranks of the bourgeoisie or else were decimated in the midst of battle against our class enemies. This is a struggle which had to, and still is forced, to pay enormous sacrifices simply in order to recapture its lost ground.

Putting aside those organisations and parties that act as a left wing alternative of the capitalists to the growing crisis, many groups and tendencies have chosen to swim against the tide in the midst of this terrifying reaction and counter-revolution. They have managed to take great effective leaps on this path, despite not being armed with a true communist alternative or platform. In countries like Iran (which, for historical reasons, have been fiercely ruled by counter-revolution) this process has transpired as an irreparable historical tragedy.

As a result of their reliance on the same old ideological foundations most of these groups, without any apparent displacement from the ranks of the ruling class, either remained locked in their former confinement or ended up in no-man's land. A study of the changes and developments in this section of the left in Iran, including the formation and the rapid mushroom-like growth of such movements after the 1979 uprising, gives us a pathetic picture of this enslavement and historical confusion right in front of our eyes.

The formation of the majority of groups and fractions known as the *third current*<sup>1</sup> can only be seen and understood in terms of the weakness of left capitalist ideology to divert working class militants. The ever increasing and unfolding crisis and accelerated division and splitting of these groups, their empirical criticism of the rest of the left, their reliance on pseudo-radicalism and, finally, their polarisation, was a clear indication of the capitalist left's inability to prevent the appearance of a critical trend in search of a revolutionary alternative. It is clear from the start that there are only two alternatives

open to this spectrum. Either a sudden departure from pseudo-radicalism and therefore reconstruction of 'left' Stalinist ideology, or an insistence on continuing with empirical criticism, defiance of the past and consequently an effort to go beyond the established framework of the "left" ideology . The political developments which led to the collapse of the main forces of the *third current* were a direct result of the above mentioned choices.

If adoption of a position such as the one taken by *The Organisation of Peykar (Struggle on the Path to the Emancipation of the Working Class)* in relation to the Iran-Iraq war was an indication of its inability to stay in the camp of the counter- revolution, then the formation of the Communist Party of Iran was a successful attempt by the extreme factions of capital's left to block the process of disintegration of this spectrum

The material means for this impetus was provided by the existence of a nationalist militia movement in Kurdistan and the counter-revolutionary potential of the "Unity of Communist Militants" to reconstruct the foundations of Stalinist thought by the piecemeal reorganisation of many big and small tendencies of the capitalist left. This neo-Stalinism, despite retaining its theoretical substructure, had to take off its Russian and Chinese uniforms so as not to appear as an extension of this or that left capitalist state or their foreign policies.

The crisis and disintegration of the Communist Party of Iran into two factions and the subsequent disputes of their leaders over the central issue of diplomacy with Iraq's regime was the end point of a reconstruction of neo-Stalinism. Bickering over diplomatic affairs with Iraq forced their leaders into admitting their secret political, military, financial deals with Iraq's state, and even their criminal dealings regarding the militia that were destroyed during Iraqi bombardment.

Neo-Stalinism was now at the end of the road travelled by the other capitalist left parties and organisations. We shall certainly witness further disintegration of the two factions of the Communist Party of Iran and there will be yet another emergence of a moralistic framework influenced by the counter-revolutionary tradition. This is the accelerated crumbling of a process which earlier had managed to stop the disintegration of the extreme faction of the capitalist left.

However, on the other side of the spectrum this experience was not repeated. The majority of split organisations such as Peykar (the revolutionary wing of Peykar), Razmandegan and other tendencies known as the *fifth current*, chose a different alternative. This meant the continuation of empirical criticism (despite being trapped in a left capitalist framework) and a refusal to repeat former practices or to go on organising in the old way.

Leaving aside the factions that abandoned politics forever, we were witness to the formation of circles which, despite their long term confusion and disunity, ultimately decided that they had made the right choice. These circles, with their reliance on activism within the shop floor movement and formation of study groups, were travelling on a

completely different path and therefore joined the critical current inside the workers movement, a current the formation of which was spearheaded by a group called *Mashvarat (Consultation)*.

The platform document of the Mashvarat comrades was a poor declaration mixed with many errors against their past experiences and against the 'Left'. It was a declaration against the "thieves who do their business in daylight in order to choose the merchandise better". It was a stance against bureaucracy, but far from a Communist manifesto against the entirety of capital.

However, Mashvarat was the first group in the Iranian workers movement since the original Communist Party of Iran to base its platform on the internationalist nature of the working class movement, arguing for the need for an internationalist organisation for the proletariat. This position, as well as the declaration that the "intelligentsia" are counter-revolutionary, did not prevent them from remaining in the counter-revolutionary camp when confronted with some fundamental matters of class struggle.

The platform of the Mashvarat comrades showed a deficient and limited understanding of "European council communism". These tendencies, in the aftermath of events in the '70's, were at a dead-end and ultimately admitted their historical cul-de-sac in the light of an international communist alternative. If the writings and documents of Mashvarat reflected an incomplete understanding of councilism, then their practice and methods of work were entirely moulded in the tradition of the 'peripheral Left'. Mashvarat's councilism was thus a typical product of the periphery of capitalism acting inside the workers' movement.

The historical experiences of our movement in the era of counter-revolution show that the adoption of anarchistic positions and councilism is an elementary stage as working class circles detach themselves from left capitalist ideology. This, in turn, might drive them into adopting communist views. Therefore, with a little caution, one can say that to persist in its positions and in the face of the workers political movement, Mashvarat was forced to make an important choice: either a fully fledged councilist academicism, or a serious study of the causes of the fall of the October Revolution and consequently accepting the Internationalist Communist alternative.

Ever-increasing oppression over the shop floor movement, the working class retreat and Mashvarat comrades' lack of desire to move towards academicism combined with a tendency towards intervention in the working class struggle, all this was forcing them to adopt the familiar methods of leftism in the periphery and play a role similar to the Fedayeen. (This was contrary to their own theoretical positions against having a central bureaucracy and furthermore against their own organisational rules.) Thus, through the absence of an international communist platform and widespread persecution by the bourgeois intelligence services, the demise of Mashvarat became inevitable. This however, should not be mistaken for the extinction of councilism in the Iranian working class movement.

The disintegrating circles and tendencies of the *3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> currents* thus could not take an effective step in consolidating the critical current inside the workers movement. Some of them repeated previous mistakes and then left the scene. The ‘Organisation of Red Workers’, for example, was a hasty effort to create yet another organisation similar to the way the *3<sup>rd</sup> current* groups had organised, with a ‘radical’ appearance and was in turn hunted down by the Islamic secret service apparatus prior to any action. The ‘Socialist Revolution Tendency’, despite its superficial critique of the ‘left’ as a whole was nothing, but was still within that front which was later eliminated by the Islamic state.

The group known as ‘The Group of Conscious Workers’, following the publication of a few pamphlets and despite its critique of the Iranian left, kept the essential characteristics of the *3<sup>rd</sup> current*. Their later activities outside Iran and within the committee of refugees in Turkey, including their effort to organise a ‘communist alternative’ via the refugee committees proved how much they had departed even from their own programmatic discussions in Iran. They had sacrificed their political positions in order to create something with a pure *worker essence*. Even so, the balance sheet these comrades drew up was a big step towards escaping from the nightmare of counter-revolution, but its echo faded away in midstream.

Other circles such as Zaroorat and the advocates of syndicalism embarked on the critical path in their own way. Some of these people ended up promoting the Frankfurt School of philosophising on the science of the emancipation of the proletariat. All of these experiences point to the fact that distancing oneself from the left counter-revolution does not automatically mean reaching a communist alternative. How is it possible to draw a sharp sword from an empty sheath? How could an internationalist and revolutionary platform come out of a movement that has been under the domination of the counter-revolution for more than a half a century? A movement whose embryo was formed within the counter-revolution where no communist tradition had ever existed? The appearance and disappearance of these circles and tendencies were desperate efforts to find the communist alternative in the darkness of the counter-revolution.

All of these experiences have shown that the condition for forming the revolutionary alternative means a complete break from the ideological apparatus of the left of the ruling class; it means having a fundamental criticism of it, and having in mind the historical continuity of the proletarian movement which has a permanent internationalist character. The elements who have regrouped around PA have experienced the history of this critical current and have the intention of becoming a political pole for it.

It is no accident today that PA has warned the vanguards of the workers movement of the threat from the left of capital with their propaganda for “independent workers organisation” and the queuing up of the large and small parties to seek justice from the “International Labour Organisation”. PA has exposed the counter-revolutionary nature of the unions as part of the bourgeois apparatus to control the workers. It is not an accident that during the wave of euphoria over the “people’s victory in the election”, PA reveals the hidden face of the ruling class and its political forces working against intensification of the class struggle in Iran. And finally it is not an accident that the flag of the

Internationalist movement of our class in Iran manifests itself as a particular historical movement rather than the previous moralistic hollow outcry.

All this means that PA is the mouthpiece of the proletarian political movement and resides within the ranks of those who defend working class interests as a world wide class. To emphasise all this and our firm intention to remain on the path we have embarked on, does not mean a foolish optimistic view which does not recognise the immense difficulties we will be facing. Communists have never claimed that they hold the absolute truth in their hands. The point is to say where we stand. We are aware that our action has a lot of short-comings because publishing PA is a painful birth, against the current. We are aware of the fact that there are many obstacles on our way; obstacles which have been imposed by the counter-revolution over our class movement for more than half a century. To overcome these obstacles requires specific objective conditions as well as patience and maturity.

We are certain that other circles and individuals have taken similar steps and with the present objective condition of our class and our common aims, the flag of a communist regroupment will soon fly inside the Iranian workers movement, as part of the world proletariat.