

Islam-Marxists win control in Iran

by Thierry Lalevée

In recent months, Iran has witnessed its most violent factional fight since the establishment of Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic in 1979. As the remains of Iran's economy begin to rapidly collapse, a grouping of government economists and business interests has advocated a new "opening" to the hated West, including access to Western loans. However, the "Islam-Marxist" factions around Prime Minister Hussein Moussavi seem to have won the upper hand, and are moving toward a complete socialization of the economy.

The newly re-elected Iranian President Ali Khamenei is attempting to tread a middle course, and said recently that Iran is "dependent neither on East nor West." But by doing so, he has merely succeeded in reproducing some of the more bizarre features of the collapsing Nazi economy under Hitler's Economics Minister, Hjalmar Schacht, such as the infamous MEFO bills and Hitler's "People's Car."

Iran's economy is now being run on the basis of "buying the future." Goods which are not available are being sold at cut-rate prices for delivery in two or three years. This is the case for so-called luxury goods such as cars, household machines, or even housing in general. One of the most profitable markets in this religious nation, has been the selling of tickets for pilgrimages to Mecca—six years in advance!

Monetarists in Iran argue that all is well, since prices of basic domestic commodities have not increased in a year. But, in fact, there has been a dramatic and drastic fall in the population's purchasing power. Though no official figures exist, the majority of middle- and small-scale businesses have been forced into bankruptcy, unable to buy raw materials to run their business, either because the materials are too expensive or simply unavailable. This has left several hundred thousand Iranians unemployed, with two other possibilities for getting work: seeking day-to-day work on the black market, or joining any one of the mushrooming Islamic organizations, where they can be hired to ensure that none of Islam's infinite taboos and rules are broken.

Since 1979, Iran has been sustained by the legacy of wealth left by the Shah, and has maintained a sort of balance between those parts of the economy which were nationalized (either because they belonged to the former royal family and its supporters, or because they were too vital during the war

with Iraq to be left in private hands) and a large private business based on the bazaars, known as The Bazaar. Earlier this year, as a boost to the economy, some businesses which had been nationalized because their owners had left Iran in 1979 were handed over to their former owners—a measure of liberalization which was complemented by an appeal to many of Iran's scientific and military community living abroad, to come back home.

But such measures proved too much for those mullahs whose allegiance has always been to Moscow. Immediately opposing such decisions was Hojatolislam Mussavi Khomeini, who in early July had been appointed as General Prosecutor. His public denunciations drew support from among the clerics, as well as from among the Mostazaffin (the dispossessed) and the Revolutionary Guards—the very backbone of the Islamic revolution. Timed with Khomeini's denunciations against "westernizing Iran," Moscow issued its own warning at the end of August that "reactionary forces" were at work within Iran.

The factional brawl reached its peak in early September, when the re-election of Khamenei coincided with the need to form a new government. Many mullahs in the parliament, politically or financially connected to The Bazaar, wanted to oust radical Prime Minister Moussavi, who is one of Khomeini's closest associates. Moussavi was planning to form a new cabinet from politicians advocating a new land reform, confiscation of property, and the establishment of socialist-like state organizations running all of the key sectors of the economy, "in favor of the poorest classes." Moussavi was opposed both by the parliament and President Khamenei, who fears for his own personal power.

Khomeini tips the balance

A vote of no confidence against Moussavi was quickly called. The vote failed, however, due to the direct intervention of Ayatollah Khomeini who, ignorant of all economic matters, fundamentally opposed the alternative of opening Iran to Western credit. Following suit, the Students of the Line of the Imam organized demonstrations in early October in support of Moussavi. Khomeini's heir apparent, Ayatollah Montazeri, warned the parliament against disobeying Khomeini's orders; a vote against Moussavi, he claimed, would be a vote against Khomeini directly!

Thus, Khomeini has given the green light to another major step in Iran's "revolution," the socialization of the economy under an Islam-Marxist leadership. This will obviously require even stronger internal controls, and to this end, Hojatolislam Ali Akhbar Mohtashemi has been appointed the new minister of the interior. Mohtashemi, a pro-Soviet hardliner like Khomeini and Moussavi, was for several years the Iranian ambassador to Damascus, in charge of coordination with Syrian intelligence as well as of Lebanon's many Islamic terrorists groups. His recent claim to fame was the TWA hijacking in Beirut.