

# Communist women in the struggle against Khomeini

When the medical team of the MLP, USA traveled to Kurdistan in December and January, we had the opportunity to hold several meetings with the women in Komala — the Kurdish organization of the Communist Party of Iran. We met with women who had been peshmargas (guerrilla fighters) for years. They were veterans of the harsh military campaigns in the high Kurdish mountains and of bloody conflicts with troops of the Khomeini regime. Some were leading comrades in charge of propaganda and agitation for entire regions, or communications and radio experts. Others were renowned for their courage in battle. We also met with the new recruits — women who had crossed the mountains for the first time in order to reach the Komala training center and join the revolutionary forces.

Each time it was necessary only to drop a hint that we wanted to meet with the women. Thirty or 40 women would crowd into a tent to talk about the life of women in Kurdistan and about their own struggle to take an active part in the revolution. Their interest in these meetings sprang from their enthusiasm to share with the American communists the profound changes that have taken place in their lives.

## Downtrodden Women Join the Struggle

These women have come out of an extremely backward society. One woman described the traditional situation in Kurdistan in these words: "Women are so without rights they can't even go out of doors. They can't attend social gatherings or meetings. They can't travel alone. They must get the permission of men and travel with them."

On top of the traditional backwardness, today in Iran women suffer under Khomeini's anti-women dictatorship. The special oppression of women is a cardinal point of the reactionary rule of the mullahs. Women are forced to wear a veil and can be beaten and arrested if they fail to do so. Putting them under the veil is part of the whole system of discrimination, segregation and humiliation that Iranian women are being subjected to.

But these women had made their way to the camps and into the ranks of the Komala peshmargas. In spring they would leave the camps, marching 12 hours a day to reach the more populated centers of Kurdistan. They would return to the camps with the winter snows, after eight grueling months of marching and fighting alongside the men. Some would lose their lives. But the difficulties are not what we heard from them. Optimism sounded in their every word. For these women, going into battle represents not only the opportunity to fight Khomeini's tyranny, it represents the overcoming of millennia of oppression.

## Overcoming All Obstacles

Komala is a social force well known all over Kurdistan. Many families give the young people support when they want to join the peshmargas. Families encourage males who are eligible to be drafted into Khomeini's army to go into the Komala peshmargas instead. And sometimes families who have a close connection to Komala encourage the young women as well.

There are, however, many young women who must confront enormous obstacles to join Komala, with their families bitterly opposed to their taking the revolutionary path.

We met one new recruit who became a worker when she was eight years old. She worked in the city at a starting wage of only pennies a day. Last year the high

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unemployment forced her to return to the village where she was a farm laborer working from dawn to dusk. The women earned 80 toman, the men 180. If they protested this, the employer would say, "That is all you get because your brain is not complex enough."

When she was nine years old she had become familiar with Komala because her uncle was a peshmarga. She listened to Komala's radio and spread the views of the communists among her fellow workers. When her political views became widely known she decided to join up with the peshmarga forces.

Unfortunately, the rendezvous with the peshmargas fell through and she was captured by her family. Five hundred Islamic Guards surrounded her home searching for the peshmargas. They threatened, kicked and beat her. She replied, "You are suppressing the people, leave me alone. I'm not going to tell you anything even if you chop me to pieces." Meanwhile, the villagers organized a protest in her defense. "She is a worker," they protested, "leave her alone."

Later she heard on the radio that the peshmargas had surrounded the town of Bookan. She and a group of others fled to join them. "That's the end of my story," she told us, "now I grasp and put into practice the theory of the emancipation of the working class. Now I am a peshmarga."

## Rebelling Against Being Traded Like Animals

Under the backward system in Kurdistan, a young woman is like an ex-

changeable commodity. Women work from dawn until midnight. Young women bear children, tend to animals and toil on farms or in brickyards and carpet weaving factories. And their "value" doesn't end there. Young women can be exchanged to obtain wives for the men of the family.

When a woman gets older (typically 25 years old is considered an old woman) and most assuredly is sickly because of the harsh conditions of her life, her husband can take another wife. In fact under Islamic law he may take a total of four wives. But in order to get a new wife, this man usually trades a daughter — no matter how young — for a woman he can marry. This practice is called "jinn ba jinn" (which means "woman for woman"). This is a system in which females are traded like animals. Women have nothing to say in this bartering with their lives. The only thing needed is the man's OK and the marriage is recognized. Furthermore, women do not have the right to divorce.

Not surprisingly this exchange of women creates dissatisfaction and hatred among women. As one new recruit put it: "The women long to leave such a life."

We met one new recruit who had been jinn ba jinned twice as a teenager. When she could not tolerate the situation any longer, she secretly fled to join the peshmargas. Another girl in her village was not so fortunate. In despair she attempted to burn herself to death and had been left paralyzed.

Two other young recruits told their story. They were set to be exchanged for each other so that the widowed father of

the first could take the second as his new wife. But these two women were friends and they were supporters of Komala. They were imprisoned at home and they were barred from talking with the other girls of the village. The father of one girl broke her radio three times to keep her from listening to Komala's broadcasts.

The widowed father, seeing he couldn't stop his determined daughter, turned the girl over to the regime for the crime of supporting Komala. While in prison she was beaten repeatedly. Once, a guard told her to shout: "Down with Komala." Instead, she shouted "Down with the Islamic Republic!" For this she was severely beaten. By the time she got out of prison she was quite weak. But she was far from broken. The two girls secretly got hold of a loudspeaker and broadcast to the whole village their defiance and their support for Komala.

The indomitable spirit of the Komala peshmargas shone particularly brightly in these two women. Both explained that they had the attitude that no matter what they had to go through to get to Komala, it would be worth it. Finally the two organized 13 other young women to join them in escaping to the Komala training center. Unfortunately these 13 were stopped by the regime on the way. Only the pair that were to be jinn ba jinned, whom we had spoken to, had succeeded in making it across the mountains to the camp.

## Drawing Women Into the Revolutionary Movement

For years Komala has stood firm in its position, demanding freedom and equality for women. It lays stress on democratic demands pertaining to women's condition. Komala explains that women take part in social production, they are members of the working class, and should have the same rights as men.

An important part of this work is among the men workers. In the factories and meetings of workers and villagers, anti-women prejudices break down when it is shown concretely how the participation of women strengthens the workers' cause.

Furthermore, Komala strives to free women from their domestic drudgery so that women can take an active part in society. They organize women to act as full partners in all social activities and in particular to take up their part in the struggle. Komala's stand on these matters is well known and is very popular among Kurdish women. Often where a family supports the bourgeois nationalist Kurdish Democratic Party — which neglects women's rights — the women of the household support Komala.

As years go by more women are present in the peshmargas. The women peshmargas help to increase the influence of Komala among women. Village women see women peshmargas leading political education, carrying arms and speaking up. They see them defend women's rights and the rights of the working people. They see that when women are part of the struggle, the forces are stronger; not weaker. Slowly they begin to believe in their own power and don't so easily accept the old ways.

After watching the peshmargas, women begin taking part in social gatherings and meetings. In the beginning they probably will not speak. But we were told that when the peshmargas return to an area after a year or so, they see the same woman who had been silent before take her place and say her piece.

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See WOMEN



Women and men peshmargas finishing their course of instruction at a Komala training center. Banners behind the peshmargas read: Long Live Socialism! Long Live Proletarian Internationalism! Long Live the Communist Party of Iran! Down with the Islamic Republic, For the Revolutionary Democratic Republic!



Women peshmargas at a meeting.



## WOMEN

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And, in turn, this lays the groundwork for more profound changes. The situation for the rights of women in general begins to be remolded. In areas where Komala's influence is strong, a woman warning "I'll tell Komala" can prevent a beating. The women begin to participate in the struggle. They form secret circles, listen to Komala's radio and carry out clandestine work in the village. They risk their lives to give food and water to the peshmargas operating in the area. Of course some of the younger women walk the distance to become peshmargas themselves.

Komala encourages the women to reach out broadly and join in all the political movements. Kurdish women are becoming more and more active against the regime. They take part in struggles and sometimes lead them. The women peshmargas told us that village women are in the vanguard in the fight against military conscription. They throw stones, rescue the men from the Islamic Guards and hide them so they can't be taken to the garrison. The women fight to have army bases removed from villages. They fight against men being drafted into the construction brigades and for the release of political prisoners.

The forms Komala has developed — its armed struggle, its radio and publications, its demonstrations — have had a tremendous effect on the women in

Kurdistan. And women who are moving forward today will, in turn, affect the lives of others. This "multiplier effect" holds great promise for the future. Once women burst forth from their oppression they become a powerful force for social change. Komala's steadfast work among women is a guarantee that toilers will unite as a class — leaving behind the archaic and reactionary separation between men and women. It's the united working class which will rally all the exploited into a single fist to smash Khomeini's tyranny, pushing forward the struggle for working class socialism where women will finally gain complete emancipation. □

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