

★ The Necessity of United Action

The following is from Raha'i, no. 43, August 1980. The problems that the Iranian left has had and continues to have in relation to cooperation and united action are well known to those familiar with its history. This article examines the factors behind the disunity of the left in Iran today and proposes some possible solutions from a realistic perspective.

Eighteen months after the bloody uprising of the 19th of Bahman (February 10, 1979), the issue of united action by the left forces has once again been raised by many political forces. The intensification of pressure and repression on the part of the regime, the extensive and systematic attacks by the ruling group on democratic freedoms, the growth of general dissatisfaction and the polarization of different political forces within society have all added a special importance to united action.

Although this issue was raised many times in the past by different organizations including our own, and despite the fact that certain steps were taken in its direction, none of these past efforts led to any positive or practical results. The sectarianism and authoritarianism of the left tendencies, the fact that many misperceived the future of the left as a boundless one when in reality it was very circumscribed, and the difficulty of recognizing the imminent danger of an intensified repression originating in the new regime which by various maneuvers was even successful in confusing political forces into vascillation from their radical positions--all these were factors that led to a situation where the disunity of the left seemed to be "genetically determined." But now, with the passage of time, things have changed; many of these factors no longer appear to be intractable.

The Left and the People

The people's illusions concerning the "Islamic Republic" are steadily evaporating. The ineptitude of the ruling group, the internal disputes between the different ruling factions, the fact that the most elementary social problems have been left unsettled, and the exposing by the democratic and political forces of the true nature and direction of the "Islamic Republic" have all worked together in bringing the people closer to a complete distrust of the regime. Perhaps, if the "leadership" had not been

able to exploit the benefits it gained from being recognized as "the destroyers of the Shahanshahi order" as it has done until now, even the chants of "allah Akbar" (God is Great) would not be heard as extensively as they are today. In fact, that which appears as a "mass base" for the regime here and there has not arisen due to the fulfillment of the people's demands which would have given this base the character of a material defense of a regime that represented these demands, but rather arose from a "trust" that the people had in the person of Ayatollah Khomeini and the perceived possibility of fulfilling some of these demands through his efforts.

In any case, it is a fact that the "mass base" of the regime is severely threatened and a lack of trust towards the ruling group is quickly growing. It is true that this "lack of trust" in many instances has been transformed into apathy, that a great many people do not display a real concern about what is happening politically, and that in some cases, a desire to "return to the past" and other "golden dreams" has even found a place in the hearts of many. Nevertheless, it is also true that the left and democratic forces have made relatively successful strides in mobilizing the people. Although this relative success was insufficient when compared to the extremely fertile conditions that exist for political work amongst the people and although the left, due to its own shortcomings and disunity which further circumscribe its power, could not take complete advantage of the favorable conditions, this success did, in many ways, build the left politically and gave it valuable experience.

This relative success taught the left many things. The Iranian left, which was still made up of small, basically intellectual circles even up to the days before the uprising, and had had the main part of its political experience limited to work in team houses and face to face confrontation with the Shah's regime, was confronted with a completely new set of conditions after the uprising. Obstacles like those of the past no longer existed to block attempts to contact the people, to attract and mobilize supporters and to expand organizationally. Left intellectuals no longer needed to employ complicated tactics that yielded limited results for the purpose of going amongst the people. In every corner of Iran, the possibility for political struggle now existed and a great sea of opportunities for struggle lay before the Iranian left.

Under these conditions, due to its lack of political experience

under relatively democratic conditions, the left, instead of initiating a principled policy of cooperation for furthering the democratic and anti-imperialist struggles, became consumed with sectarianism. Each political force went after only that which was good for its own organization and that which would propagandize its own line of thinking. There was no attempt to bring about a central unifying political tendency. The left did not have the experience to understand that unity in action was not only not in contradiction with the individual growth of different organizations and tendencies in the movement but was in fact also actually a guarantee for the continuation of the left's activities and the safe-keeping of those gains which would allow each political tendency to continue its independent work more easily.

This "growth" and "expansion" however brings with it its own special limitations for the left political tendencies, especially when society as a whole is in turmoil. One of the natural consequences of such a growth for any political organization or line of thinking which seeks to learn from its practice is the clarification of the limitations on its own political and organizational capacity for undertaking a general, all-encompassing, extensive struggle. When the confusion that comes with quick growth is replaced with the acceptance of the reality of each individual force's lack of completeness for the extensive mobilization of the people, by necessity, changes begin to take place within the ranks of the left. It seems that the trend of political events has been such that each political tendency has had to "grow" to a certain extent and has had to add just so many supporters to its ranks before it could grasp the fact that the relative growth of each tendency and its quantitative expansion did not necessarily answer the needs of the movement.

In addition to the existence of confusion arising from the possibility of the massive expansion of individual left forces who eventually placed the principle of independent work in opposition to political cooperation and thus rejected the dialectic of independent work and cooperation between different forces, other impediments also existed, blocking the way for a principled cooperation between left forces. The Organization of People's Fedayee Guerrillas, by following an authoritarian line in its relations with other forces, played an essentially disruptive role in response to any attempt undertaken for cooperation between left forces. The O.I.P.F.G.'s understanding of cooperation between left forces was not a principled one based on accepting the existence of different views between political organizations and the

need for independent work by each tendency according to its beliefs and the promotion of cooperation between them despite their differences. Rather, it was based on a self-centered perspective that practically understood cooperation to mean the towing of its own policies by everyone else. O.I.P.F.G. believed that they could either isolate other forces or pull them under its banner by relying on bureaucratic principles and refusing to acknowledge the existence of other left forces.

This reached its culmination in the electoral policy of the O.I.P.F.G. and was reflected across the social scene. But this "impediment" also was not able to withstand the internal changes taking place in the left movement. The authoritarianism of the O.I.P.F.G. came to be criticized from within by the "minority" and from without by other left forces.

The disintegration of the "Unity Conference" which showed the excessive haste of the participating organizations for a "Principled Unity," also helped to confirm the necessity of considering "unity in action" before any hurried move or "unity from above." The division of the "Unity Conference" into three different tendencies (Razmandegan, Peykar and Revolutionary Unity) and the consequent cooperative actions between Razmandegan and Peykar with "Rah Kargar" during the past few months has shown to many that the process of "unity"--especially that between organizations which have not yet found their ideological homogeneity and strength--must start with "unity in action," or at least the cooperation of different political tendencies within the left movement around the most basic positions.

The Platform of "Unity in Action"

Another of the impediments to the "unity in action" of the left forces in the past has been the insistence by some of the forces upon a "specific and all-encompassing" platform. The comrades who were previously organized in the "Unity Conference" believed that the prerequisite to unity in action was a specific and complete program. Although these organizations, after the experience of the "Unity Conference," put this prerequisite aside and some of them began to organize cooperative actions with Rah Kargar, the idea for the necessity of such a platform lingers still amongst many Iranian political forces. In our opinion, when social conditions demand the unity in action of the left more than they have at any other time, such a platform must not be so "specific" that in practice it blocks any cooperation between the militant left

political organizations. The most fundamental issue that the platform for left unity in action must concern itself with is that of taking an uncompromising position concerning the ruling clique

In our view, any left political force--regardless of the kind of theoretical orientation or ideological position it holds--can cooperate with other forces in the practical struggle around the most basic democratic and anti-imperialist slogans as long as it has a clear and explicit position concerning the reactionary ruling clique.

Obviously, pointing out the unimportance of a "specific and all-encompassing" political platform at the present time and condensing all that is necessary into the taking of a position "against the ruling clique," does not mean ignoring such a platform at a later time. Such a platform can only be constructed after different political tendencies have united in action in the most basic and essential senses of the word. The first step never begins with a "specific and all-encompassing" political platform. One must start with the first steps and after appraising the first experiences, take later steps.

The Iranian left movement has a long way to go before reaching such later stages and thus it must begin from the most basic and possible means in order to undertake the difficult road ahead. Perhaps in the history of the last eighteen months since the revolution, the issue of unity in action of the left forces has never been as seriously on the agenda for the political forces as it is today. And perhaps the impediments to the "unity in action" facing the political forces have also never been so few. And finally, perhaps the social conditions have never so urgently called for the necessity of such cooperation. Yet, these suppositions can only be proven once the left political forces, far from all forms of sectarianism and feelings of self-importance, understand the "sensitivity of the present conditions" and the need for "unity in action" and each of them does its share to take a step forward.