

Who was Mansoor Hekmat?

by Hamid Taghvaie

The life of Mansoor Hekmat (Zhoobin Razani), the great Marxist thinker and leader of the Worker-communist Party and worker-communist movement, was not separate from the history of this movement and party in any of its moments or ups and downs. This is both a biography and, at the same time, a history of Revolutionary Marxism and worker-communism in Iran.

Zhoobin Razani was born in 1951 in Tehran. He completed his primary and secondary education in Tehran and his higher education, in Economics, at the University of Shiraz. He arrived in London in 1973 to continue his postgraduate studies. It was at this time that he turned to reading Marx's Capital and other works. And it was in Marxism that his critical, vibrant and enquiring mind found the answers to his fundamental questions on the truth of the existing unjust and inhuman world and the way to change it. Young Zhoobin's profound and uncompromising humanism and love for freedom blended with Marx's radical critique of capitalism. Thus 'Mansoor Hekmat' and Mansoor Hekmat's Marxism were born. This Marxism had no kinship with the existing Marxism. Russian and Chinese Communism, the guerrilla warfare movement, Social Democracy and Trotskyism were all themselves subject of criticism by Mansoor Hekmat's communism. In contrast to these distorted accounts of Marxism, he began directly from Marx, and brought back to Marxism its humanism and radicalism. Hekmat's Marxism was a relentless critic of nationalism, religion, democracy, liberalism and reformism. Those left tendencies who were imbued with these views did not escape this sharp criticism. A left that had reduced Marxism to a prescription for reforming the existing system was, above all, criticised by this revived Marxism.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution and the advent of Revolutionary Marxism

Mansoor Hekmat's early writings, now considered among the classics of Marxism in Iran, deal with problems raised by the 1979 Iranian revolution. The revolution criticised and rejected the ideas of the traditional left on the streets. The theories of the guerrilla movement, Maoism, and Tudeh-ism were criticised and refuted in practice through social revolutionary practice. The workers' movement and the revolutionary left, however, needed to raise an independent theoretical banner. Hekmat's early writings were a response to this necessity, and thus quickly gained acceptance in the left movement as well as among labour leaders.

Different branches of the traditional left in Iran all represented what amounted to objections to different aspects of the underdevelopment of capitalism in Iran. Some of them even believed the Iranian economy to be feudal or semi-feudal, and therefore believed certain sections of the Iranian bourgeoisie to be progressive and revolutionary. In views put forward by organisations such as the People's Fedaii Guerrillas or the Tudeh Party, which believed Iran to be a capitalist country, certain sections of the bourgeoisie and the petty- bourgeoisie were assessed as progressive and revolutionary. All organisations of the traditional left, irrespective of their differences, in fact represented a movement that, at the very most, objected to the shortcomings of capitalism, and not capitalist exploitation itself. The force carrying the banner of Marxism at the time in Iran was, indeed, as Hekmat showed later in developing worker-communism, the left wing of the anti-Shah nationalist-religious movement and had nothing to do with the workers' movement or worker- communism's critique of capitalism. This fact was clearly observable not only in their irrelevance to communism and the communist critique of capitalist exploitation, but also in their attitudes towards all social and political issues raised daily by the revolutionary situation in society. This left had nothing to say with regard to such issues as workers' rights and demands, civil rights, women's liberation, active criticism of religion, active criticism of nationalism, and even urgent welfare

demands of the people at large. Although the problem with this left was not its theory but its non-worker ideals and visions, Marxism in Iran had to first settle accounts with it in theory. It was necessary first to rescue Marxism from under the rubble of non-working-class policies and objectives in order to organise a true worker-socialist movement. This had turned into an immediate necessity as the Iranian working class had entered a great revolutionary battle. In the context of this revolution, the workers' movement required its own, independent theory and policy. Marxism and communism had to be returned to the workers' movement, and Hekmat fulfilled this historic necessity.

In his writings published during 1979-1982, Hekmat proved, with astonishing clarity, consistency and insight, that the so-called progressive nationalist bourgeoisie is a myth, and that the entire capitalist class in Iran had a vested interest in the Shah's dictatorial rule, whose very *raison d'être* was to exact super-profits from the Iranian working class. He showed that Iran was a capitalist society. He showed that the cause of freedom in Iran was inextricably bound with the workers' struggle against capitalism, and made it clear why the religious, liberal-religious and nationalist forces were not capable of promoting this cause. In his writings he explained the meaning of liberation, freedom, and equality, and showed the way to achieve them. All his writings in this period, especially the pamphlets 'The Myth of National and Progressive Bourgeoisie in Iran,' 'The Peasant Movement After the Imperialist Solution of the Agrarian Question in Iran,' 'The Prospect of Destitution and the Marxist Theory of Crisis', and 'The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Populist Socialism', demolished the entire theoretical system of the non-worker left and laid the foundations of a coherent, radical Marxist system in Iran that came to be known as Revolutionary Marxism. His political essays in this period, such as 'Two Factions of the Bourgeois-Imperialist Counter-revolution', 'Fight over Realization of Populist Socialism', 'War, Theory, and the Theory of War', and 'Populism in Deadlock', are in fact the application of the theories of Revolutionary Marxism in analysing the new, Islamic regime and, at the same time, in criticising the inconsistent, compromising policies adopted by the traditional left towards it. These writings became the charter of claims, the banner of socialist workers in the context of a revolution snatched by other classes, by a newly established regime and its non-working-class, half-hearted opposition.

Hekmat's writings are clear, sharp, coherent and profound. His style of writing is lucid and lively. It remains intelligible even when his subject matter is the most abstract theoretical issue. His prose, like the content of his writings, is unprecedented in Iran's political literature.

During the revolutionary period, Iranian society was in turmoil, passing through sharp turning points one after the other. In every case the Islamic reactionary government that had come to power in the name of the revolution took a step further along the path of suppressing the workers and the people's revolutionary movement. The nationalist-religious forces left out of the government, as well as the traditional left, defended the new government to different degrees, or, at any rate, did not stand up to it. Under these circumstances, it was the Revolutionary Marxism of Mansoor Hekmat that represented, theoretically as well as politically, the revolution and the workers' movement. At such turning points as the Iran-Iraq war, the occupation of American Embassy in Tehran, the movement in Turkman Sahra, the movement in Kurdistan, the regime's assault on women, unemployed workers, universities, workers' councils, etc., and the faction fighting within the regime, it was Hekmat's Marxist analyses of them that laid bare the truth and guided the struggles of workers and other revolutionary forces. Revolutionary Marxism was the outcome of Marx's pounding criticism of capitalism, on the one hand, and the multifarious problems raised by the then-current revolution in Iran.

The significance of Revolutionary Marxism is, however, not limited to Iran alone. Hekmat's views contain originality and, indeed, run against the prevailing views among Marxist currents on a world scale. His critique of Populist Socialism demolished not only the theoretical system of its international poles, i.e. Russian communism, Chinese communism, and guerrilla warfare-ism, but also targeted, as far as it

positively hinged on Marx's critique of capitalism and stressed socialism, tendencies such as Trotskyism and Social Democracy that were not represented in Iran. His Revolutionary Marxism had an international character in that it analysed social issues and the problems of the Iranian revolution from the perspective of a worker's critique of capital. He criticised capitalism not only in Iran, but also in its most advanced forms in Western Europe and the US. The ideals of liberation from exploitation and freedom and equality that he sought for the Iranian workers are the same as those of the working class across the globe. It was his standpoint and his method that lent his views, irrespective of their subject matter, an international character. Revolutionary Marxism was written in Persian and in relation to the Iranian revolution, but it brought Marx back to the contemporary world. Revolutionary Marxism in the Realm of Practical Struggle

Revolutionary Marxism was not merely a theoretical tendency. From the very beginning, and parallel with the publication of Hekmat's writings, he and his comrades engaged in the work of organising an active intervention in the current social revolutionary developments.

In 1979 Hekmat and a few comrades formed a communist circle called Sahand, and later on an organisation by the name of Union of Communist Militants (UCM). The latter initiated the publication of a paper, 'Towards Socialism'. The publication of 'Towards Socialism', which carried Hekmat's extensive writings, resulted in winning over a group of the most advanced communist revolutionaries and labour movement leaders to Revolutionary Marxism and to the ranks of UCM. Among the early practical activities of Revolutionary Marxism were: engagement in the current struggles of unemployed workers and the publication of an organising paper, 'Against Unemployment'; organizing protest actions against encroachments of the Islamist counter-revolution on civil rights and the simultaneous agitation for unconditional political and civil rights for all, vis-à-vis the traditional left's demand for such rights exclusively for 'the people'; defence of women's rights in opposition to the regime's imposition of the compulsory veil Hijab, as well as in opposition to those leftist forces who would not consider the protests of 'uptown women' worthy of defence; organising Capital reading groups among labour leaders; and agitation for Workers' Councils.

Drafting a communist programme and building the communist party was on UCM's agenda from its inception. A major aspect of its activity in this early period was to make other left organisations appreciate the significance of having a programme, as they neither wanted to nor were capable of declaring their objectives and policies within the framework of a programme. In 1980 Hekmat drafted the programme of UCM which was put to the membership's vote and subsequently published as the organisation's programme. It formulated the socialist objectives of the working class, characteristics of the state sought by it, and the immediate demands of the working class for itself and the people at large.

A characteristic feature of Hekmat's thought was the relation he forged between reform and revolution. He was an idealist, consistent, and uncompromising revolutionary who sought to revolutionize capitalist society and liberate humanity from the yoke of all its political, social, and economic aspects. He was, at the same time, a revolutionary practitioner, a practical leader, who appreciated the worth of, and fought for, the slightest improvement in the lives of people. In his system of thought, there were not only no contradictions between reform and revolution, but they were considered two inseparable aspects of one and the same struggle. He criticised those Marxists who, out of 'revolutionism', either view any change as impossible in a capitalist society and prefer not to 'soil' their hands with the day to day struggles of the working class, or those who, like the European social-reformists, wash their hands completely of socialism and limit all their ideals to partial reforms. Hekmat was a Marxist of a different kind. He sought both the abolition of capitalism and, at the same time, ever more improvements in the conditions of the working class and the people at large within that very system. This conception of the relation between reform and revolution is strikingly clear in all his writings and in the programme of UCM in particular. The programme declared, alongside the abolition of the capitalist system and the establishment of

socialism as the immediate goal of the communists, scores of concrete, urgent demands aimed at improving the conditions of all sections of the population. It put the struggle for these demands on the immediate agenda, as they will both improve the lives of the people and facilitate the struggle of the working class for socialism. This runs like a thread through all party programmes he wrote, down to the present programme of the Worker-communist Party.

The publication of UCM's programme captured everyone's attention. Left organisations rejected it either as 'reformist' or 'too left' and 'Trotskyist'. However, it quickly gained popularity among their rank and file. A member of the Islamic parliament, referring to it as the programme of 'one of the counter-revolutionary small groups', labelled it dangerous, for it put forward 'illusory and impossible' demands that would raise the people's expectations. His worries were justified. Part of that 'dangerous' programme - that is such demands as the unconditional freedoms of expression, organisation, etc. and the separation of religion from the state - have become general, popular demands adopted even by many opposition organisations. Part of Hekmat's programme has now appeared on the people's banner in their struggles against the Islamic regime of Iran.

As the influence of the views of Revolutionary Marxism grew within society at large, there appeared, within the left organisations, fractions sympathising with UCM. The turning point in the growth of influence of Revolutionary Marxism, however, was when The Revolutionary Organisation of Working People of Kurdistan (Komala), a truly mass organisation leading the radical, armed struggle of the people in Kurdistan against the new Islamic regime, was drawn to it. Komala, a populist organisation, faced with daily, concrete problems raised by the mass struggles in Kurdistan, had come to a dead end. It realised the sterility of its populist views, and found the way to advance in Revolutionary Marxism. It seemed as if Hekmat had written his 'The Peasant Movement after the Imperialist Solution of the Agrarian Question in Iran' and 'The Myth of Nationalist and Progressive Bourgeoisie', in response to the problems facing the left revolutionaries in Kurdistan. Finally, Komala officially accepted the views and policies of UCM in its second congress in April 1981. A few months later a part of Komala's leadership met with the leaders of UCM in Tehran. During the summer of the same year Mansoor Hekmat, who had not yet picked this pen name and was known by the first name Nader within the organisation, went to Kurdistan and got involved in Komala's internal discussions. Komala's leadership and cadres soon realised that Nader, this sincere, humorous and modest young man, had original, shattering, guiding views not only in the realm of theory, but also in response to practical issues of the revolutionary movement in Kurdistan. That year he went to Kurdistan once more. Finally, in April 1982, at the time of the Islamic regime's massive assault on the left revolutionaries, Hekmat and the rest of UCM's leadership decided to retreat to the safety of the liberated regions of Kurdistan.

In recent Iranian history, June 20, 1981 marks a turning point in the course of political developments in general, and in the history of the left movement in particular. The new regime that had up to that point failed in its efforts to completely defeat the revolution launched a sweeping, bloody, suppressive onslaught unprecedented in recent history in its savagery and criminality. The spread of Revolutionary Marxism in the left movement was thus cut short. In the period between February 1979 and June 1981 there existed in society, thanks to the revolution, and despite the counter-revolutionary regime that had come to power in the name of revolution, a semi-democratic climate that provided Revolutionary Marxism, represented by Hekmat, with an opportunity to grow and gather force. In the same period the traditional left, on the other hand, began to crumble. The Tudeh Party, The Aksariyyat (Majority), the Three-worldist Maoists, and the Trotskyists joined either this or that faction of the regime, and the populist-socialist organisations such as Peykar and Razmandegan plunged into crisis and, like Komala, came to a dead end. Populist-socialism, in all its forms, revealed its sterility, and gave way to Revolutionary Marxism to grow within the Iranian revolutionary left movement in its entirety. The onslaught that began on June 20, 1981 brought this trend to a halt, and made the process of founding the

communist party only harder and lengthier for Revolutionary Marxism, but did not succeed in thwarting it. The path to its completion was to pass through Kurdistan, where the revolution lived on.

During the same period UCM began the publication of its political paper, 'Communist Worker'. The name 'Mansoor Hekmat' appeared for the first time in its fourth issue, in an interview on the pre-requisites of the foundation of the communist party. Up until then, following the traditions prevailing within the Iranian left, his writings had been published anonymously. The publication of articles carrying the signature of the writer was one of the results of his critique of the practical methods of the Iranian traditional left whose leaders had, as a rule, remained faceless. In the editorial of 'Towards Socialism', no. 5 (first series), Feb. 1982, Mansoor Hekmat argued that this facelessness, customary in the Iranian left, could not be reckoned as a party method, a method in our movement. He said: the leaders, thinkers, and writers of our movement have to be recognizable within the organisation and in society so we can, in the first place, establish a specific line of thought and action that can then be criticized or accepted. He rejected the concept of leadership behind closed doors, and argued that the working class should be able to readily recognise its leaders as well as mis-leaders. This argument is, in fact, part of a more comprehensive discussion, i.e. that of 'The Party and Personages', which he expounded fifteen years later in the Worker-communist Party of Iran.

Founding the Communist Party of Iran

The necessity of building a party occupied a top priority on Hekmat's mind and on UCM's agenda. In the frame of thought of the non-working-class left, organising the communist party had, like many other Marxist practical questions, turned into enigmatic, insoluble issues. It was basically reluctant towards party building. Its theories in this regard were nothing but a set of views put forward to justify why it was not possible, under any circumstances, to build the party and why one was, in effect, not even allowed to do so. For UCM, on the other hand, it was a vitally urgent task.

In the autumn of 1982 the first congress of UCM was convened in the liberated regions of Kurdistan. It was at this congress that Hekmat applied his critique of populist-socialism to practice, and positively determined the foundations of communist method of work. This was, in fact, UCM's first practical turn towards building the communist party. He subsequently wrote the first draft of the party programme. It was then put to vote and ratified by both UCM and Komala organisations.

In the winter of 1982, in a seminar in Kurdistan that later came to be known as the North Seminar, Hekmat proposed his theses on the theory of party and the concrete ways to establish it under the concrete circumstances of the Iranian left. In them he criticized such traditional leftist views as the 'theory of fusion'. He defined the communist party as the embodiment of working-class independence in theory, policy, and practice, and stated that Revolutionary Marxism could and should put the task of organising the party on its urgent agenda. This constituted the underlying vision for building the Communist Party of Iran.

In September 1983 UCM, Komala, Revolutionary Marxism fractions of other organisations, and independent revolutionary Marxists finally founded the Communist Party of Iran. This was a historic act, a decisive turning point in the history of the left movement in Iran. The Iranian working class was thus for the first time armed with a party representing its independent programme, declaring socialism as its immediate goal. Founding the communist party was a significant achievement for Revolutionary Marxism and the left movement in general, also because of the special circumstances in which it was done. While the brutal attacks on the revolution and revolutionaries had ceaselessly continued after June 1981, and while the communists found themselves increasingly cornered and their prospects ever darker in other

parts of Iran, Revolutionary Marxism was not only not routed or silenced, but founded the party in Kurdistan and thus initiated the process of its counter-attack in a newly opened, immense front.

The foundation of the communist party per se, the mere news of it, initiated a strong wave of hope, encouragement, and self-confidence in the left movement. It reached the imprisoned communists and revolutionaries under the blade of executions, and invigorated them. They would congratulate each other on the occasion. With the foundation of the communist party, Revolutionary Marxism opened a new chapter in the history of the Iranian left movement and revitalised it.

In the Communist Party of Iran, Hekmat had original things to say in every respect, from armed struggle to political agitation and propaganda, to relations with nationalist parties and forces. He drafted resolutions and plans of action on scores of issues such as organising workers and advancing the struggle in cities, determining the stages and objectives of the armed struggle in the country, forms of organisation of Pishmarga forces, political and military tours (Gashts), improvement in the condition of village dwellers in the liberated regions, organising women as Pishmargas and insuring their equal rights in every respect within the organisation, and so on and so forth. In a declaration entitled 'Basic Rights of the Working People in Kurdistan' he stated their fundamental legal rights and welfare demands. The publication of this declaration was yet another step along the path of criticism of the nationalist traditions of struggle in practice – traditions that are devoid of any rights or demands for the people in any shape or form.

The prominent role Hekmat played in the field of armed struggle might not have been clear to the readers of his works. He produced a profound criticism of the nationalist traditions of armed struggle in Kurdistan, and formulated the strategy of revolutionary war alongside the organisation of workers' struggles in cities as part of the struggle of the whole party. He recognized the Pishmarga force as the military wing of the working class movement in Kurdistan, and made it known as such. In numerous cases where traditional methods of struggle had reached an impasse, his views were path-breaking and very effective. One such case was the guidelines he presented to the fifth congress of Komala in 1985. While the field of armed struggle had been severely constrained, and employing traditional methods led either to adventurism or pacifism, his guidelines armed Komala with a realistic, viable, and progressive military strategy.

Another dimension to Hekmat's character that remains unrecognisable from his writings was his deeply humane and progressive disposition. Open, non-clandestine conditions of struggle in Kurdistan gave a great number of Pishmargas and members of the party the chance to get to know him closely. He, who was still, after the adoption of the pseudonym Mansoor Hekmat, affectionately called Nader or Kaak (brother) Nader by everyone, was an approachable, humble, and sincere person. He abhorred hierarchy, formality, titles, flattery, and so forth. Despite his numerous exceptional capabilities, there was not an iota of vanity or smugness in him. He saw everyone as his equal, and treated them as such. He was humorous and witty, comfortably made friends with everyone, and joked with all his friends. In meetings and gatherings, he presented his arguments with utmost clarity and in a non-condescending way. He did not see himself as anyone's mentor or big brother. He did not patronize anyone in discussions and was, therefore, sharp and uncompromising; one had to either convince him or be convinced by him. He cared and was concerned about everyone - from the conditions of life of the people in such and such village to day-care centres for children in Komala camps, to the health and clothing of Pishmargas, to the women's situation in the organisation and so on were all his concerns. He thought about everything and came up with solutions for them. Respect for life and for humankind was a part of him, clearly visible in both his personal manners and characters and in his political views.

From the very beginning of the formation of the party, turning the party into a mass workers' party was a main preoccupation of Mansoor Hekmat. His writings over this period, the articles on agitation among workers, worker circles and practical labour leaders, our organisational policy among workers, and worker membership deal with the mechanisms of organisation and struggle of labour activists and their relationship with the party. These were in fact the precursors of the comprehensive discussions, which later Hekmat expounded as 'worker-communism', and which, ultimately, in their deeper and more developed forms, provided the theoretical basis for the foundation of the worker-communist party.

Worker-communism and Kurdish nationalism

Before the formation of the Communist Party of Iran, Komala not only was not critical of Kurdish nationalism, but basically operated in the tradition of Kurdish nationalism. Populist Komala was in fact the left wing of a movement, whose right wing was formed by the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). It was heavily imbued with backward nationalist traditions in the armed struggle, in political activity, in work in the liberated areas of Kurdistan, in its attitude towards peasants, in its approach to religion and the question of women and even in organisational relationships. Right from the beginning, and even before the formation of the party, Mansoor Hekmat was a relentless critic of all this backwardness.

With the formation of the party, the struggle against backward and essentially nationalist traditions started in the Kurdistan Organisation of the party. Step by step the nationalist tendency retreated in the face of criticism of religion, backward mentalities, women's status, work among people, the party's publicity and the traditions of struggle of the Pishmarga force. But outside the party, the nationalist tendency could not tolerate such changes in a movement, which traditionally it considered to be its own. For the KDPI, Komala's communist agitation proved too hard-hitting and an 'insult to the sanctities'. Communist Komala's growing influence in Kurdistan posed a serious threat to the KDP. In the summer of 1984, the KDPI launched an attack on Komala Pishmargas in the Oraman region, setting off a three-year war.

The nationalists inside Komala saw this war as a conflict between two rival forces within the national movement. The truth, however, was that the KDPI could not tolerate Komala as the Kurdistan Organisation of the Communist Party and as the advocate of communist ideas among people. This was how Hekmat understood the war. He explained the war as a struggle between the Kurdish working class and bourgeoisie over freedom of communist expression and activity. Indeed, for the first time in Iranian history, communism had appeared with such clarity and so radically that even the bourgeoisie in opposition could not tolerate it. The war was brought to an end, unilaterally by Komala, on Hekmat's initiative and plan, after it became clear to the KDPI that it was unable to defeat Komala or even restrict its communist politics. In its first military encounter with the local bourgeoisie, the Kurdistan Organisation of the party had come out honourably.

Nevertheless, in the Revolutionary Marxist system of thought, criticism of nationalism could not go much beyond the criticism of ideas and policies or, at most, of methods of practice and style of work. For Komala's leadership, which had turned to Revolutionary Marxism following the dead-end of its populist views, even this much criticism of nationalism by Revolutionary Marxism was too much to take in; it was regarded as extreme and too excessive. For Hekmat, in contrast, this criticism was not deep, radical or comprehensive enough. It was with his discussion of 'worker-communism' that Hekmat brought this depth and comprehensiveness back to Marxist critique and analysis of social movements, including the criticism of nationalism. According to Hekmat, the differences and disputes were in fact differences between different social movements, having different class perspectives. Criticism of nationalism is not just a criticism of ideas and policies or even of traditions and methods of practice. Nationalism cannot be convinced of Marxism.

Naturally, these discussions were in no way palatable to the nationalist tendency in Komala, which, mainly in silence, had tolerated Revolutionary Marxism and the formation of the party. Now it began to speak out and put up a resistance. At that time, Hekmat, who along with the rest of the party leadership, was in Europe, published his views in the party, both in writing and verbally.

Some of Komala's cadres and leaders started attacking Hekmat with the most unprincipled methods. Heated discussions flared up in the party. Although the nationalists were in a minority, Hekmat, who did not want his organisational position and authority to impact the presentation of his views, left the central committee to form the Worker-communist Centre and Worker-communist Fraction. He wrote his views at length and elaborated them at special seminars. The nationalists tried to put up a resistance with the most backward methods. A large majority of party cadres and members joined the Worker-communist Fraction. In the end, at the 16th plenary meeting of the Central Committee in 1989, the leadership of the nationalist tendency conceded defeat and accepted the criticisms. Hekmat was unanimously elected as a member of the Political Bureau and Chairperson of the Central Committee.

Organisationally, the dispute had been settled to the advantage of worker-communism, but Hekmat knew that politically and socially the problem remained. He wanted the Communist Party of Iran to be the organised section of the worker-communist movement, or, as he put it, a 'single-stranded' worker-communist party, but he knew that his party was not such a party. The nationalist tendency had thrown in the towel and gone quiet again, but it lived on in the party. The Gulf War in 1991 set the scene for the resurgence of nationalism. With the attack by the USA and its allies on Iraq, the Kurdish nationalist forces saw an opportunity to draw closer to the USA against the Iraqi regime. Nationalists in Komala were also stirred. Abdullah Mohtadi, from the Central Committee, put forward a draft resolution to the Political Bureau calling for solidarity with the Iraqi Kurdish nationalists and, specifically, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). In an article, Hekmat showed the nationalist and anti-working class nature of the resolution. Once again debates flared up between the nationalists and worker-communists – this time on the issue of the Gulf War.

The documents of the discussions of this period, published as a collection on the Gulf War, and in particular Hekmat's lengthy article entitled 'Only Two Steps Back', give a clear picture of the debates of that time. They reveal Hekmat's clarity and coherence of thought, his political insight and high moral principles in political debates with opponents in the party. In the course of these debates, it became clear to Hekmat that the existing party was not a homogeneous workers' party; that the existence of a strong Kurdish nationalist tendency in it, even if it had conceded to himself and to the communist tendency in the party, was a serious barrier to basing the party squarely on worker-communism. Faced with this situation, Hekmat took a daring, imaginative and unprecedented decision: he resigned from the party, a party in which the majority of the Central Committee, cadres and members supported his views and regarded him as their leader, where even the nationalists opposing him had acquiesced organisationally. The future would show that this resignation, from a position of strength, which seemed odd and inexplicable even to his closest comrades, was the most principled and trouble-free route to strengthening and pushing forward worker-communism.

Formation of the Worker-communist Party

Along with Mansoor Hekmat's resignation, the majority of the party's leadership, cadres and members, who supported his views, also resigned from the party, and joined the worker-communist party, which, he and other members of Worker-communist Centre had called.

Hekmat left a party in which he was the leader, taking, as he put it, 'only his pen', leaving behind the party's name and resources for those who remained. By any political or constitutional standard or

principle, the worker-communist tendency had every right to remain in the party and exclude the nationalists. Hekmat gave up this right so as to frustrate in advance any attempts by the Kurdish nationalists to take advantage and make a scene. He saw beyond organisational rights and principles. He knew that in a post-Soviet world and with nationalism on the rise, both in the region and around the world, having worker-communism's intellectual and political supremacy and the support of the majority in the party was not enough. He knew that while communism was under attack by the world's reactionary forces, worker-communism was not in position to rid itself of nationalism without a confrontation with its nationalist opponents, which in an armed organisation could easily lead to an armed conflict. He simply resigned and did not even call on his supporters to resign. His supporters followed suit by resigning individually from the party and joining the Worker-communist Party. This was the most civilised and the most trouble-free way of detaching worker-communism from Kurdish nationalism. The remaining cadres in the leadership of the Communist Party told Mansoor Hekmat that they would continue his line, and he wished them well. Such a split was unprecedented in the history of the left and, generally, in the history of parties around the world.

Two years after the formation of the Worker-communist Party of Iran, the Worker-communist Party of Iraq was founded. Hekmat's writings had been translated into Arabic and Kurdish long before then, influencing the Iraqi left. Hundreds of left activists and leaders in Iraqi Kurdistan had started learning Farsi so that they could read his writings. In particular, Hekmat's analysis of the Gulf War and his stand against it was well received in the Iraqi left. The Worker-communist Party of Iraq was the product of the growth and social influence of Hekmat's views in Iraqi Kurdistan. This was the only party that stood up to the reactionary Kurdish nationalist parties, which had come to power following the extension of the Gulf War to Kurdistan, challenging the hold of religion and backward mentalities. Hekmat was in regular contact with the leadership of this party. Members from either party's leadership joined each other's central committees.

The worker-communist party was formed following a period of political and theoretical struggle against Kurdish nationalism. Worker-communism was not, however, the antithesis of nationalism. The significance of the formation of the party did not lie, either, in its triumph over Kurdish nationalism. Worker-communism arose in opposition to existing communisms around the world. It was, in its essence, a different movement. Hekmat represented Marx's communism as distinct from the movements of other classes, who also laid claim to Marx. This was a turning point in the history of contemporary communism around the world.

Worker-communism as Distinct from other Communisms

Worker-communism is based on the fundamental notion that communism is not merely a system of thought, or even a party or party struggle. It is, above all, a social movement. It is the movement of the working class against capitalism that has existed independently of, and prior to, Marxism and party politics.

In its assessment and its criticism of theories or organisations, worker-communism refers to the social movements to which these theories and organisations belong. It explains their differences and disputes on that basis. Thus, what from the point of view of Revolutionary Marxism was regarded as 'deviation from Marx's theory' or 'revision in Marxism' was seen by worker-communism as the appropriation of Marx by other social movements. It is not a question of theoretical misunderstanding, confusion or disputes within a 'Marxist camp', but, rather, of differences between totally different social movements and socio-political perspectives. The worker-communist standpoint, elaborated in *Our Differences*, one of Hekmat's deepest and most comprehensive writings, identified as a non-working class social movement what traditionally the left would see as 'deviation in Marxism', such as Maoism, Russian Communism, Social Democracy

and the European New Left. Iranian populism was regarded not as 'deviations in the workers' movement', but as the left wing of the Iranian national reformist movement. In the article Anatomy of Left Liberalism, a brilliant analysis of revolution and the Marxist theory of revolution, Hekmat criticised the views of the Organisation of Communist Unity as the left wing of the Iranian National Front [the bourgeois nationalist reformist party]. He used the same method later in his analysis of the political forces in Iran.

But the brilliant application of the theories of worker-communism are to be found in the analysis of the experience of workers' revolution in the Soviet Union, published as a series of debates in several issues of the bulletin Marxism and the Question of the Soviet Union, from 1986 to 1988. Revolutionary Marxism did not, and could not, offer a theoretical solution to this basic problem of the international left; nor did or could the other tendencies, on the international scale, which were critical of the Soviet Union, such as Trotskyism, Maoism and the New Left. In his profound discussions in the bulletins, Mansoor Hekmat explained the cause of the defeat of the October 1917 revolution, in the final analysis, as the defeat of the workers' movement and the Bolsheviks by the Russian national reformist movement, which strived for the industrialisation of Russia. Russian nationalism, which also was critical of Tsarism because of the backwardness of Russian capitalism, was finally able, in the late 1920s, to triumph over Bolshevism. It was able to take hold of the party and the newly formed state of the Russian working class and organise state capitalism in the name of socialism. Hekmat's analysis of the October Revolution and the Soviet Union present the deepest, the clearest, and the most consistent criticism of the Soviet experience ever presented in the world's left movement. It was by relying on this criticism that worker-communism could stand honourably and challenge the unipolar world following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Hekmat himself said that worker-communism was nothing but the communism of Marx in the conditions of today. The theoretician and champion of the Marxism of our age had a whole world before him to criticise and change.

The International Significance of the Formation of the Worker-communist Party

The Worker-communist Party of Iran was founded in autumn 1991, following Hekmat's detailed polemics and discussions expounding the ideas of worker-communism and after his and his supporters' resignation from the Communist Party. The formation of the party was an answer to the needs of an independent workers' movement, and the need to give to this movement an organisational dimension, distinct from existing communist and left parties, parties that in fact represent other social movements. The circumstances and the time in which the party was formed are a reflection of this reality: the existing Communist forces around the world were in retreat; along with the Berlin Wall, the non-worker left had collapsed; the bourgeoisie was celebrating what it perceived to be the end of Marxism; pro-Soviet Communist parties, and those critical of it, were either dissolving themselves or changing their names; market economy and capitalist savagery were having a field day; and, along with Lenin's statues, any humanist or egalitarian idea and cause was being knocked to the ground.

Under these conditions, Mansoor Hekmat founded a party that not only had not given up the socialist cause and Marx's humanist ideas, but which reaffirmed and emphasized the correctness of Marxism and its relevance with such clarity and purity that was unprecedented in the history of the contemporary left. The Communist Party of Iran was Hekmat's answer to the onslaught of the Islamic Republic; the Worker-communist Party was his answer to the anti-communist onslaught of world capitalism.

The attacks on Marx and communism had started in fact long before the fall of the Berlin Wall, by Thatcherism and Reaganism in the 1980s. Thatcherism attacked every sign of humanism, egalitarianism and freedom, replacing it, in all fields, from politics to art and culture, with free market capitalism's naked savagery. As if the bourgeoisie in the West was taking revenge on the leftist world of the 1960s. The existing communisms, the Russian and Chinese left, Social Democracy, Trotskyism and the New Left,

were unable to stand up to this enormous attack by world reaction. In fact these tendencies' alienation from, and irrelevance to, Marx's communism was one of the factors which facilitated the rise of the most right wing and reactionary factions and representatives of the bourgeoisie in the West and internationally. Thatcherism brought to the surface, along with itself, all the slime and dirt of history. Religion, nationalism, racism and ethnicism were all thrown up. They cast their ominous shadow not only on politics, but also on culture, art and philosophy. The collapse of the Soviet Union hastened this process of regression. With the end of the Cold War, the unipolar world became a stage for the intoxicated sallies of the Western bourgeoisie.

Mansoor Hekmat went to war against this dark world, with his writings, his profoundly humanist and radical ideas, and with his party. His writings in this period, *The Gory Dawn of the New World Order*, written originally in English and which deals with the Gulf War and its place in consolidating the New World Order; the series of articles in the paper *International* in critique of democracy, nationalism and political Islam, and, finally, his analysis and standpoint on September 11 and its aftermath – all of these were the declaration and indictment of worker-communism on the grim world after the Cold War. In *Our Differences*, Hekmat pointed out that communism should give up polemicizing with itself, and fight bourgeois ideas in society; that, like Marx, we should demolish bourgeois thinkers upon their contradictions. He himself did just that. The articles *Democracy: Interpretations and Realities* and *Nation, Nationality and the Programme of the Worker-communist Party* are brilliant examples of this return to Marx in the field of theoretical struggles. This was not just a reiteration and revival of Marx, but, rather, its expansion and deepening in addressing the various problems of the world of the late 20th and early 21st century.

Hekmat's last writings, a series of articles on September 11 that were published in four issues of the *International*, were in fact the manifesto of the civilised world against both Islamic terrorism and the West's state terrorism. On September 11, NATO and its homebred, political Islam came face to face. In the attitude towards this event, it was only Hekmat's line, which had always been relentlessly critical of both the New World Order and political Islam that could be the cry of a humanity caught between these reactionary camps. Without this third banner, the world after September 11 would be a darker place.

The Worker-communist Party started a massive campaign internationally around these views. The active force of this struggle was the organisation abroad of the Worker-communist Party and the numerous campaigns and projects organised directly or indirectly by the party in various countries. Defending the rights of women and refugees, standing up to racism, defending children's rights in the heart of Western Europe at a time when these states had started a massive attack on rights of immigrants and refugees, standing up to political Islam and the growing influence of religion in Western societies, standing up to the idea of cultural relativism and revealing its inhuman and reactionary nature, in one word, opening up a battlefield in every field where the New World Order was encroaching on people's rights and dignity – all these were part of a struggle waged by the Worker-communist Party without letup. A struggle on this scale is unprecedented in the history of the left, not only in Iran but internationally. In whichever country that it has members and organisation, the Worker-communist Party is an active and interventionist party in society. This is totally in contrast to the traditions of the existing left, both in Iran and throughout the world, whose maximum radicalism has been to struggle in exile against their own governments; the kind of struggle carried out, for example, by the Confederation of Iranian Students in Shah's time, or the South African left and or the ANC against the regime of Apartheid, or, today, the methods of struggle by the Iranian opposition organisations, even those who are aiming to overthrow the Iranian regime.

These are not worker-communism's traditions. Hekmat's worker-communist movement is not just a force in exile that struggles against its own government. It is a movement that challenges whatever is reactionary and backward, and wherever it can, fights to improve people's living conditions. Worker-

communism, even in opposition and in exile, is a party effecting changes in society, in the people's lives. This is a unique quality given to the party by its unique leader.

Worker-communism in Iranian politics

Mansoor Hekmat stood against the Islamic Republic and its factions, as well as its supporters in the opposition, as the representative and epitome of freedom and emancipation. His sharp and radical criticism of political Islam and the Islamic Republic and his deep analysis of the nature of the '2nd Khordad' (i.e. pro- Khatami) forces in the opposition, not only threw light on the struggle of the party and party activists, but also turned into the hope of all those whose hearts were beating for humanism and emancipation. His political writings of the period, published in the International, articles such as The Final Crisis; Mujahedeen's Forbidden Dreams; Rah-e-Kargar's Hejab-Gate; The History of the Undeclared; Plastic Al- Ahmads; and scores of other articles, turned the Worker-communist Party into the sole champion of secularism, modernism, humanism and freedom and the genuine representative of the movement that aims to overthrow the Islamic regime.

At the party's Second Congress, Hekmat introduced new, path-breaking discussions on the relation between party and political power and the place of the party in society. He wanted to make the party approachable, known and accessible to people. He wanted the cadres and leaders to become well-known figures in Iranian politics. He wanted to put the party at the centre of Iranian politics and at the head of the movement aiming to bring down the Islamic Republic. In his speech at the Third Party Congress, he said, to make lasting changes in people's lives, one should seize political power. His efforts throughout this time were geared to preparing the party for political power. His discussions on Party and Society and Party and Political Power were innovative, unprecedented and liberating. His ingenuity and creativity knew no bounds.

Over this period, the party opened numerous fronts in the struggle against the Islamic Republic. Hekmat was directly involved in the planning and implementation of many of them. They included preventing the Islamic Republic regime from establishing itself abroad with the public opinion and governments in the West. The height of this was the party's successful campaign against the conference in Berlin by the 2nd Khordad Movement. They included the campaign against stoning, against compulsory veil and sexual apartheid in Iran, the campaign in support of the oil workers, the successful campaign for the release of labour activist Mahmoud Salehi, the founding of the organisation Children First, the building of the Communist Youth Organisation and the campaign to replace the Farsi script with Eurofarsi – a script designed and developed by Hekmat himself - in what was directly his own project. These have been part of the relentless struggle of Hekmat's party and movement against the Islamic Republic and, in general, reaction and backwardness in the Iranian society. Opposition to Khatami and the 2nd Khordad faction from the very outset and standing up to the politics of the pro-Khatami forces in the opposition have been a continuous area of struggle for the party during this period. In the resolution Khatami's Election and the Resurgence of the Pro-regime Opposition and the series of articles entitled The Final Act, Hekmat identified three social movements in Iranian politics today: the monarchist movement, or the pro-West Iranian nationalism, the national-religious movement, whose mainstream at the moment is 2nd Khordad, and the left and communist movement, which is represented by the Worker-communist Party. Here, political parties and organisations are assessed with respect to their social position and the movement to which they belong. In this brilliant application of the worker-communist outlook to the current political situation in Iran, Hekmat shows that organisations and personalities such as the Tudeh Party, Aksariyyat, the Freedom Front, the Mojahedin Organisation of Islamic Revolution, Khatami, Soroush, Khalkhali and Hajarjarian all belong to the same political movement and perspective, and must be critically assessed and identified as such. The significance of this social criticism of political parties goes beyond a mere assessment of the current political situation and sheds light on Iran's past 25-year history and the history

of parties and politics in contemporary Iran. Hekmat's *The Final Act* and *The History of the Undefeated*, written using the same method, provide a deep and vivid picture of the political alignments in Iran in the past two decades. Without Mansoor Hekmat and the Worker-communist Party, the left, humanism and love for freedom would not be represented in Iranian politics, and the initiative would totally fall to the supporters of the present regime or those of the previous regime of monarchy. Mansoor Hekmat's party is today a main force on the political stage of Iran and in the movement to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

Mansoor Hekmat's Legacy

Twenty five years of untiring struggle in the theoretical field, and the political organisation and leadership of a movement that sprang up around these ideas, produced hundreds of theoretical articles and essays, political commentaries, tactical resolutions and organisational action plans, the Programme of the Worker-communist Party, *A Better World*, hundreds of speeches and seminars, numerous organisations, projects and publications in various fields, and, above all, the two parties of Worker-communist Party of Iran and Iraq. This immense organised struggle, which in its practical breadth and diversity, as well as its theoretical depth and clarity, is unparalleled in the history of the Left in Iran and the contemporary world, is his dear and invaluable legacy for all those who fight for human freedom and happiness.

Zhoobin Razani's biography ends with his untimely death on July 4, 2002, but the life of Mansoor Hekmat has not ended. The story of our party and movement will always remain as the story of Mansoor Hekmat. The impact of the immense legacy that he has left for us will not remain confined to our time and our generation. As long as there is injustice, inequality, poverty and exploitation in the world, Mansoor Hekmat and the worker-communist movement, whose banner he raised, will live on.