

**INTERVIEWS
WITH
FEDAYI,
MOJAHEDIN
AND TUDEH
ACTIVISTS**

**FRED HALLIDAY IN: 86
(MARCH/APRIL 1980)**



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Since the overthrow of the Shah, over 150 distinct political groups have declared their existence in Iran. Of these, the majority are probably groups adhering to some version of revolutionary socialism, and few have as yet a substantial following in the country. Perhaps the largest left-wing group judged in terms of membership and ability to influence events is the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, whose influence is predominant in the Kurdish mountains and towns.

The situation elsewhere is far less clear, and it is too early to establish what the lasting power of the different left groups in the main centers of Iran will be. What follows are interviews with just three of the groups that have apparently established some following and organization in the chaotic months since the fall of the imperial regime. The two guerrilla groups, the Fedayi and the Mojahedin, have been able to win a wide following among young people, even though their actual cadre force was weak prior to the outbreak of mass opposition in 1978. The Tudeh Party, whom some observers rather too hastily discounted, has been able to bring back a core of political activists from abroad and largely on this basis, to build an organization inside the country once again.

I conducted these interviews in the early half of August 1978, a few days prior to Khomeini's closure of all left-wing offices and papers. The interview with a member of the Fedayi leadership took place in a captured SAVAK building. The discussion with the foreign relations spokesman of the Mojahedin was in the former headquarters of the Pahlavi Foundation. I interviewed the Tudeh

central committee member in the party's central offices next to the university. Within two weeks all three buildings had been taken over by the Islamic Guards and their occupants expelled. Since the partial relaxation of early October, all three groups have been able to begin public activities again, and the matters raised in these discussions are of prime relevance to the ongoing struggles in Iran today.

Fedayi: "A Confrontation Between Us and the Regime May Well Be at Hand"



Can you tell me what the role of your organization was in the revolution that overthrew the Shah? The present regime denies that you played any role in that struggle, even in the February rising, and Khomeini has denounced you as imperialist agents. It does appear that your movement was very heavily hit by the repression in 1976, when Hamid Ashraf was killed in a Tehran gun battle. You seem to have regained your momentum only in the latter part of 1978, after the popular movement against the Shah had acquired mass momentum. This would appear to be a particularly important problem for you, since the basis of your strategy has been that armed struggle was the way to mobilize the masses. Yet in practice it was not your armed struggle, of which the masses probably knew very little, but the political actions of the clerics which really induced the mass mobilization that ultimately overthrew the Shah.

It is absolutely false to say that we did not participate in the February uprising. Everyone knows that we did. The petty bourgeoisie who are now in power always distort the truth, and we

don't expect to get the truth from them. They did nothing until the moment of victory and then, at that moment, they want everything for themselves.

It is, however, true that in 1976 most of our cadres were killed, and it took two years to build up our organization again. When we grew again in 1978 most of the cadres were those who had been recently released from prison. But after 1976 we were not passive: In the two years after the death of Hamid Ashraf we lost another 25 people.

We carried out about 15 military actions in the months prior to the February rising. The nature of the actions was different in that previously they had been well organized and prepared for a long time, whereas now, as the political tempo quickened, we sometimes only had one day to arrange things. In Mashhad we assassinated Col. Zabanipour, who had killed young political activists. We attacked the Zanzan police station in Azerbaijan, the Eshtatabad barracks in Tehran, and the gendarmerie headquarters on Esfand Street, also in Tehran. Two or three weeks after the Tabriz rising of February 1978 we killed Col. Majidi in that town, and we assaulted the Rastakhiz Party headquarters in Qom.

When the big September demonstrations took place we played a certain role. The first one, on September 4, was largely a religious one and we did not play a significant part. But the one on September 7 was more overtly political and we participated in an organized manner, chanting anti-monarchical slogans. We did this not under our own name, however, and similarly when the Ashura demonstrations occurred in December we did not take part as Fedayi. It was only in January that we came into the open.

During the strikes we had cells that were active in certain cities and 14 of the organizers in Abadan were sympathetic to the Fedayi. Our following there can be gauged from the fact that in the August 3 elections the Fedayi candidate got 14,000 votes in Abadan, while the Tudeh candidate got only 700. Neither Mojahedin nor Paykar even put candidates up. Our candidate was Nasser Khaksar, a 45-year old activist who has been a steelworker and a poet. He has been imprisoned by the Islamic Guards in Khuzestan province.

During the February rising itself we captured a lot of police stations and we seized the SAVAK headquarters, in which the Fedayi now have their own headquarters.

Can you estimate how many people you lost in the period of eight years from the first armed actions in February 1971 until the Shah's fall?

Over those years we lost over 200 people. Of these about 40 were executed, about 20-30 disappeared, probably under torture, and the rest died in clashes. Another ten or so members died as a result of accidents — with cars, guns — while working for us. Over ten thousand people were arrested for Fedayi activities, a figure several times higher than for any other political organizations.

Can you give some idea of the social origin of the Fedayi? One gets the impression that, despite a certain workerist vocabulary, your membership consists mainly of students.

Our origins lie in the intelligentsia. We used to have workers in the organization, too, but as a result of the stagnation of the workers' movement those members tended to depend on the intellectuals. Of course, this situation was not just true of us. It was true of all political groups in the pre-revolutionary period. The participation of the working class depends on the level of the spontaneous movement.

You seem to have undergone some change of position in the mid-1970s, with the prison writings of Bijan Jazani providing some correction to the strictly military approach of the earlier period, exemplified in the writings of Poyan and Ahmadzadeh. And yet a minority section of the Fedayi, led by Ashraf Dehqani, herself a guerrilla leader of the earlier period who endured terrible torture in jail before her escape, still holds to the original position and has in practice split the Fedayi in recent months.

Well, we are preparing a full reply to Ashraf Dehqani. In the first period we chose military struggle as the central tactic in the people's and workers' movement and as the main form of struggle. Later, we rejected this idea and we asserted that the form of tactics depends on the specific political situation. A one-sided stress on military tactics at a time when the workers' movement is stagnant will not lead to the creation of a working-class party. Ashraf Dehqani, who returned to Iran after the February rising, still maintains that there was a revolutionary situation in the early 1970s and she insists that the main tactic now should be a military one.

Turning now to recent events, it seems puzzling to outsiders why you have given up some of the positions you gained through insurrection in February. Why have you handed so many buildings over to the mullahs?

We had no choice. We had to do it. The mullahs didn't take part in the struggle against the regime, they didn't declare jihad, and they only moved when the others did.

What is your evaluation of the present situation in Iran?

We are a Marxist-Leninist organization and the government is a petty bourgeois one. Our society is still dominated by imperialism, hence it cannot establish a bourgeois-democratic and nationalist regime. This has already forced us to abandon legal, public activity. We know that this government cannot establish democratic institutions.

Before the February uprising the system was based on three foundations: the court, the bureaucracy and the army. At first, the court was the main basis, then in the last few months the army took priority. Now we have another similar system: a weakened but still present army, a bureaucracy, and the system of revolutionary committees. The latter are close to the petty bourgeoisie, and Khomeini depends on them. The bureaucracy depends on the support of the liberals, the remnants of the dependent bourgeoisie, and a weakened national bourgeoisie. The army is still the

instrument of imperialism. We believe that the national bourgeoisie does not exist as a class; only a remnant survives.

What is your evaluation of Ayatollah Khomeini?

His support comes from the upper sections of the traditional bourgeoisie. His outlook just consists of Islam and nothing else. And his reliance on religion leads him to confuse a popular with an anti-popular line. Each of the two factions thinks that Islam can solve their problems. There are revolutionaries in the committees, and there are SAVAK agents.

Do you think the regime is going to attack you?

I think I have already answered that by what I said about the prospects for democracy. Sooner or later they are bound to It depends, however, on a lot of things — on our tactics, on imperialist maneuvers, on other factors. But the recent clashes in Kurdistan indicate that a confrontation between us and the regime may well be at hand.

What are your relations with other groups? Are you willing to work with the Mojahedin and the Tudeh Party?

We are willing to work with all anti-imperialist and independent organizations. We are trying to expand our relations with the Mojahedin but we refuse to work with the Tudeh Party, which is not independent.

Do you consider that the Soviet Union is an imperialist country?

No. The Soviet Union is not an imperialist country, and we do not subscribe to the theory of Soviet “social-imperialism.”

Thank you very much for this discussion.

Mojahedin: “We Are an Islamic Movement Separate from the Ruling Oligarchy”



I would like to begin by asking about your role in the revolution. During 1978 the Western press did not mention your activities until December, when one long-time member of your organization, Masoud Rajavi, was released from jail and began to reorganize your following. The present government implies that neither you, nor any other left group, were significant factors in the struggles of the last year of the Shah's rule. How would you evaluate your own role in the revolution?

We were a vanguard organization, and we offered a correct analysis and guidelines for the people to act upon. But we did not operate under our own name. We worked in secret and were in contact with a number of other active groups. We were even responsible for some of the main slogans launched by the mass movement and we provided an analysis of the new international situation of imperialism following Carter's election.

Did you carry out any armed guerrilla actions during the period of the revolution?

We participated in the armed actions of 21 Bahman (February 10, 1979) but since we were acting as a politico-military group we were not so concerned with military actions as with the need to fight the reformist policies being imposed upon the movement. When we took part in the demonstrations on Eid-i Far (September 1978) and Ashura (December 1978) we saw the basic problem as being one of preventing deviationist slogans. We took portraits of our martyrs and raised our own slogans. Looking back on it, we see our main concern as being to establish how we influenced the movement, rather than what actions we as a group carried out.

When you were founded in 1965, you were a breakaway from the Iran Liberation Movement of Mehdi Bazargan, now the prime minister. It is reported that you tried to convert Bazargan to guerrilla struggle by providing him with some of Mao's work. Evidently you did not succeed. But have you maintained any contacts with the ILM subsequent to that period?

For a time we had some contacts, but when we broke in 1965 we broke for good. There were, after all, some fundamental political differences between us.

In 1975 your organization underwent a serious split, when the "Marxist-Leninist" fraction expelled the rest of the membership, accusing the latter, i.e., yourselves, of being "petty bourgeois religious" elements who were holding back the struggle. Although the "Marxist-Leninists" have themselves expelled the cadres held responsible for the way in which the split occurred, there is still a legacy of bitterness between your organizations. At first it seemed as if your tendency, more loyal to the original Islamic orientation of the Mojahedin, had been destroyed in the conflict, but you are now a major force, rather stronger than Paykar. How do you see the split of 1975 now, in retrospect?

We do not think that we were expelled. Rather, a group of deviationists broke away, and we ourselves confused the issue because we took up an opportunist line. It was not like, for example, the split in the Omani movement that took place in 1968 when there

was a clear left and right. Three or four people were actually killed by those who broke away, but this is not as serious a crime as the very act of dividing an anti-imperialist movement.

Have you any idea of how many of your members were killed or imprisoned under the Shah's regime, in the 14 years between when you were founded and the triumph of the revolution?

We do not have any exact figures, but we reckon that about 80 of our members were killed and about 800 imprisoned. This does not include members of our organization who took part in activities but not as part of the Mojahedin.

At the end of March the left faced its first major political choice, with the referendum on the Islamic Republic. The Fedayi and the National Democratic Front abstained. The Tudeh voted in favor. What was your position?

We supported the call for an Islamic republic, but we opposed the reactionary elements within it. Within three weeks of the Tehran uprising of February 10-11 we declared that the revolution was going downhill and could only be stopped by resolutely passing through the anti-imperialist phase. This position at once separated us from those in the ruling group itself. This we did intentionally, to demonstrate that we were an Islamic movement separate from the ruling oligarchy. As opposed to the Marxist opposition we did not oppose the Islamic republic as such, only its class character. Yet even this provoked an organized series of attacks upon our centers. Our offices have been attacked in Yazd, Kerman, Abadan, Qom, Khorramabad and Torbat. But we still have 21 offices open.

What are your relations with the Ayatollah Taleqani? In the runup to the election for the Council of Experts on August 3 you asked him to be one of your candidates, yet only a few days before, on the anniversary of the 30 Tir clashes of 1952, Taleqani launched a violent attack on the left which was indistinguishable from the diatribes voiced by Khomeini. Surely Taleqani's supposed support for the left is misleading. He is if anything

more dangerous as an ally than Khomeini, because the latter is at least clear where he stands.

This is a very difficult question: Our relations are between our organization and one of the most progressive members of the clergy. We asked him to accept leadership of the different groups in order to avoid a confrontation; but when we asked him to become a candidate in the elections the reactionaries opposed this. As for the 30 Tir speech, we live in the real world. We have to look at things in relative terms, and in their overall movement, not just statically. Taleqani has opposed imperialism, despotism and some aspects of the present regime. In comparison to the other leaders, his stand has been a better one.

Did the Mojahedin make specific proposals regarding the draft constitution announced in June?

Yes. First of all, we said there should be a constituent assembly, and that this was not the right time to have an assembly. It should be postponed. But as it was going ahead we faced a choice: either to participate, or to boycott it. So we decided to take part, because we wanted to lodge our views in the minds of the people and we thought we could do so without contradicting our own principles. We raised 14 points, outlining general principles we thought should be observed. These included: emphasis upon labor as the basis of value, democratic liberties, and a stress on the full Islamic equality of men and women.

What is your position on women? You say you think they are the equal of men, yet from looking around your building here it seems that all your women members have to wear the *rusari*, or scarf.

We cannot accept what has been imposed on women since the revolution, even though we know that it has been imposed in the name of Ayatollah Khomeini. However, although it becomes a major issue at times, the question of women is not the main one, which is the need to sweep away the traces of imperialism. Women do have

to wear Islamic headdress and keep their arms covered in our organization, as our religion enjoins, but this is a minimum requirement. Many of the fighters in our organization are women.

But this is like a revolutionary organization in the US saying that since the question of relations between blacks and whites is not the major issue, compared to the struggle against capitalism, the organization will impose discriminatory practices upon blacks in order not to antagonize racist white workers. It is impossible to argue that you consider men and women equal if you make women subject themselves to restrictions that men are exempted from.

This is not a burning issue at this time. We are not saying that every woman should wear Islamic clothing. Only that those who join our organization should do so.

Have you any following among the working class?

We played a role in the Abadan oil workers strike.

How many of your members are now in jail?

The only actual member is Saadati, a guerrilla leader who was seized and tortured by the Islamic Guards some weeks ago. Some of our supporters have also been imprisoned.

What is your view of the Soviet Union? Do you think it is “social-imperialist” and what role did it play in the revolution?

The Russians made mistakes in their relations with the Shah, but this does not mean one can call them “social-imperialist,” or equate them with the US. The Soviet Union has played an anti-imperialist role, and we on our part condemn the “Three Worlds Theory.”

Finally, may I ask you about your policy on the nationalities? Do you consider they have the right to secession from Iran?

We support the right of all nationalities to complete autonomy within Iran. But we do not concede the right to secession. We have no strong organizations among the nationalities but we have some influence among the Azerbaijanis. One of our founders, Mohammad Hanifnezhad, was an Azerbaijani.

Thank you very much for this discussion.



Tudeh: “Conditions Are More Favorable for Our Work”

I begin by asking you for some comparative evaluation of the situation you now find yourself in and that in which you first developed after the party was set up in 1941? At that time you had a membership of many tens of thousands and were a real force in the country. Now you certainly are an organization: Your electoral meeting in the university the other night attracted up to 50,000 people and demonstrated your organizational appeal to a large number of young people. And yet you seem overall to be much weaker than you were in the 1940s.

We like to talk of 1941 as the birth of the Tudeh Party, and 1979 as the rebirth. The two periods involve very different conditions, internally and internationally. The country was at that time semi-feudal and classes were not clearly formed — there was a situation of class amorphism. Nevertheless, we played a certain role as being the only party with clear ideological preparation. In 1941 we were the only party that had a systematic view of conditions in Iran. This ideological monopoly was an advantage. On the other hand, we did

not have great experience. The average age of our leaders was between thirty and forty, and many mistakes were therefore made. Now, of course, the situation is quite different. Tudeh is not the only left party, and even the Islamic forces can present a systematic analysis of society. That monopoly of ours has gone. A situation of great ideological struggle, quite unlike the 1940s, is upon us. But we are no longer in a position of class amorphism, and there are also several factors that make conditions more favorable for our work: the advanced international balance of forces in favor of socialism; the growth of the working class; the increased number of intellectuals; the fact that dependent capitalism has shown itself to be incapable of guaranteeing independence; the growth of third world liberation movements; the party's greater experience and the fact that it has applied Marxism-Leninism to the concrete conditions of Iran.

You refer to “mistakes” that were made after 1941. What, in your view, were those mistakes?

Our party has had two congresses and several plenums of the central committee. Mistakes were discussed at the fourth, tenth, thirteenth and fourteenth plenums. The fourth, in 1957, identified four mistakes: our relations to Mossadeq, the conduct of the military organization after August 1953, certain internal problems, and our miscalculation around the August 1953 coup itself. The tenth plenum in 1963 discussed organizational questions: it was discovered that Hussein Yazdi, the son of Murteza Yazdi, one of our leaders in the 1940s, was a SAVAK agent. He was imprisoned in East Germany for a time. The thirteenth and fourteenth plenums dealt with the infiltration into the Tehran party organization of Shahriyari, a SAVAK agent.

Two issues you do not raise as mistakes, but for which you have been often criticized, are the “northern oil” affair, and your attempts to form an alliance with the ex-SAVAK chief, Gen. Timur Bakhtiar. The former concerns your decision in 1944-1946 to endorse a Soviet claim that the USSR receive an oil concession in the north of the country, comparable to that

owned by the British in the south. This marked you out as pliant supporters of Soviet policy in Iran and has been used against you ever since. The latter incident, which occurred when Bakhtiar fled from Iran to Lebanon and Iraq in the 1960s, suggested a degree of desperation and opportunism that antagonized many younger people in Iran itself. Bakhtiar was, after all, the man who organized the repression against Tudeh after the 1953 coup and was the first head of SAVAK.

We do not consider that we made a mistake in regard to the question of the northern oil. At that time, we did not consider it something bad. The socialist countries were in need of fuel and the participation proposal made was a fair one that would have benefited our own economy. As for Bakhtiar, I deny that we ever had any connection with him.

After the 1953 coup your organization bore the brunt of a terrible repression and hundreds of your members were imprisoned. Over 20 of the members of the Tudeh military organization were also shot, and some remained in jail until the last weeks of the Shah's dictatorship. Apart from those killed and imprisoned in the aftermath of the 1953 coup, what were your losses in that period?

Five of our members were killed in the subsequent years. Three — Hekmatjoo, Masoumzadeh and Razimi — returned voluntarily from abroad and died at the hands of SAVAK. Tizabi and Haydari-Bigrand, who came to us from the Fedayi, were killed in prison and in a clash with the police respectively. Sixty or seventy of our members were arrested, but some were later released.

What was your organizational strength in this period? I have heard claims of up to 30,000 Tudeh members took refuge in the USSR.

Our organizational strength in the 1953-1978 period was about 5,000. Now lots of young people want to join, and others who were

formerly with us want to rejoin. But we are not able to process all of these people or to readmit all those who left us after 1953.

What do you evaluate your role as having been in the struggle against the Shah?

We were always active in exile. From 1959 we had our radio station Peik-i Iran, we were among the founders of the Confederation of Iran Students abroad, and the regime always portrayed us as having such a large influence. At times the Shah even exaggerated it. In the last three years the people who came over from the Fedayi published the paper *Navid*, and we had some role in the Abadan strike. The slogan calling for the overthrow of the Shah's regime and the establishment of a republic was raised by us five years ago, and Khomeini made it much later. More important than our organized strength is the political and moral influence we have exerted.

You mentioned the radio station, Peik-i Iran, but it seems that this was closed down in 1976 in return for the Shah's returning to the USSR a Russian pilot who had defected with his plane to Iran.

This was not the reason for the closure of Peik-i Iran. Ten years before we had been officially told by the host country that we would have at some time to cease using facilities in that country.

Until late 1978 the Tudeh opposed armed struggle, was critical of the Fedayi and Mojahedin, and had at most a cautious attitude to Khomeini. Then in December 1978 the Tudeh changed its policy, supporting armed struggle and endorsing Khomeini's stand. This coincided with a change in the party leadership, with Kianuri becoming secretary-general in place of Iskandari. Since Kianuri had, in the early 1950s, adopted a minority position favoring a more active alliance with Mossadeq and resistance in the 1953 coup, could this be seen as a substantial shift inside Tudeh itself, in response to events in Iran?

Kianuri's election to the post of secretary-general was the result of a process of political and organizational change within the party. Our political and organizational line was corrected. Kianuri was appointed secretary-general by the Politburo and this was unanimously approved by the central committee. I would like you to note that Comrade Iskandari himself voted for these changes. The matter of the differences within the party in 1953 was settled by the Fourth Plenum of 1957.

Khomeini is a strange person for a communist party to be supporting. It almost seems as if, in a reaction against a left sectarianism of the early 1950s, when you failed to support Mossadeq, you are now making the opposite error of a right deviation, allying with a rabidly anti-communist and in many ways reactionary cleric. How can you justify this stand?

I do not accept your characterization of Khomeini. You cannot simply state that he is a reactionary. His final face will only be shown in future events. You must not identify Khomeini with the mass of the clergy nor should you judge his record in religious terms. If you draw up a political balance sheet, then this record is, to date, a positive one. He has ousted the Shah and declared a republic. He has taken Iran out of CENTO. He has broken links with Israel and established ties with the Palestinians. He has stopped the supply of oil to South Africa. [*The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has stopped direct sales of oil to South Africa, but industry sources believe that significant amounts of Iranian oil are going to South Africa through spot market transactions involving international companies with interests in both countries. NIOC retains a 17.5 percent share in the National Petroleum Refinery at Sasolburg, southwest of Johannesburg. NIOC also holds interests in refineries in India and South Korea. -Eds.*] He has withdrawn Iranian troops from Dhofar. Iran has joined the non-aligned nations. He has removed US bases and expelled foreign advisers. He has nationalized banks, insurance companies and some industries. He has announced a new constitution that is on the whole more progressive than that of 1906, because it does not allow any place to the monarchy. We do not identify ourselves wholly with him, and on

some issues we make our position of difference clear, such as on the position of women, and on the religious character of the constitution.

Why don't you oppose him more openly? And how do you account for his popularity?

Matters are at an early stage yet. Our party is just finding its feet. So too is the Iranian revolution. We are not strong enough to lead the movement, and as we cannot lead we have to choose. Khomeini's influence is much higher than ours and this reflects the structure of Iranian society, which is still in some respects medieval and dominated by Islamic ideology. We must take into account the way in which a medieval atmosphere still prevails in this country and whereby, under the last regime, religious protest had a freedom of maneuver which political protest was denied.

The major obstacle the left seems to face in this country is the depth of anti-communist feeling, which takes the form of an anti-Russian feeling that is second only to the hostility to the US. Yet the Tudeh seems to fly in the face of this by pursuing a policy of absolute loyalty to the USSR that can only discredit it. People remember the northern oil affair, and the fact that Stalin opposed Mossadeq. They remember that Brezhnev sold arms to the Shah. Why do you persist in this unjustified and politically suicidal loyalty to Moscow, at a time when much of the rest of the international communist movement has established some degree of distance from the USSR?

Let me make some things quite clear to you. First, we determine our own tactics and strategy in this party. No one else does. Secondly, we decide how to apply Marxism-Leninism to the specific conditions of Iran. Thirdly, we do not take orders from abroad. But we do believe in proletarian internationalism: International capitalism is organized internationally, so we should be organized in this way, too. The charges you mention are attempts by the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie to weaken us. We reject them.

Thank you very much for this discussion.

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