

# Fake Socialists vs. Women's Liberation

## Apologists for Islamic Reaction



GAUMY-MAGNUM

Mullahs in Iranian parliament

Reprinted below is the text of an IBT statement on an incident that took place in Toronto during the celebration of International Women's Day in 1998:

The removal of two literature tables from Toronto's International Women's Day (IWD) fair at Ryerson Polytechnic on March 7 [1998] has created a major controversy on the Canadian left. One table belonged to the racist Canadian Forces. The other, entitled "Positive Images of Women in Islam," was set up to promote the Iranian theocracy's record on women. It was stocked with a variety of propaganda materials published by the Ministry of Culture of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) and displayed quotations from "Imam Khomeini"—the reactionary cleric who led the movement that toppled the Shah in January 1979.

Khomeini's Islamic Republic immediately moved to impose the veil, crush the left and restore the barbaric practices of flogging, amputation and stoning. On 8 March 1979, a few short weeks after taking power, Islamic thugs opened fire on Teheran's International Women's Day demonstration. In the months that followed, the Imam's "Revolutionary Guards" attacked national and religious minorities and murdered thousands of leftists, feminists, homosexuals, "adulterers," atheists and other "enemies of Allah."

Recently the Iranian government has sought to soften its well-deserved reputation as one of the world's most misogynist regimes. The chance to set up a propaganda stall at International Women's Day in Toronto presented an excellent public relations opportunity, while also serving to discreetly intimidate refugees from the mullahs' death squads. The liberal feminists who organized the IWD fair were happy to welcome IRI participation just as they embraced the "sisters" from the Canadian Forces.

Not everyone saw things this way. Women comrades of the Workers' Communist Party of Iran (WCPI), some of whom had spent years in the mullahs' jails, took the lead in driving out the Imam's propagandists. The New Socialists, Socialist Action, Trotskyist League, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty and a variety of left-feminists and anarchists also participated in this commendable action. (None

of our comrades were present at the time, otherwise we would certainly have joined in.) After removing the Khomeinites, the leftist protesters turned to the Canadian military and ran them out as well.

Predictably, the feminist organizers of the fair, as well as various liberals, feminist union bureaucrats and fake-socialists, opposed the exclusions. Among the supposedly Marxist groups which sided with the Khomeinites were the Communist Party, Socialist Resistance (formerly Labour Militant), Communist League (followers of Jack Barnes) and International Socialists (IS).

The IS has been the most outspoken defender of the IRI's "right" to participate in IWD. With consummate cynicism, the IS leadership claims that this action, initiated and largely carried out by émigré Iranians, was a "racist" act motivated by blanket hostility to believers in Islam:

"The booth was attacked and the women expelled from the fair on the bogus argument that the religion they represent is sexist."

"This is just racist."

—*Socialist Worker* [Canada], 11 March 1998

The IS article goes on to smear the protesters by associating them with the National Front fascists in France, on the grounds that they too oppose the veil! This cynical trick recalls the Zionists' practice of branding all criticism of Israel as "anti-Semitic."

In a 28 March statement defending the action, WCPI supporter Hassan Varash explained:

"one of the women standing behind the booth as the staff admitted that she was employed by the Iranian consulate in Canada...."

"And another fact is that the IRI's booth was far from the [WCPI]'s, whereas there was a table just attached to the [WCPI]'s booth which belonged to an Islamic women's group. This group has always been present in the fair for a number of years and the [WCPI] had no problem with their presence.... The only thing that caused the action was the fact that the booth belonged to the Islamic state, which was perceived as an insult to the cause of women's equality, and as a threat to the security of the regime's opponents in Canada. For this reason the [WCPI] was determined to force the IRI's agents out.

"The slogans used and chanted until the agents were expelled were also indicative of the fact that the protesters planned to expel the IRI, not the Muslim women—slogans such as 'Down with the Islamic Republic of Iran,' 'Stop stoning in Iran,' 'Islamic terrorists out, out,' etc."

The 25 March [1998] issue of *Socialist Worker* carried a full page editorial by Paul Kellogg, disingenuously posing the issue as one of "defend[ing] the right of all religious minorities to participate in the fight for women's rights and the fight against poverty." Kellogg asserts that "no evidence has been advanced" to prove that the booth, which was stocked with official IRI propaganda and staffed by a woman who admitted to working part-time for the Iranian consular service, was in any way connected to the Iranian state. But Kellogg and the IS leadership don't care: "Even if there were a booth at IWD that had some backing from the Iranian state, would that justify an attack?" The IS says no.



ROBERT SCILLER—AFP

At issue is the attitude of socialists toward the mullahs' "Islamic Revolution," which the IS supported. While not supporting the IRI, the IS considers Islamic fundamentalism to have a progressive aspect inasmuch as it is "a type of nationalism, a response to the crushing hand of imperialism in the Middle East." Thus Kellogg views Khomeini's revolution positively:

"What makes the Iranian state reactionary is not its religion, but the class project of its rulers—a class project which set itself the task first to destroy the gains made by Iranian workers and the poor in the revolution of 1979, and second to rebuild an Iranian capitalist class...."

But there was no workers' revolution in 1979—there was a reactionary mass mobilization that toppled a reactionary dictator. The millions of workers and poor people who participated in the struggle to oust the hated Shah and his brutal regime did so under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini who unambiguously declared his intention of creating an Islamic state. The overthrow of the bloody Pahlavi dictatorship did *not* result in any gains for the workers' movement, but rather in its rapid destruction at the hands of Khomeini's Islamic gangs. It is bad enough that the IS loudly hailed the "Islamic Revolution" at the time, but to continue promoting the lie that it brought "gains" to Iran's workers and oppressed is positively perverse.

In 1978-79 the IS treated the mobilizations against the Shah as a working class upsurge in which Khomeini and his mullahs were only incidental figures. The Canadian IS paper ran a front-page blurb (copied from its British parent) that proclaimed: "Suddenly, workers' power in Iran has exploded on to the world stage...Iran, fired by workers' power, can fuel the struggle for socialism" (*Workers' Action*, December 1978-January 1979).

While acknowledging that Khomeini held a position of "symbolic leadership" in this supposed explosion of "workers' power," the IS asserted that: "At present there is a complete vacuum of political leadership among the Iranian working class." This was simply untrue—the leadership of the Iranian workers' movement (principally the Moscow-line Tudeh Party, but the other leftist groups as well) made the same "optimistic" assessment of the character of the "Is-

lamic Revolution" as the IS. Instead of warning the workers of the mortal danger posed by Islamic reaction, they celebrated the dimensions of Khomeini's "mass movement," and painted rosy pictures of the unfolding of an inexorably revolutionary process. An article from the February 1979 issue of *Workers' Action* entitled "The form—religion; The spirit—revolution" asserted:

"Khomeini has many reactionary views. He is an absolute anti-communist. But, for the time being Khomeini is a symbolic focus for a revolt which began in the mosques because it was the only place the people could organize their opposition without fear of the dreaded SAVAK.

"But to believe the people of Iran are fighting and dying in their hundreds and thousands only to let one reactionary leader be replaced by another is absurd."

What was "absurd" was the refusal of the IS and the rest of the fake-left internationally (and in Iran) to open their eyes to the dangers of Islamic reaction. In fact the opposition to the Shah extended far beyond the mosques. Leftist organizations had substantial support both on the campuses and in the unions, particularly among the oil workers. The problem was that the Iranian left, like the IS, tailed Khomeini and his movement. Only the then-revolutionary Spartacist tendency (whose program the International Bolshevik Tendency upholds today) raised the necessary program for the Iranian workers: "Down with the Shah! Down with the Mullahs! Workers to Power!"

Had the Shah's propaganda ministry attempted to set up a literature table at the first IWD march in 1978, the feminist and leftist organizers would certainly have joined refugees from his dictatorship in overturning it. If two black stooges of the hated apartheid regime had attempted to set up a table to promote "positive images of black women in South Africa," they would surely have received the same treatment. Publicists for Iran's brutally misogynist regime who turn up at events dedicated to promoting women's liberation deserve no less. Those miserable "socialists" who choose to defend the Islamic reactionaries against their victims thereby take political responsibility for the terrible crimes of the mullahs against Iran's workers, women and other oppressed people. ■