

OUR DIFFERENCES

INTERVIEW WITH MANSOOR HEKMAT
ABOUT WORKER-COMMUNISM

The following interview with Mansoor Hekmat took place in autumn 1989. The present translation is from the Farsi original. There are two parts to the interview: The first deals with issues of working class and communism at a general level. The second focuses on more specific problems concerning the Iranian left and, particularly, the CPI. This second part has been abridged to some extent - particularly the discussion on organizational issues. Any references here to the "party" are to the CPI.

Mansoor Hekmat, who was himself a founding member of the Communist Party of Iran, left the CPI along with other members of its leadership (the political bureau of the CPI) in November 1991 to found the Worker-communist Party of Iran. (The Communiqué on the formation of the Worker-communist Party of Iran is reprinted at the end of this interview.)

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Question: The report *The International Situation and the State of Communism*¹, which examines the crisis and decline of bourgeois socialisms, describes worker-communism as the only current which has prospect of making headway under the present conditions - i.e. under conditions of disintegration of bourgeois socialisms and of a massive offensive by the bourgeoisie on socialism. Only a few months have gone by since the adoption of this document in the Third Congress of our party, yet the events have unfolded with a stunning speed: the developments in Poland, the disintegration in Yugoslavia, the turn-about in Hungary, very rapid developments in the Soviet Union itself, and, recently, the mass upheavals followed by bloody suppression in China. Could you imagine that the process would develop so rapidly? Already the term "the crisis of communism", whipped up by a running commentary by the Western bourgeois media, has become a catchword. What is your view of the recent developments?

Mansoor Hekmat: I think that the events of just the past few months have, better than any arguments we could have presented in the Third Congress, confirmed the correctness of our analyses in the report we submitted. Even in that report we did not anticipate a long period for these changes. But the speed of the recent events is really staggering.

The developments in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, on the one hand, and the recent events in China, on the other, display *different* aspects of the general course of eclipse of bourgeois socialism. There are important differences between them which we should not overlook. As a bourgeois socialist camp, a "pole" in the so-called communist movement, bourgeois socialism in China had become bankrupt very early on. Maoism faced defeat and left the political stage in the very '70s. The post-Mao China's abandonment of socialist pretensions, too, had been confirmed much earlier. The current Chinese events indicate, rather, the conflict over the material adaptation of China's political and administrative structure to the fundamental orientations previously made in its political economy and ideology. We are seeing here the conclusion of processes which had already ended and discredited the bourgeois socialism there - both within and without the country. In a sense, these events, for all their prominence, are far less significant than the changes in Soviet

society and the impact of the latter internationally. In the Soviet Union we are witnessing epoch-making turning points which, over and above their effects on the international political and economic relations, will close the chapter of the mainstream bourgeois socialism that has existed so far. The political developments here have unfolded at a much greater speed than the economic changes. But the irreversible process that has got underway and already brought the whole state-capitalist model to bankruptcy, will end up in the complete dissolution of the so-called socialist camp and the demise of Soviet bourgeois socialism. This is not a disaster only besetting the so-called revisionists; along with the collapse of this trend, all the other pseudo-Marxist non-worker tendencies which had come into being on account of their criticism of this mainstream, will, to my mind, also come to an end.

Is this "the crisis of communism" or "the end of communism"? The truth is I don't see the world as the battleground of doctrines. Real history is the history of social and class movements. Obviously "something" here has collapsed and ended. These developments signify the defeat of the state-capitalist bourgeois movement. The bourgeoisie called it communist and introduced it as such to millions of people. Historically, too, this movement arose alongside the communist movement proper, establishing itself through specific stages as the official mainstream of communism. Workers' socialist movement, i.e. a communism which epitomizes the worker's anti-capitalist struggle in contemporary society, has continued to exist alongside this official communism, and naturally with the supremacy of this state-capitalist trend, has suffered great setbacks and ups and downs. This is another movement to which, following *The Communist Manifesto*, I refer as *worker-communism*. The failure of bourgeois socialism in the Soviet Union and, consequently, the decline of every other non-worker socialism - from left national-reformism to populism, etc - has fuelled the bourgeoisie's anti-Marxist bluster. This naturally puts worker-communism, too, under greater ideological pressure. But the crisis of bourgeois socialism neither undermines worker-communism nor throws it into crisis. Quite the contrary, as I also wrote in the Congress report and explained in the first seminar on worker-communism² a few months ago, a new period of workers' communist struggle is ahead of us. Today the bedrock of what officially is called communism is once again shifting to within the working class. Worker-communism, as a social movement, is once again finding its real place in society. This movement has an immense strength. Contrary to those who have declared the supposed end of Marx and Marxism, I see the coming decade as the period of the resurgence of Marxism, for the social movement which Marxism epitomizes, i.e. the worker's anti-capitalist protest movement, is now straightening its back from the defeat after the October Revolution and after decades of supremacy of the bourgeoisie's false socialist movements. We don't need to go very far in time. I believe the '90s will be a decade of rising radical working-class struggles in the industrial centres of Western Europe and of the emergence of a new generation of communist parties - working-class communist parties. I believe, Marxism as a profound criticism of capitalist society and as a theory is not susceptible to crisis. Even the current developments vindicate Marxism. The theory of workers' revolution can only be proved by workers' movement and workers' practice itself. The collapse of the non-worker forces who had clung to Marxism for the cause of nationalism, democracy, reform and industrialization, is but a confirmation of this fact.

Q: It seems that the Communist Party of Iran is undergoing important developments along with the changes in the world as a whole. Not only party members but even outside observers following our literature, particularly in the period after the Third Congress,

notice frictions and even conflicts inside the CPI. Your report to the Third Congress and your speech around it, the articles published in *Komonist*³ concerning the party's organizing work in the working class and our work in Kurdistan, the discussions on worker membership, and so on, all indicate that such frictions do exist. To what extent is the issue of worker-communism relevant in this context?

M.H: Well, like any other real political party, the CPI has factions; it has left, right and centre tendencies. The conflict among them has existed in different forms since the inception of the party. In fact these tendencies are the result of real social pressures and persuasions; we should have been surprised if they did *not* exist. But in the past few years, particularly during last year, the confrontation and cleavage among them has increased for quite understandable political reasons. This is not only directly related to the question of worker-communism and our discussions in this period but, in the final analysis, is the reflection of the same social and political realities of which I spoke in reply to your earlier question.

The discussion of worker-communism has not been concluded from the circumstances of the CPI. Rather, it is an explanation of the most fundamental problems of contemporary communism. Independently of the course of movement of the CPI, these issues confront any communist, and should be addressed by any communist. Nevertheless, worker-communism is a discussion and outlook that has been propounded by the left tendency in the party. It is a criticism of the beliefs, views and methods of the other tendencies; a criticism of the conditions that these tendencies impose on the CPI. This discussion presents the party with a particular "what is to be done?" and a specific political-practical platform which is different from the explanation of the other tendencies with regard to the problems and the perspective of the party.

The situation of the other tendencies has also changed over the past few years. The same global trend which has pushed non-worker socialism to dead end is also undermining the perspectives of the non-worker socialist tendencies in our party. As a result, we have been witnessing a course of divergence inside the party: the left, the right and the centre have today more than ever come into conflict with one another with distinct visions...The present situation is the result of an evolving process whose contributing factors and conditions should be recognized.

Q: The term worker-communism has assumed different meanings amongst us, and in fact you yourself have used it in different senses: as an outlook, a viewpoint, a doctrine; as a material social movement, a political tendency and a party movement, etc. My question is, which of these interpretations do you think are more precise or more central to your discussion?

M.H: The answer is very simple. I use the term "worker-communism" instead of "communism", for the term communism has nowadays lost the specific class character that it had at the time of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848. Then, communism was synonymous to *worker-socialism*. Engels explains their choice of this term for the *Communist Manifesto* in precisely the same way. To mark out their distinction from contemporary non-worker socialism, Marx and Engels chose the term which the *workers'* socialist movement had already adopted. Every word of the *Communist Manifesto* stresses that this is the manifesto of *worker-socialism* and what this specific class tendency is saying about

the existing world, society and socialisms. If Marx and Engels were to come to life today and see how this name of communism has been appropriated by the disenchanted, pseudo-socialist currents of other classes, they would certainly think of doing something about the title of the *Communist Manifesto* and the term communism as a whole. Perhaps, like me, they would add to it the adjective "worker" so as to convey in full the essence of this pamphlet and of the social movement for which it was the manifesto.

So my reply to the main point of your question is clear. Just as communism has meaning in different senses, i.e. as an outlook, a doctrine, a social movement, a party current, etc, so worker-communism, which is the precise name of the same phenomenon at the close of the twentieth century, refers to all of these, embodying all these senses. Worker-communism is different in all these respects from what the world in the last half-century has called communist. It is another school and another movement; it calls for parties of another kind; it has had a different history; it has other principles, etc. The struggle for worker-communism is about bringing out these differences and re-organizing this different social movement.

Q: So, isn't the discussion of worker-communism the older theme of "returning to orthodox Marxism"?

M.H: No. In the theoretical sense, worker-communism is definitely nothing else but Marxism, that is, what we understand of Marxist classics. But this way of formulating the question is incorrect and fails to express the theoretical and practical problems which we address under the general heading of worker-communism. There are a number of reasons for this: first, "returning to Marxism" in itself somehow brings to mind a theoretical position. The so-called "anti-revisionist" movement, in its various stages and various offshoots, did not have any other claim but this. However, worker-communism is not another version of the anti-revisionist currents. Before, when we held this basically ideological interpretation of our identity and work, we called our current "Revolutionary Marxism", which precisely expressed this element of allegiance to orthodoxy. Worker-communism, however, signifies a social attachment, and hence, a theoretical movement. It is concerned with the organization of the actually existing socialist movement of a *particular class*, the working class. Marxism's significance for us is precisely because it is the embodiment of this class tradition. Second, only those can return to something who have previously parted with it. Indeed a current which has discovered itself in the context of contemporary non-worker, and consequently, non-Marxist communism, in order to break with this tradition has to "return" to Marxism. It has to return to another standpoint and locus - both theoretically and socially. But what we are saying is that worker-communism is a social movement and tendency distinct from the hitherto non-worker communist movement. It is already there, where it should be.

Marxist theory emerged originally in the context of worker-socialism. For a time working-class communist parties were at the same time the spokesmen and the authorities of their contemporary Marxism. With the developments in the 2nd International, the supremacy of nationalism and reformism in the Soviet Union of the late '20s, the rise of left nationalism in the countries dominated by imperialism and particularly with the Chinese revolution, and the emergence of, first, "Western Marxism" and, then, the New Left, the social application of Marxism gradually changed; non-worker social movements in various forms became the official interpreters of Marxism. But the change in the social application of Marx's theories was not possible without violating their content, their unambiguous working-class and

revolutionary content. For a current which has emerged from within these traditions, any turning to the real and class essence of Marxism is regarded as a return. In other words, I don't see the problem as one of theoretical enlightenment. From a theoretical standpoint, worker-communism means Marxism; from a social point of view, it means the worker's anti-capitalist protest movement. This movement is objective and that theory, too, exists. If we speak from within this movement, then the question becomes one of organizing this movement and basing it on the entirety of this theory. Third, the formula of "returning to Marxism" omits the kernel of our present discussion. We are Marxists in a different world and age. Today even Marx himself would have to say something about this world and this situation. For many, returning to Marxism means repeating basic Marxist principles and formulations. For our movement, for worker-communism, which has never made any revisions in these fundamental tenets, the crucial issue is the application of Marxism as a critique to the present world and the existing class and political forces.

So briefly, the formula of a return to original Marxism by no means expresses the framework of our present criticism and discussion. If we assume the social basis and identity of the movement as being intact, then we could definitely speak of revisionism and the anti-revisionist struggle as concepts relevant to this class movement. But when the whole of this movement, or in any case, its world camps, rests on non-worker class movements, then the question will not be confined to the theoretical level, i.e. returning to a particular theory or challenging a particular revision. The entire social foundation of present-day communism, and, thereby, its ideas, should be criticized. This criticism should be made from the standpoint of a different social movement. Marx's communism, worker-communism, before criticizing the ideas of the non-worker socialisms of his time and calling for a change of ideas, explained their social character as non-worker movements, and counterposed to them the social movement of the working class and the socialist protest of the worker. Marx rejected and criticized his contemporary socialism from within a different social movement. This is what we want to do today by propounding the discussion of worker-communism.

Q: You say worker-communism is *socially* different from the existing communism, and that the theoretical differences arise *owing to this* social distinction. Could you elaborate the reasons for this emphasis and the place it has in your discussion.

M.H: Worker-communism has stated its distinction from other socialisms once before. The *Communist Manifesto* was essentially a manifesto for this purpose. Marx's method in the *Manifesto* is the social, and not ideological, differentiation of worker-communism from other tendencies. There Marx, having explained worker-communism as a social movement and a specific class reaction to capitalist society, points out the differences between this movement and the socialism of other classes, i.e. feudal, bourgeois and petty-bourgeois socialisms. The *Communist Manifesto* explains these currents, and distinguishes worker-communism from them, not as doctrines but as definite class movements, as the outcome of definite circumstances and definite interests. Marx speaks of the confrontation of *social movements*, and only on this basis does he speak of the confrontation of ideas. For Marx, worker-communism was a concrete, objective and social movement which existed prior to his own ideas and efforts and which had already produced intellectual leaders and theoretical standpoints. Marxism set itself the job of ordering this movement and arming it with clear aims and a profound and powerful criticism of the existing society. Marxism very rapidly

turned into the banner of worker-communism.

Today, we view the world by the same method of the *Communist Manifesto*. For us, worker-communism is above all a social and objective movement. Only on this basis do we enter the issue of the ideas and politics dominating this movement and its distinctions from other socialist tendencies in contemporary society. This is precisely the opposite of the approach of all tendencies of existing communism to the question. One indication of the detachment of this communism from the working class and from worker-communism is the very denial of the social objectivity of worker-communism. For them, worker-socialism is a derivative of *socialist ideology*; socialist doctrine is the creator of the socialist protest of the working class. They regard Marxism, with whatever conception they have of it, as the origin of worker-socialism. Thus, the relation between movement and ideas, society and consciousness, is totally reversed. If they regard this Marxism as distorted and revised, then they have to deny the objectivity of the worker's socialist protest.

Our point of departure is the workers' social movement and protest against the present society. If today the Marxism and party communism which had set its aim to lead and organize the worker's socialist struggle has been driven back, and the existing communism is following another social cause, this only signifies the weakness, confusion and lack of leadership of this social movement and not its nonexistence. If Marx were to come to life today, look at the society and see the workers' protest, he would once again set to the work of writing a manifesto of worker-communism. This manifesto would be the expression of the socialist protest of the *worker* and would arm this movement with vision and criticism against the entire socialism of other classes which, unfortunately, have even called themselves Marxist. We don't have Marx today, but we have our own social and class movement and, fortunately, also Marx's profound influence in this movement as the instinctive (and now certainly "spontaneous") urge of the militant worker for Marxism. For us, the discussion of worker-communism means putting forward the manifesto of this different social movement; it does not mean the invention of another tendency and doctrine within the tradition of existing communism. Our response to this communism is a social response; our criticism is social and practical; and our subject of work is different. It is the same response that we give to the bourgeoisie as a whole: the foundation of a powerful worker-communist movement.

Q: I fully understand the significance you attach to the social differentiation of worker-communism and to its analytical priority over any theoretical and political differentiation. However, there are two important questions here: first, what is the place of theory and theoretical differentiation *vis-a-vis* other "Marxist" and "socialist" tendencies in this outlook? And second, what issues do you think such theoretical polemics should focus on? With regard to the first question, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that it is an old approach in the communist movement to counterpose 'theory' to 'movement'. Don't you think your present discussion may be accused of shifting the emphasis from theory over to movement as in the same old theoretical framework of the left?

M.H: Of course, my discussion may be accused of many things, including the "primacy of movement over theory", or "Economism", or the worshipping of "spontaneity" against consciousness, etc. I think such characterizations of our discussion, more than saying something about the content of our views and their defects, betray the schematic thinking of

our presumed critic. The discussion is not at all about "theory or movement?". The main question is: "which movement"? The whole point is that all segments of existing socialism, irrespective of the hammer and sickle that they have posted on their banners and the names of Marx or Lenin which have been on their lips, have mainly been the social movements of other disenchanted classes for reforms and non-socialist changes. The question of the relation between the theory and the political action of the parties in this movement and their respective priorities, and so on, can be a matter of debate within these traditions themselves. Our argument is concerned with belonging to another social movement; a movement which has existed, and still exists, alongside this non-worker socialism, with its own different theory and different practice. As a matter of fact, in this movement, i.e. in worker-communism, theory and movement are not separable into independent domains. The issue of the primacy of theory over movement, or vice versa, has no meaning in our system of thought. These are the different levels of manifestation of a single social movement. In my opinion, anyone who reads the *Communist Manifesto* carefully, understands that it is the manifesto of a working-class protest movement; it is not the outline of a scientific sociology to be taught, elaborated or turned into a subject in its own right, independently of this class protest movement.

I believe that what has become of Marxian theory, and the theoretical problematics which have emerged in the existing Marxist tradition - forming the basis for the distinction of different lines, tendencies and poles in the so-called communist movement - cannot be understood in isolation from the social fate of Marxism, and the class application that this theory has assumed. Just as a philosophical and political outlook, a theoretical doctrine, cannot be assessed in isolation from its material social bases and historical-class requisites, so the questions which are raised and debated inside that doctrine cannot be comprehended without taking into account the social interests lying behind them. As a theory and a doctrine, Marxism has an inner coherence, it has a method and it makes well-defined and specific deductions about society, politics and revolutionary practice. Marxism can be studied and understood as a theory in its own right. Internal polemics and the question of different, and at times conflicting, interpretations of this theory arise only when the issue becomes one of applying this theory in the real world; when different social tendencies use it to respond to their own particular problems. For instance, Marxist theory has set forth a particular viewpoint on communist revolution, on the conditions for its realization and on its tasks. But the problematic of "socialism in one country" emerged against the background of a historical and social controversy between real tendencies in the Russian revolution over the economic development of the Soviet Union. In *Capital* Marx has in a definite and clear way explained the relation between price and value in capitalist society. But the "transformation problem" became a theoretical problematic only in the context of specific historical and social conditions and on the part of particular social forces. The same goes for the thesis of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the question of base and superstructure and their interaction, socialism and market, etc. Each of these has been the source of major, prolonged polemics inside the so-called Marxist tradition and cannot be discussed without taking into account the social interests behind them, without recognizing which objective social struggle this theoretical dispute is portraying.

In short, these theoretical controversies and problematics are not results of scholarly and spontaneous enquiries into Marxist theory to discover its "ambiguities and unclarities" as a doctrine. They spring from the special way in which various social forces have tried to apply Marxism. May be these controversies have really made us aware of the existence of

obscurities in the theory itself. Personally I don't think so. But even if this were the case, the important point is not that this theory may be interpreted in different ways, but, rather, that there exist different interpreters and important social interests that give rise to diverse interpretations of Marxism. The misfortune that has befallen Marx's theory is the result of the fact that different social movements have tried to turn it into a tool to serve purposes with which this theory in itself is incompatible. Marxism is not an economic theory for calculating values and prices and arriving at mathematical equations to create balance between production departments. If anyone wants to use it in this capacity then he will naturally have to tamper with it. And this is not possible without criticizing Marx's theory of value or converting him into a Ricardo. In fact I think that the bulk of the theoretical problematics in the existing Marxist tradition is rooted in the [internal] dispute of those forces who, having removed the kernel of this theory - the criticism of capitalism and the necessity of workers' revolution -, have tried to convert it into a scientific sociology or an alternative economic science for the left wing of the bourgeoisie; who have tried to make out of it theoretical justifications to express the most worldly non-worker interests, to justify, for instance, Russian and Chinese nationalism, sectarian disputes, and so on.

Therefore when you ask me about our attitude to theory I must first clarify my differentiation with this scholastic and opportunist application of Marxism. For worker-socialism, theory and theoretical struggle have a crucial significance. At the same time, for us Marxism is the weapon of criticism; it is the tool to comprehending the deepest roots of the hardships which humanity as a whole and workers in particular are subjected to in this society; it is the instrument for the worker of gaining a profound social and historical self-consciousness and for recognizing the possibilities which exist for transforming the present society. These are the positive attributes of Marx's theory which, were it not for its non-worker applications so far, could have been directly taken into the society and into the class, creating a powerful intellectual line-up against the society's ruling ideas. Worker-communism must be a powerful intellectual force in society against the bourgeoisie's basic trends of thought such as liberalism, democracy, nationalism, humanism, social democracy and the like, and not just another version of Marxism against currents such as Maoism, Trotskyism, Soviet Socialism, or the New Left. This is the place that theory has with us.

You see, we have come and talked about the social and class attributes of communism; we have said that prior to the question of "what the communists say", the issue is which section of society and which class communism epitomizes. We have stated that we are prepared to understand communism only as the worker's protest movement and that only within the social struggle of this class can we comprehend, and fight for, communism as a doctrine, outlook and revolutionary theory. They have reacted by saying: "what happens to theory?" I regard this the natural reaction of the same social class, the same political tradition, which I am criticizing. Communism, for the existing radical socialism, is only a theory. Its reduction to an intellectual system which is supposed to serve the public good, to a "science of history", and so on, is the way the bourgeois leftist intellectual, the reformist bureaucrat, the Chinese, Bolivian and Iranian nationalist and democrat, lays claim to Marxism and communism on the same terms as the worker. When we say communism is worthy of the name only as a working-class current they ask what happens to theory. I think they mean "what happens to us?" In my opinion we are only now beginning to put theory where it belongs. If they have not understood Marx so much as to know that communism is not a movement of ideas but a definite social-class movement, a working-class action, then their concern for theory against

the discussion of worker-communism should not be taken seriously. This very criticism of our discussion means that they have not understood the basis of Marxism as a theory.

Let me say "what happens" to theory. From a tool for contriving ambiguities, for justifying non-worker interests in the name of Marxism, for whitewashing the left wing of the bourgeoisie, for the intellectuals gaining superiority even inside Marxist parties, and so on, theory is turned into the same incisive, working-class, profound and well-informed criticism that we find in Marxist classics. Theory becomes once again a sharp weapon in the class struggle. It becomes a revealing, lucid and comprehensible indictment against the present society and all its seemingly complex mechanisms; a material force which will shape the mind of the militant worker in contemporary society. For ourselves, the discussion of worker-communism has been the result of much theoretical contemplation. It confronts us with diverse and much more serious theoretical tasks than before. It has given us a framework on the basis of which to begin to launch a vast theoretical campaign.

Q: Of course this theoretical campaign involves theoretical differentiation with the various sections of the existing so-called communist movement and the resolving of the key problems in this movement. In other words, we should show how worker-communism as a specific Marxist outlook and tradition distinguishes itself from other traditions laying claim to Marxism. My question is, on which focal points do you think this theoretical struggle should concentrate and what are its priorities?

M.H: Let me explain one point first. Generally, when the left-radical forces speak of theoretical struggle they mean in the first place polemics "about Marxism" with the other trends in the left. For them "ideological struggle" has come to mean a controversy within the sect. We ourselves have done this many times before. I cannot here enter into why and how theoretical struggle has assumed such a limited sense. But I have to say that this itself is a reflection of the non-social and esoteric feature of the radical and so-called communist left. For us, theoretical struggle is an aspect of the class struggle and, consequently, a battle against the ruling ideas in society, the ideas of the same classes against which we have stood up, as a class, in the real world, in the practical field. A battle against bourgeois ideas, doctrines and theoretical traditions which have been able to shape the mind of people on a scale of tens of millions. Polemics against those who lay claim to Marxism has been a part, but by no means the central part, of this struggle; it is particularly not the channel through which the theoretical profile of worker-communism comes to its own. The campaign I talked about, the offensive which worker-communism - Marxism as a class movement - should launch is aimed at the fundamental theoretical traditions of the bourgeoisie; traditions which in fact make no claim to Marxism. In the field of theoretical battle we are confronted with liberalism and democracy, with nationalism, reformism and social democracy, with anarchism, and so on. In fact I think that even the struggle with forces claiming to be Marxist is not possible without taking into account the deep influence of these more underlying theoretical and political traditions on the thinking of the pseudo-Marxists. ...

Q: Perhaps you should elaborate this point, since internal polemics have been an integral part of the communist tradition as well - the same worker-communist tradition of Marx and Lenin. We have Marx's and the Marxists' polemics against Proudhon and Lassalle; Lenin's polemics against the theoreticians of the 2nd International which, incidentally,

in large part define the political and theoretical features of Leninism. We also have the question of revisionism which for long has hindered the formation of revolutionary Marxist parties and the growth of worker-socialism. What is the significance of this dimension of theoretical struggle in your outlook?

M.H: I don't by any means write off polemics inside the [Marxist] school, let alone inside the movement. But let us look at the historical contexts in which these polemics - insofar as one side of the debate has really been Marxism and worker-communism - have taken place and what role these debates have played in the theoretical struggle of worker-communism. What makes Marxism Marxism and communism communism is not Marx's polemical differentiation with Proudhon or Lassalle. It is, rather, Marx's universal criticism of capitalism and of bourgeois thought as a whole. Marx criticizes the German ideology and the earlier philosophical thought. He makes a scrupulous criticism of contemporary and earlier thinkers of political economy. And above all, he criticizes the dynamism of the existing society and its consequences, from exploitation, impoverishment, colonization, slavery, prostitution and religion, down to democracy, nationalism, and so on. Marx goes to battle against the ruling classes and the ruling ideas. The *Critique of the Gotha Programme* would be impossible without *Capital* and *The German Ideology*, and would not make up a school and tradition of thought. Marxism criticizes a general dominant economic, political and theoretical situation and on that basis takes to task also the superficial and non-revolutionary critics of this system. You mentioned Lenin's polemics against the 2nd International. My question is, how could such a campaign be at all possible without the criticism of imperialism, nationalism and bourgeois democracy - as thoughts and ideas existing outside the Marxist tradition? It was this universal criticism, transcending the school and movement, which shaped Leninism as a revolutionary and valid stream of thought against the 2nd International. I must also add that both Marx and Lenin had found themselves up against powerful quasi-socialist tendencies. These were forces which on a social scale had influenced the mind of the militant worker. I, too, think that polemics against other actual forces within the class movement, in the real sense of the term, is always necessary. But I don't put this under the heading of doctrinal debates.

The question of revisionism should be discussed in more detail. As time has passed this term has assumed a more religious and more esoteric meaning. Revisionism, of course, could not be an issue for the communism of Marx's era. For Lenin, revision in Marxist thought by other tendencies has a direct relation to the social movements and material forces which have necessitated it. That is, for him revisionism is the expression of particular non-worker material and social forces. These forces are the subject of criticism, above all on account of their political and social position. Lenin defends the truth of Marxist tenets against distortions, in *this* framework, i.e. in the framework of fighting other classes' political actions. Before being an issue confined to the realm of ideology and defined by the criterion of as to which principles it violates, revisionism appears as the theoretical expression of non-communist and non-worker social interests and streams. In its non-religious sense, revisionism means the rise of non-communist and non-worker social movements under the name of Marxism. A branch of the state-capitalist movement in the Soviet Union acted under the name of Marxism and, as a result, produced a particular interpretation of this theory. This is revisionism. The same goes for the anti-colonialist and nationalist movement in China. In its struggle against nationalism and state-capitalism as such, worker-communism carries out polemics against the

pseudo-socialist branches of these movements too. But in contrast to the anti-revisionist movement of the radical-left, its theoretical and political identity is not derived from demarcations with, for instance, Maoism, or the resolutions of the 20th and 22nd Congresses of the Soviet party, or the thesis of non-capitalist way of development, and so on. The very esoteric nature of the intellectual life of the radical-left and the fact that it defines its particular identity on the basis of its differences from the existing socialist camps proves that they both stand in the same social position and movement. The radical-lefts, along with the so-called socialist camps that they criticize, have belonged to a common social-class stream. Their differentiations from Soviet and Chinese revisionism is sectarian and verges on the religious, since they did not themselves socially represent another, independent and distinct movement or advocate different ideals. They had the same criticism of capitalism and the same conception of socialism. Their problem was the "deviation" of these camps from particular theoretical principles or policies and tactics. In the social sense, all ramifications of the radical-left, from Bordigism and Trotskyism down to the present day, have emerged as critics of this mainstream. No one can define Trotskyism in isolation from this mainstream, in its independent confrontation with bourgeois society. This current is the by-product of the same mainstream; it is a specific version within the same social movement.

Briefly, although worker-communism should certainly wage polemics against these traditions too, its political identity is defined by its confrontation with bourgeois society as a whole and with the chief social and political tendencies and movements of the bourgeoisie at any given time. You mentioned the past polemics of the Marxist and worker-communist tradition. Very well, but my question is which theoretical polemics are crucial today for the building of a rank of workers' revolution: polemics with Maoism, Trotskyism, the New Left, etc? Or with nationalism, trade-unionism, liberalism and democracy, reformism, social democracy, Gorbachevism, Thatcherism and so on? I.e. ideas and interpretations of the present society which shape the mind of workers and society generally. Since the time of Marx, worker-communism has stood for a class and comprehensive confrontation with the bourgeoisie and bourgeois society, and not just tried to preserve its theoretical purity relative to the most left-leaning of the adjacent currents.

Let me add a few other points. Firstly, we have to see how much these people themselves will stick to Marx in the period which we have now entered. So far, it seems that they have all either joined in the chorus of the "end of Marxism" or are waiting until this wave blows off. In the late '60s and the early '70s, when Marxism was in fashion among the intellectuals, certainly a greater need was felt for the intervention of worker-socialism in the struggle over the legitimacy of the working-class interpretation of Marxism. Secondly, we should not fall into the trap of doctrinal struggle. For a criticism of Maoism and populism, for instance, there is no need for much reference to what Marx has really said. One can directly go to the main nationalist core of this current and expose it. In my opinion, going too far in the "intra-doctrinal" polemics with these tendencies adds to the confusion surrounding their actual social identity and being. Thirdly, as I said, the other accounts of Marxism are not the result of misunderstanding or academic disputes. They are the interpretations of Marxism, as a theory, by other social tendencies; the interpretations of a theoretical and political school, by nationalism, reformism and democracy, as social movements. These forces have not laid their hands only on Marxism. For instance a basis of nationalism is racism, and it may, through this, even give a particular interpretation of Darwinism. But polemicizing in the field of biology and natural evolution will not only fail to draw the lines but will conceal the real

difference. Fourthly, the profusion of the theoretical debate over "what Marx really said" reflects to some extent the audience which the non-worker tendencies have created for Marx's theory. The bourgeois intellectual has made a profession out of these polemics, and this profession, being detached from communist struggle, had a certain degree of appeal, at least until seven to eight years ago. I think the degree to which the locus of communist struggle shifts into the working class, and workers' leaders become the principal audience of theoretical polemics, to the same degree will the doctrinal nature of theoretical differentiations diminish and assume a more classical form, like the confrontation of socialism and nationalism, socialism and liberalism, etc.

Even in the theoretical struggle with forces going under the name of Marxism the main basis of our work should be to look for the reflection of the basic bourgeois intellectual movements in these forces' explanation of Marxism and communist politics. Only when the repugnance of nationalism as a thought, as a definite way of looking at the world, has been revealed can one begin to show the non-worker and non-Marxist content of populism and Maoism. If there is a left - like the radical left in Iran in the past few decades or the entire populist and Maoist tradition - which even took pride in being nationalist or, at any rate, was not put off by nationalism, then polemics against such a force over Marxism and Marxist politics is self-deceptive and futile. I think we should regard the non-worker left as a certain version of the more general and basic bourgeois social forces, and in the light of the theoretical and political response we give to this more general trend we should also smash its quasi-Marxist products.

Finally, I should also say that for long Marxism, as a theory, has been turned into the skill and science of safeguarding the inner cohesion of one's sect. The Marxist theoretician has been reduced to one who can reply to people who have declared in advance that they belong to the same doctrine. Outside this milieu, outside this given "market", our theoretician is not even a worthy and influential thinker and critic in his contemporary world. In fact, even from the viewpoint of intellectual caliber and theoretical capacity he is usually a second-rate thinker. Marx took to task and triumphed theoretically over the intellectual giants of the bourgeois world. He crushed Hegel and Feuerbach, Ricardo, Smith, Mill and Malthus upon their contradictions. We can still say the same about Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Trotsky, Bukharin, Preobrazhensky and a large number of communist leaders at the beginning of the century. But today the radical-left thinker has as much audience and as much prestige as he can polemicize, and define the dividing lines, with the neighbouring tendency. His/her thoughts have an inside-the-sect consumption and have significance by virtue of the sect. Leave out Maoism and you will have no Bettelheim in the realm of critical thought. In my opinion, communist theory - and thereby the communist theoretician and critic - should assert itself as the critic of *ruling* ideas. Rather than acting as a mere guide for its disciples and followers, it should explain the *world* for the vast masses of the class and play its part in shaping the general class consciousness. This is what worker-communism has been. As it emerged, and particularly, as its world outlook was formed and expressed by Marx and Marxism, a critical stream with a broad social reach stepped onto the stage. After the rise of this current, society's concept of the state, economy, religion, justice, history and the future of humanity, and, in short, all dimensions of human society, changed irreversibly. This is precisely what we need today. Who would accept from communism and the working class that in circumstances when every minute the basic concepts and traditions of bourgeois society, from the sanctity of property, to nationalism, reformism, democracy, liberalism, racism and

so on, are shaping the minds of hundreds of millions of people, to preoccupy itself with polemics against such trends as Maoism, Trotskyism and the New Left and still consider itself a living current of thought, a valid critical tendency in the contemporary world. We *must* counter the sects which claim to be Marxist. But worker-communism must once more assert itself as a powerful social criticism against *the ruling ideas*. This is what we want to achieve. Worker-communism will not win social power as a thought and a world outlook except by taking on the bourgeois world and bourgeois thought on a *social scale*.

Q: I totally agree. I think this approach to theory in itself attests to a radical intellectual break with the traditional non-worker left. But some may say that this is true only today, i.e. at a time when the various factions of bourgeois socialism have reached an impasse. 'Anti-revisionism' today doesn't by itself say much about the particular political and theoretical identity of revolutionary communism. But is it not true that 30 to 40 years ago, when the Soviet "socialist camp" dominated the whole mentality and practice of the communists, the formation of any genuine communist trend and the development of worker-communism as a party current would have to be achieved through an anti-revisionist struggle? Do you recognize any place for this anti-revisionist tradition, particularly of the past four decades, in the history of worker-communism?

M.H: Of course the understanding of our viewpoint and its presentation have become much easier today compared to 30 to 40 years ago. I have no doubt about this. I even accept that had the state-capitalist movement in the Soviet Union not yet lost its false status as the standard-bearer of Marxism, worker-communism would have more tasks of an "anti-revisionist" nature. But the situation then prevailing does not make any difference in the essential point of my discussion. It does not necessarily lead to a favourable assessment of the currents which at that time challenged this mainstream and separated from it. It does not make me consider them any closer to worker-socialism or as having made any contributions to it. Indeed the rise of the trends which descended from the so-called socialist camp has coincided with the further separation of communism as a theory and movement from its class base. Maoism is a criticism of Soviet socialism, but itself is equally non-Marxist and non-worker. The same goes for the New Left, Trotskyism, Eurocommunism, the pro-Albanian trend and populist socialism. In fact the alienation of radical socialism from the worker and worker-communism is apparent more clearly in the case of these critical trends, since these trends did not have the legacy of a great workers' revolution and plainly emerged and settled in the non-worker centres of society. They never criticized the ideological foundations of Soviet bourgeois socialism, and have had the same conception of socialism and common ownership as they. You can clearly detect in their controversies their overtly non-worker interests and the influence of bourgeois intellectual and political tendencies. The criticism by Eurocommunism, Maoism and populism, of this official mainstream is utterly nationalist. The criticism by Trotskyism, left liberalism and the New Left is a criticism from the standpoint of democracy. From the practical and social viewpoint, these critical currents by no means represented the activation of worker against this official bloc. On the contrary, their political radicalism coincided with their social base assuming a student and intellectual character; it coincided with the centre of attention to Marxism shifting to campuses and student protest milieus. They never represented working-class protest, and they were by no means tendencies carrying and organizing the worker's socialist protest against Soviet bourgeois socialism.

Thus, when this official camp has eventually begun to crumble under objective economic pressures and under the offensive of the pro-market bourgeoisie, we find workers not behind these critical currents but even altogether sceptical of socialism. If worker-communism had built a rank against these camps, we would not today be witnessing the incursions by the church and the new conservatism on the Soviet bloc's growing workers' movement or the abandonment of workers' protests in Western Europe to the mercies of Social Democracy and trade-unionism.

We can return to thirty or forty years ago and define the "anti-revisionist" tasks of worker-communism - tasks which, with the disintegration of the parties belonging to this tradition, were never taken up. But in my opinion such a struggle by worker-socialism would by no means take on the theoretical and practical features which the radical-left critics of the Soviet Union assumed. In my view, this radical-left has not made any direct contribution to the history of worker-communism. It has contributed to the history of the formation of a radical and militant socialism; but not to the history of worker-socialism.

Q: You said that you regard theoretical struggle against the so-called communist and socialist trends and traditions a function of communism's challenging of bourgeois society's basic trends of thought. What are these trends, and, in your view, which ones will worker-communism primarily confront in the course of its progress?

M.H: What I wanted to stress in reply to your earlier questions was that worker-communism is not a theoretical movement seeking its practical base. On the contrary, it is a distinct material-practical movement. And it is on this basis that it should also take part in an extensive theoretical struggle. So it is only when we correctly recognize our own social rank, as a movement, against the present society and all the other dissenting movements, including those going under the name of socialism and communism, that we can enter a theoretical confrontation with this society and these movements.

Worker-communism, Marxism, is a certain social criticism of the existing, capitalist system. It is a criticism made by a certain section of society; a fundamental and radical criticism by a class which has no interest in preserving the foundations of the present system. Worker-communism is opposed to the totality and the very existence of capitalism. But this is not the only criticism that exists. From within this same society other social criticisms have emerged - even prior to worker-socialism - polarizing bourgeois society around themselves. These tendencies have constituted the intellectual and political groundwork of bourgeois society. At the same time, since they each propose a particular scheme for capitalist development, they have now and then found themselves critical of the particular path which the capitalist development in a particular country or at a particular period has adopted. In my view, the chief tendencies which have stamped their mark both on the official and the critical thought in bourgeois society are: nationalism, democracy and reformism. The history of worker-communism is at the same time the history of confrontation with these social movements and these deep-rooted convictions of contemporary society. In my opinion, apart from short periods, for example during the first two to three decades of the century, in Germany and the Soviet Union, worker-socialism has up to now, on the whole, been overwhelmed by these tendencies on a social level. Even from the point of view of its practical strength inside the working class it has been to a large degree overshadowed by these movements. These currents basically represent not social *class* divisions but the objective

splits within the bourgeoisie. Whether individually or in combination with each other, these currents have been the origin of a series of political and social movements in contemporary history. Each has in particular junctures and in various countries gained supremacy and turned into the dominant line inside the bourgeois class itself. In my opinion, the various trends of communism and socialism up to now have largely been the product of these powerful non-worker social tendencies, with a certain degree of compromise with worker-socialism. Depending on which of these fundamental tendencies and movements has made the greatest contribution to moulding these factions of socialism, we are faced with different strands of communism and socialism. For instance, the nationalist element, while very strong in Maoism, does not play a great role in Trotskyism, where reformism and democracy are the pronounced elements. Populism was a blend of the particular nationalism and reformism of the less-developed country, in which democracy, at least in Populism's early stages, had a smaller share. The New Left was essentially the product of the criticism against the official line [of communism] from the standpoint of democracy. Soviet "communism", as we noted in the discussions in the bulletin of *Marxism and the Question of the Soviet Union*⁴, was the result of the prevailing of nationalism and reformism over worker-socialism, and today it is shedding its reformism in favour of democracy. When you study the history of the left in Iran you notice the same basic traditions of bourgeois criticism shaping the Constitutional Revolution⁵, the National Front⁶, the Tudeh Party⁷, the guerilla-warfare line and populist socialism. Today when the whole world has turned *Glasnost*, the leaders of these currents are in their political memoirs explaining the nature of their movements and parties explicitly in terms of these same fundamental tendencies of the bourgeois criticism of capital.

These tendencies are not just intellectual systems and schools, but massive, ongoing social movements. They are part of the ruling class's ideas which have shaped the mind of millions of people, turned into a material force and shaped the destiny of contemporary society. Their pressure on worker-socialism is real and immense. We stand against these tendencies as a different movement. Our differences with the various traditional and contemporary trends in socialism are in fact a reflection of our differences with these vast and powerful bourgeois movements and currents. We do not recognize any place for these fundamental trends in socialism and workers' revolution. In bringing about objective changes in the social situation which may be facilitating or impeding the cause of workers' revolution, yes; but not in the socialist movement of the worker. We are an independent social movement in conflict with capital as a whole and with all the critical non-worker currents and movements in this society.

Today non-worker socialism has been hit by crisis in all its offshoots. This is mainly due to the fact that reformism as a social tradition which supplied the economic content of non-worker socialism has lost its whole perspective. As a result, other tendencies - democracy and, to some degree, nationalism - have gained supremacy. Judging by the way they are proceeding, serious theoretical polemics with the existing tendencies of the non-worker left may altogether lose relevance; we may be faced with the mother tendencies pure and simple. However, the degree to which polemicizing with them proves necessary, for the purpose of throwing light on workers' historical memory and their way of viewing the contemporary world, we will explain our differences with them on the basis of the criticism of the same basic tendencies which shape these currents.

Today it has become the fashion for the pseudo-Marxists to look to see which of these three ingredients has least gone into making their socialism. They want to make socialism more democratic, make more room in it for nationalism, and so on. It is their own doctrine, they

can do with it what they like. For worker-communism, however, no mixing with any of these tendencies is necessary. Quite the contrary, it is high time that we once again, just like when worker-communism crushed nationalism at the time of the First World War and replied to democracy in the October Revolution, make communism independent of any residues of influence of these trends on a vast social scale.

The quasi-socialist currents which developed under the influence of these basic bourgeois tendencies, inevitably distorted the whole content of Marxism - from its method and philosophy to its political theory and economic criticism - converting it into something else, appropriate to their own needs.

In introducing the discussion of worker-communism in the seminar a few months ago, I tried to state briefly my understanding of the basic foundations of Marx's theory in these principal areas. This is what anyone who refers to Marx's own writings from the standpoint of the militant worker would get. In my view, our differences with the prevalent false conceptions of Marx's theory are at the level of the foundations of this theory and not just the more concrete questions which stand in the way of communist movement's practical course of development. I'll here only mention a number of the basic differences.

Our first theoretical differentiation concerns our approach to the history of the movement; that is, how communism understands, and introduces to itself, its past. The way in which existing communism traces its own history, shows to what actual part of society it belongs. I don't understand why we should consider all those who, under the hammer-and-sickle banner, wished to plan the national economy and organize wage labour in their country, who wanted to reconstitute their national rights, consume the bread and butter produced in their own sacred homeland, and have democracy, or whoever felt "alienated" in the "post-industrial" society, as part of the history of communism, but file under the history of trade-unionism the British miners' strike who for a whole year fought the entire bourgeoisie, from its police down to its penpushers, or classify the workers' council movement in this or that country under the history of anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. So our first distinction with the existing socialism as a whole is over the history of communism itself; not only past history but, rather, the living history of today going on before our very eyes. For us the history of communism is not the history of an ideology but that of a class protest. Once we look at it from this angle, we begin to realize what these people have done to the ideology itself, and how, today, when their own movement has reached the end they are also announcing the end of Marxism, i.e. the worker's criticism of capitalism. This different way of looking at the history of communism not only allows us to reject the existing scenarios and problematics, but already confronts us with a vast and totally different set of theoretical and practical problems which are essentially not addressed by the existing communism. Some of our differences with these currents, therefore, find expression in what they do not say or understand.

Another difference is over socialism itself. What is socialism? The answer depends on what one's problem is in this society. Marx, from the standpoint of clear working-class interests, considered this to be the wage-earning system and bourgeois ownership of the means of production. Hence he defined socialism as the termination of this situation, the abolition of wage slavery and the creation of a society based on common ownership. Marx was thus able to criticize and analyze all human suffering, from political lack of rights and economic insecurity, to Man's enslavement in the grips of the seemingly incomprehensible social relationships and superstitions. Socialism is Mankind's total liberation from all forms of

deprivation and bondage and its mastering of its own social and economic destiny. But all this is possible only by doing away with capital as a force which is outside the control of, and in confrontation with, the immediate producer. The other tendencies, however, do not have this problem. For the bulk of them socialism is the solution to the capitalist system's "anarchy of production" or a particular strategy for the development of the productive forces. These forces have traditionally understood socialism as statification and planning. Their socialism is, therefore, the manifesto of another movement in capitalist society which starts not from the criticism of the labour-capital relation, of the wage-earning system, but from the criticism of the shortcomings of production and distribution in uncontrolled capitalism. Our distinction with regard to this non-worker communism is, therefore, in essence the same as what Marx outlines in the *Communist Manifesto* in his criticism of bourgeois socialism. The fact that this bourgeois socialist movement adopted the banner of Marx and Marxism was, of course, the reflection of the power of Marxism as an ideology, and of the vigour of worker-communism as a social movement. But this did not alter the social character of bourgeois socialism. They are giving up Marxism today because their movement for reforming capitalism in the way they wanted, has been defeated. But the hardships of the capitalist system, as well as the worker's criticism, remain, both theoretically and in practical terms. What our criticism of the existing system is and consequently the negation of what situation socialism is, is a central point of difference between worker-communism and the various strands of contemporary communism and socialism. This difference over the criticism of the present society and over socialism as a certain social situation, is the source of a series of fundamental programmatic and political differences between us and others. This shows itself in our programme, in the analysis of the tasks of workers' revolution and in our theoretical and social classification of the left. We saw an example of this difference in outlook, in the discussions over the Soviet experience in the bulletins⁸. The same applies to the assessment of the history of the Iranian left and our conception of the bases of the programme of a communist party. In the coming period we will put forth and discuss many of these theoretical and political differences.

The other difference with the so-called communist and socialist tendencies, or, in other words, a distinctive feature of worker-communism is the question of the attitude towards economic and social reforms and the economic struggle of the working class. I regard this question as one of the most fundamental bases of the separation of existing communism from the working class and working-class protest; as one of the principal causes of the social isolation of contemporary radical-left. For us, workers' continuous economic struggle to improve their conditions by forcing political and economic reforms upon the bourgeoisie is an inseparable part of working-class struggle and constitutes one of the fundamental premises of this struggle. The question of the relation of workers' revolution with reforms and with the ongoing economic struggle of the class is for us a crucial issue in communist activity. The socialism and communism so far has succumbed in the face of this question. Those trends which have supposedly attached significance to economic struggle and the fight for reforms - this being more a characteristic of the official trends of communism before the 1960s - have essentially acted as reformist forces. Their tendency to take part in the fight for reforms has been the result of their *removing* the cause of workers' revolution from their agenda. The left wing of the bourgeoisie has always been active in the field of the struggle for reforms, and these trends represented the political tradition of this section of society. In contrast, the radical-left which emerged through the criticism of this official line, whether in the form of Maoism or, to some extent, Trotskyism, firstly broke with the economic struggle of the class,

making intellectuals the focus of its activity, and secondly abandoned reforms. The statement "capitalism cannot reform" became a basis for their pretensions to revolutionism. Their whole revolutionism consisted of nothing but a wish to impose economic, administrative and cultural reforms on the bourgeoisie, while at the theoretical level and in practical activity, struggle for reforms became a heresy in their political vocabulary. Worker-communism is a movement for working-class and communist revolution. We regard this revolution possible and on the agenda right now. But as a class which is under pressure, we fight resolutely for every degree of improvement in the social situation which enhances workers' and working people's political and economic power and promotes their human dignity. We also fight for every degree of political and cultural opening which may facilitate our struggle. Being present in the struggle to improve the conditions is the initial and given state of worker-communism; it is not something which it ought to put on the agenda by passing some resolution. We want both a workers' state and a rise in the minimum wage. We intend to turn the means of production into common ownership and also want a lowering of the retirement age. We aim to insurrect against bourgeois states, and also want unemployment benefit. For us the equality by law of men and women is important; the separation of religion from the state, literacy, health care, freedom of expression, and individual rights are important, since we have not deduced their necessity from books but feel it in our daily lives as a class. This is that aspect of Marxism which the non-worker left has had no interest in understanding. In Marx's words, a distinctive feature of worker-communism is that it strives "to push forward the whole class movement" in all its moments and stages.

We have fundamental differences with the various tendencies of socialism also in the field of the theory of organization, the class-party relation, the features of a class party, the general basis of tactics, the conception of internationalism, and so on. When we put all these together, we see that for worker-communism any sense of kinship with the radical-left is misleading. What is especially important today, however, is that with the erosion of bourgeois socialism, favourable conditions have been created for the direct and positive presentation of Marxism. I think this to a large extent facilitates our work of "redefining" Marxism through positive reference to the main body of this theory itself.

Q: Let us return for a moment to the last point you made on worker-communism and reforms. I think there seems to be a contradiction here, at least at first sight. In reply to the last question and in your seminar on the same subject you spoke of democracy, nationalism and reformism in negative terms. You described them as tendencies opposed to worker-socialism. At the same time you stress the significance of struggle for reforms. How do you reconcile these two? Does not the one entail withdrawing from the democratic and reform movements, and the other drawing close to them?

M.H: This is a very important point. I think this contradiction exists in the way the radical-left has conceived the question of reforms in capitalist society. If it is to accept that reform is a good thing then it finds itself obliged to embrace the bourgeois opposition which supposedly is the patent-holder of the struggle for reforms. And if it is to avoid this and wishes to be an independent force on the political stage then it must deny the value of reforms and turn into an isolated melancholic current in the margins of society, without any influence on the objective situation. The question is, what inborn deficiency does the worker have which supposedly prevents him/her from being able to raise the banner of social reforms

himself/herself directly? (Reality has shown precisely the opposite of this to be the case.) As I said, improvement of the economic, political and cultural situation in the framework of the existing society is the permanent preoccupation of workers and worker-socialism; it is the presupposition of their existence as a current of social revolution. Why should the fight for putting an end to national oppression draw workers close to nationalism as a cause and a social movement of a section of the bourgeoisie? Why should the demand for the promotion of political rights in the present society send workers off behind bourgeois democracy as a known movement of the ruling class?

I believe, so far as we are talking at the theoretical level, the problem lies in the radical-left's non-materialist and ahistorical view of society. The left forgets that society's ruling ideas, and the principles which even seem to have originated in Man's nature, are the ideas and principles of the ruling class; they are the concrete forms in which the bourgeoisie has expressed Man's ideals. Freedom is a cause, but democracy is the bourgeoisie's movement for freedom, and is based on this class's narrow view of the cause of freedom. Democracy is a definite social movement, with a particular interpretation of Man, of society and of the relations which ought to be in place. Democracy is not a synonym for freedom in general, but a particular interpretation of freedom put forth by a certain section of society - the bourgeoisie. The worker wants freedom, but why should he/she accept the bourgeoisie's interpretation of it and join the bourgeoisie's movement? Democracy is not socialism turned concrete; it is not a two-dimensional and political image of the worker's three-dimensional and socio-economic ideal. It is a general social state of affairs, with its own economic and social presuppositions. As a concept, democracy should be found in the dictionaries of politics. As a movement, however, the object of democracy is not only politics but Man and human society as a whole, with all its economic, political, legal, administrative, and ethical, etc., dimensions. If democracy, as a movement, confines itself to politics and the administration of society, assuming the appearance of a movement for political and administrative reforms, this is precisely because it presupposes - and also preserves - the prevailing economic and social situation. Just like worker-socialism, democracy as a movement speaks not only on politics and individual political rights but about the whole society and all of its dimensions. Thus, worker-socialism and democracy as movements are not complementary, but stand in struggle with each other. The development of worker-socialism will no doubt mean the decline of democracy, nationalism, and so on, as social movements.

As a cause, democracy is a special expression and explanation of freedom in general. This is the special way in which historically a certain class, the bourgeoisie, has spoken of freedom. Marxism has its *own* conception of freedom. The Marxist understanding of human freedom and the relation between the individual and society is a crushing criticism of democracy as well. Marx begins from human being and not from quantities, majorities and minorities. In fact the only way the bourgeoisie can compromise with the cause of the human's freedom and equality is precisely this, i.e. strengthening his/her unequal position in production and giving a semblance of formal and legal freedom and equality between individuals. The point of departure for democracy is not the human being, as a given, legitimate and inviolable entity, but the individual, as a countable unit. In democracy, the human being is reduced to a vote. Our democrats today forget how the recognition of workers, women, immigrants, American Indians and blacks as countable individuals and the extension of democracy to them, has itself been the result of decades of undemocratic struggle

by people against the existing democracies; that even this has not yet been realized in most of the democracies that they worship. The new Iranian democrats abroad, for instance, have forgotten that they themselves, as immigrants in the cradles of democracy, have no rights whatsoever in the same once-in-a-while elections to choose between the Mitterands and Le Pens, the Thatchers and Kinnocks. I even doubt whether the majority of them would recognize the same right for the Afghan immigrant in their democratic Iran. They forget that a vote, the vote of a human being, is as worthless and ineffective for a democracy as it is for the most autocratic systems; and this is a sign of the worthlessness of the human being as human being for democracy. They forget how wherever the issue of human rights in the real sense and the question of human equality have genuinely been raised the bourgeoisie has taken advantage of this same concept of democracy and vote, against freedom and the struggle for freedom. They forget that at any given time democracy is a power balance between humanity and the anti-human bourgeois society. I will not here enter into the main Marxist discussion about the relation of political freedom and individual rights with the economic base and the necessity of economic transformation of society for the realization of the political emancipation of humans, because I think every Marxist ought to know this by heart.

To be advocates of freedom, we communists do not need to compromise with or draw inspiration from democracy. We are critics of democracy from the standpoint of freedom and equality for human beings. For us the basis is the human being. The name of our advocacy of freedom, the name of our conviction in the human's collective and individual rights and the manifesto of our struggle for the establishment of this freedom and equality is *socialism*. We defend the rights of the human being not only in the legal and political dimensions but in the most fundamental economic dimensions, because we are *socialists*. This for us is a point of principle, even if the bourgeoisie were to have the people of the entire world vote against these rights.

The issue is even more straightforward in the case of nationalism, since this is not even a half-hearted version of human ideals of justice and equality. Look what message nationalism has for the world's deprived people. The whole essence of nationalism is support for one's own ruling class - in its exploitation, in its war, in its spreading of superstitions, in its violation of human rights. As a movement and a political stream, nationalism is a means for the internal settling of accounts of the bourgeoisie internationally and for the in-fighting of the various sections of this class over the share of each in the process of capital accumulation. Nationalism has been the official ideology of imperialism. The fact that the nationalism of the bourgeoisie in the less-developed country or among oppressed nationalities has, during a short period in history, found itself in confrontation with certain features of imperialism, has led the non-proletarian left, whose essence is made of this same nationalism, to embrace and whitewash nationalism. But the communist worker and Marxism see in nationalism the image of the bourgeoisie and nothing else. In my opinion, as a thought and a tendency, nationalism is among the superstitions of the dark ages from which humans should free themselves. From an ideological point of view, nationalism means cutting human beings from their common human and universal character. Nationalism is contradictory to the primacy of the human being. At any rate, its social consequence is the fragmentation of the working class and the weakening of the camp of workers' revolution. A worker who, instead of describing himself/herself as a human being and a worker, regards himself/herself as British, Tamil, Indian or Iranian has already bowed to receive the yoke of slavery and oppression. In my opinion, nationalist prejudice is a truly shameful sentiment; not only does it not have any

compatibility with worker-socialism but is contradictory to every kind of moral advancement of humans.

Reformism is supposedly the current which can show that it improves the material conditions. After all, the working day has been shortened to ten or eight hours, and something called unemployment insurance has been granted in some places. They are after all vaccinating some of our children, and so on. I don't consider these as merits for the reformist movements. We want every one of these reforms with all our hearts. But the social current which intercedes for Man with the bourgeoisie and, promising to leave the foundations of the present society untouched and justifying the basis of this system, receives minor concessions from the bourgeoisie cannot be the movement of the worker at the close of the 20th century. Reformism narrows and clouds the perspective of workers' struggle to change society. The existing reforms have been the result of workers' and deprived masses' revolutionary struggle and pressure. Reformism keeps this struggle and this pressure in check. Worker-socialism can itself directly and without any need for any mediator fight for the imposition of reforms upon the bourgeoisie. For us these reforms are only a small part of what our movement can accomplish. If it was up to us, i.e. workers and worker-socialism, you would not have children dying every few minutes of hunger and lack of medicines in such places as Sudan, Bangladesh and the ghettos of the capital cities of democracy and reform. If it was up to us, food, clothing, housing, education, health care and economic security would be just as free and available as the air we breathe. If it was up to us, the flowering of each and everyone's creativity, and not survival, would become the fundamental law of society. These are all possible right now; we should have no doubt about it. Mankind's productive powers have advanced so far that the survival of economic and social hardships can no longer in any way be attributed to anything but the existing social relations. Reformism keeps precisely this truth out of our sight; it lowers the human being's expectations of change and stifles protest.

In its striving for political freedom and social reforms, worker-socialism is a movement in its own right. Our struggle for the organization of social revolution, workers' revolution, does not make our movement leave the field of struggle for continuous improvement in the situation to the social movements of other classes. In this field, too, worker-socialism is an independent alternative.

It is in this sense that I regard worker-socialism in conflict not only with bourgeois society but also with the bourgeois critics of this society and with the non-worker movements which want to condition and reform it. Precisely because we regard improvement in the political and economic situation as important, we cannot abandon the struggle for it to movements which promise the most curtailed and distorted changes. Movements which, moreover, in this way shield and preserve the whole of the present system from the practical criticism of the working class.

Does this amount to a hostile or indifferent attitude towards the non-working class reform movements? Not at all. One can't be in the field of struggle for a change and at the same time bare the fangs at those who, with whatever interests, want the same or part of the same change. My discussion here is about the relationship of social movements with each other and the relationship of each to people and in particular to the working class. The basic difference between worker-socialism and the non-worker reformist tendencies should find expression in our efforts to limit their influence and prevent their perspective from dominating the social movement to change the situation. This, however, would be a result of worker-socialism being able to play the part of a real alternative on the political stage. The struggle to eliminate

national oppression should be strengthened *while* weakening the nationalist vision and the social power of nationalism. The struggle for political freedom should be expanded *without* allowing illusions in bourgeois republicanism and parliamentarianism to grow. Communism can spearhead the movement for reforms and for the abolition of national oppression, it can be an active force in the struggle to improve workers' current situation, and push these movements as a whole forward, without having to concede or give free play to reformism and nationalism.

Q: What specific relation does the discussion of worker-communism bear to the Iranian left? That is, to what extent do you see your present viewpoint as building on the developments in the Iranian left? How is this discussion related to the situation of the Iranian radical-left ten years on after the 1979 revolution?

M.H: We have to separate two questions here. First, the relation of worker-communism as a critical system of thought to the theoretical and political development of the Iranian left, and second, and at a more specific level, the particular course which has brought us, as particular individuals, to these views.

To see worker-communism as a social movement and a political system of thought, there is no need whatsoever to refer to the Iranian left and its developments; there is nothing specifically Iranian in this discussion. Worker-socialism is an objective and material force in capitalist society and its theory and outlook is Marxism. Analytically, our present discussion about worker-communism has by no means been deduced from the development of the Iranian left or even the class struggle in Iran, let alone being based on the developments in the Communist Party of Iran. It is a general communist viewpoint on, and an assessment of, the state of the class movement and the fate of socialism as a theory and a social practice. However, it is obvious that I as an individual have arrived at these assessments and viewpoints through a certain political experience. We are the activists of the recent generation of communism in Iran; we have played a part in shaping the political consciousness and practice of our contemporary socialist movement in this particular country, have agitated, organized and brought about demarcation and unifications in this radical-left. Nevertheless, even in terms of general concepts, our present conclusion - insofar as we are talking about the intellectual development of these people - is in the historical continuation of our political experience.

But even this political experience should not be seen as merely local and national. If the political action of these individuals has mainly been limited to a certain political geography, as communists and socialists they have been influenced by, and have reacted to, broader and more international problems and observations. This is true not only about us in the Communist Party of Iran, but also about all the activists of the Iranian left, even those who have an extremely national, parochial and limited notion of themselves and of their political identity.

I believe that ten years on after the 1979 revolution, a fundamental rethinking within the Iranian left is inevitable. The Iranian radical-left experienced its irrelevance to society, witnessed its entire populist and reformist radicalism being criticized and evaporate into thin air, saw how what apparently was once sufficient theoretical and practical basis for heroic struggle against the monarchist autocracy had lost the capacity to tackle the most elementary problems of the political struggle, of mustering even a minimum of force and unity for any form of social protest or even for manifestation as a sect. This experience creates a tendency

towards rethinking and re-assessment especially among its victims. But what has rendered this re-assessment its present features and results is certainly the situation of socialism internationally. I think the objective experience of the 1979 revolution itself, the establishment of bourgeois-Islamic reaction and the nightmare that the Iranian people are still going through were the result of an international situation; they bore, in particular, the mark of the crisis of bourgeois socialism and non-proletarian radicalism on an international level. The developments in China and the Soviet Union and the total defeat of bourgeois socialism in the face of the offensive of the right tendency within the international bourgeoisie induce the radical-left in Iran to make its rethinking on a world scale and by reference to the state of socialism and radicalism internationally. They induce it even to reflect on its Iranian experience within a global context.

Today, by and large this has taken place. The results of this reflection are showing themselves in the form of serious theoretical and organizational developments in the Iranian left. A large section of the ex-activists of Iran's radical-left have, as a result of this situation, turned altogether to the right. Having re-examined their previous populism and radicalism, they have arrived at the conclusion that these contained too little of democracy and nationalism. Many, having shed the cover of their former radicalism, are discovering themselves as the new generation of Iranian nationalists and democrats and are vociferously celebrating their discovery. This trend is developing into a new Iranian social democracy and liberalism which enjoys a large social base in the Iranian bourgeoisie - an economy-building, anti-working class and revolution-wary current; a tendency which at last wants to pull the Iranian bourgeoisie from under the auspices of the Shah, the National Front, Islam and the Tudeh Party and bring it into the midst of the class struggle of the world of the end of the twentieth century.

Worker-communism, too, is the product of a re-examination. This is *our* evaluation of this period and this world. In my opinion, the Iranian revolution, despite its political defeat, brought about an immense social-political maturity. One of its results was to fill the gap between politics and economics in the Iranian society. The era of monarchist repression was the era of capitalist development, on the one hand, and the ossification of the political superstructure, on the other. Revolution removed the fetters from politics. Hence, the political developments which had for long acquired an objective necessity - in particular within the Iranian opposition - unfolded in a short time, just like a speeded-up film. The chapters of the traditional currents of the bourgeois opposition were quickly opened and then closed. The radical-left, from the Feda'ie guerrillas to populist socialism, emerged for one or two years, was criticized by society and left the scene. New class forces which, fenced off by repression, had not made open political manifestation took to the scene. Most important of all was the workers' movement and, within it, worker-socialism. This transformed the Iranian left. The same reality which forces the bourgeois state in Iran to launch the Islamic Councils, exerted pressure on the national-reformist, anti-establishment and non-working class Iranian left. A new kind of radical-left took shape, specifically reflecting the pressure of this worker-socialism. The Communist Party of Iran is specifically the product of this situation.

The presentation of the discussion of worker-communism proclaims the end of the co-existence of worker-socialism with the nationalist-reformist radicalism of the non-worker opposition in Iran. It means precisely separating the fate of worker-socialism in Iran from that of the non-worker radical-left and its history. However, this requires putting the bases of this movement upon its own world history, in opposition to the bourgeoisie and non-worker

socialism. My re-examination, as an individual, from the experience of the last ten years has thus brought me to completely different conclusions. The Iranian left and even the CPI should be viewed from the standpoint of a class, and hence an extra-national, movement, from the standpoint of a world movement for social change. From this perspective, in contrast to a socialism which is declining, one can clearly see another socialist movement which stands totally on another class foundation, embedded in another social protest; a socialist movement which is alive and has the answers. I consider myself an activist of this movement and irrespective of how the left opposition of the Iranian bourgeoisie sees itself today, irrespective of what has happened to the state-capitalist movement in the world, regardless of what in their mind Marxism is and what it is not, as an activist of the worker's social protest movement, I must be concerned with the organization and development of this movement. Therefore with the discussion of worker-communism we have emerged from this experience with Marxism and *class* protest. This is diametrically opposed to the general course taken by the Iranian radical-left which has displayed its political maturity precisely by emphasizing its lack of conviction in both of these.

I believe, in the coming period worker-communism, on the one hand, and new liberalism and social democracy, on the other, will make up the principal fighting traditions and party tendencies in the Iranian opposition. All the existing left parties and currents will transfigure and polarize under the impact of these two chief tendencies. It is really then that the political stage in Iran will be set in a way corresponding to society's economic realities. Party activity in the name of the left *between* these two tendencies will be no more than the same sectarian stirs of the former generation of activists of the Iranian opposition, without much serious social consequence.

Q: One old objection made against communists generally, concerning the question of workers' economic and numerical weight in contemporary capitalism, may also be raised against your discussion. The claim goes that as a result of technological growth and the technological revolution workers as a class are no longer quantitatively the force which Marx talked about, they don't make up the majority in society, and therefore the communist alternative is losing its social base. This view is common among the "communist" parties, the Eurocommunists, the New Left and so on, in Europe. Even if only in theory, these parties have tended to broaden and diversify their social base. This is the opposite of what you are doing. They may simply say that your worker-communism will not have a happy ending since as a class workers don't have their former economic status and numerical weight. What is your view on this?

M.H: This is a very useful criticism since it allows us to clarify even more our radical differences with the existing socialism and communism and with those lefts. The question of what the workers' numerical, economic and political weight in the present society is and what changes it has undergone compared, for instance, with the time of the publication of *Capital*, the October Revolution or the Second World War, is an objective question; it can be evaluated objectively and does not need an ideological answer. Precisely from this objective viewpoint, I think that those who are not prepared to see the immense growth of the wage-earning worker in the contemporary world, compared to any other earlier period, are certainly looking at the world through anti-socialist ideological spectacles. When Marx was writing *Capital*, capital as a relation of production, a relation based on the employment of wage labour, had been

established only in a handful of countries. Most of the countries whose labour force and employment statistics are now registered by the ILO, perhaps did not even exist on the world political and economic map of those days. Now all over the world, doing wage labour for capital has become the way of making a living for the great majority of the producers. Behind these objections lies a narrow-minded Eurocentrism and a naive attempt to justify reformism in Western Europe, since anyone can compare the Germany of 1920 with the Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, South Africa, and so on, of today, or the present India and China with fifty years ago, and arrive at the appropriate statistical conclusions. Besides, it is strange that the discussion of revolution and the movement of the industrial and modern worker should be less applicable today than fifty years ago - let alone one hundred and fifty years ago - when glancing at any newspaper in any language, you see discussion of production, wages, accumulation, productivity and the confrontation between states and worker organizations. These objections are absurd. They are the justifications of bourgeois socialism which hopes to make up seemingly scientific excuses for its estrangement from the working class and worker protest, or to corroborate theoretically its loyalty to parliament and parliamentarianism in the eyes of the bourgeoisie. I believe that the worker has never been as powerful in the political and economic arena as today.

But whatever one's statistical and objective observation of the situation of the working class may be, our reply to this objection is only one thing. Let us for the moment accept that workers form a minority class and that their economic weight has fallen. So what? We are activists of the worker's protest movement. We are fighting for the establishment of the worker's social and economic alternative as a class. Only those can switch their movement and cause, on the strength of statistical reports regarding the weight of classes, who *have* such a choice. Worker-communism is the political and social movement of a class, whether this class constitutes 20% of the population or 51%. This makes no difference to us. The worker's position in production does not change. The economic foundation of society does not change. This class's alternative for the organization of human society does not change. The worker still has to sell his or her labour power daily in order to live, and thus views the world from the same standpoint and offers the same solution to it. Communism is not an economic and social idea or prescription for the realization of which Marx had supposedly searched and chosen the working class from among all classes. This is how most of the left has understood the relation between Marxism and the class. No wonder then that our socialist, who now imagines that workers have declined in numbers and no longer form a majority, should look for a new executive agent for the achievement of communism, or even scrap it altogether, find out what system the majority classes now want and join that cause. Socialism is not a crown to be worn by every social stratum and class. It is the cause of workers as a definite social class. Communism is the worker's movement to destroy capitalism, abolish wage-labour and do away with exploitation and classes. Marx has nowhere justified communism by the idea that workers are the majority. In his own time the proletariat was by no means the majority. For communism, the legitimacy of the working class and the validity and necessity of workers' revolution have not been deduced from the concepts of democracy and the working people being the majority. The point of departure is the worker and his antagonism to capital. After all, has the struggle for equality between women and men been based on, or is justified by, women being the majority? Are blacks the majority? Would the cause and struggle of an activist of women's rights or racial equality movements change on the strength of statistics on women and coloureds? Why should communism, as a working-class

movement, be any different? The truth is that while it can evidently be seen that women's and the minorities' protest is rooted in their objective and given position in society, the existing so-called communist and socialist movement cannot claim such an objective connection with the worker as a given social entity. If the existing communism really represented working-class protest then this objection would seem as absurd as the example of women that we mentioned. Such a problematic or proposition would then not even arise in the tradition of communist thought. But contemporary communism in fact finds itself in the same position of utopian socialism of Marx's time, that is, as a set of ideas and models to be implemented by social classes. Communism has turned into the password of reformist non-worker parties who to realize their programme have needed workers' power. So now if someone points out that workers are not the same force they used to be or that Marxist theory has altogether exaggerated the social significance of workers, then these so-called communist currents ought to take their wares somewhere else: among oppressed peoples, students, peasants, etc. This is what has happened so far. But the worker remains where he is, with his objective situation, with his protest to the wages system and private property, with his real solution for mankind, and cannot protest against the present system except by communism. We are the activists of this movement. This movement, and this movement alone, is our reply to the present situation. Some ex-communist university professor can from tomorrow turn "Green", Social Democrat, nationalist or even mystic; the working class cannot.

It may be said that you go on making your communist and class protest, but with the changes that have taken place in workers' weight in the economy and society, your victory is impossible; or that the legitimacy of your revolution would be questioned by the majority in society. My answer, apart from regarding this as an empty rhetoric by capital against the worker, is that for victory it is not necessary for workers to be the majority, since the mechanism of this victory is not referendum on a sunny day. Society becomes overwhelmed by crisis and revolution. This is the fundamental rule of the capitalist world. In the course of this revolutionary period social groupings are shaped around the solutions and slogans of the main classes of society: the working class and the capitalist class. The working class will triumph by virtue of being the backbone of production in the existing society, the leader of the new society and the social class having a real solution to human suffering as a whole. The bourgeoisie has not taken power in any other way either, without ever being numerically anything more than an insignificant minority. It is interesting that the very same people who today question the legitimacy of workers' revolution on the basis of the numerical weight of classes, have already accepted the legitimacy of the rule of an insignificant minority, the bourgeoisie. The power of the working class does not lie only in its size. This power essentially rests on this class's position in capitalist production and in the objectivity and truth of the solution that the worker puts before society as a whole. The day may come when state and private employees constitute the majority, just as peasants have done in certain periods in history. But the social conflict, which will also decide the fate of this same presumed majority, is the conflict between the main social classes in social production and between their perspectives and alternatives. So far, bourgeois society has revealed its complete impasse and its incompatibility with human happiness and integrity. Worker-communism has the answer to this impasse.

The era of workers' show of strength on the political stage is once again arriving, and this time, in my opinion, in particular in the cradle of capitalism and in those heartlands where allegedly workers' weight has declined. I think the realities of the next few years will better

than any reasoning drum the real power of workers into the heads of the ex-socialists and their new parties.

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Q: At the beginning of our talk you referred to the existence and confrontation of different tendencies in the CPI. But characterizations such as right, left and centre do not as yet express the social and theoretical attributes of these tendencies. What is your explanation of the political and social characteristics of these trends?

M.H: Well, to do this we must first understand the process through which this party has emerged and the influences it has received from the external social developments. The CPI emerged from a movement in the Iranian left which called itself "Revolutionary Marxism". The conceptual framework of this current rested on a criticism of populism and a return to Marxism's orthodoxy. The CPI emerged through the disintegration of populist socialism, as a current critical of this trend. Politically, the CPI formed the most left-wing section of the left opposition in Iran. But in reality other social and political currents also took part in the formation of the CPI. Furthermore, "Revolutionary Marxism" itself was a non-uniform phenomenon, harbouring the most serious conflict among the tendencies in Iranian communism.

Once you analyze the historical conditions under which this current appeared you distinguish two chief trends. First, the resurgence of the workers' movement in the course of the [1979] revolution and the formation, or at any rate, the coming to the forefront of this movement, of a layer of socialist workers. In other words, with the revolution, worker-socialism in Iran became very active. Second, simultaneously with this class movement we witness an intellectual and political radicalization within the non-worker radical-left. The Iranian left was the movement of the intelligentsia. In the course of the revolution this movement, totally differentiable in its social position from worker-socialism, turned towards a principled and revolutionary Marxism, in opposition to populism, etc. The "Revolutionary Marxism of Iran" was effectively one current, but represented the alignment and mutual influences of these two distinct social trends. It was, on the one hand, a bridge politically and practically linking these two different social tendencies, and on the other, a common framework for the continued coexistence of worker-socialism and the socialist radicalism of the intellectualist opposition. Thus a radical current appeared which made the left more radical, but in the final analysis maintained a common cause between worker-socialism and the radicalism of the left intellectual. This continuity and coexistence was the result of the alignment of both these movements in the struggle against the left opposition's populism, worker-wariness and alienation from Marxist theory. To put it briefly, the "Revolutionary Marxism" in Iran, i.e. the particular current under whose banner the CPI was formed, had been founded, from the outset on two different social pillars. It was the product of the alignment and coexistence of two different social tendencies: Marxist criticism within the non-worker left, with its campaign against populism, on the one hand, and worker-socialism, with its councils, strikes and shop-floor leaders, on the other. It is obvious that the stepping-up of Marxist criticism could not but drive the radical-left towards the working class and towards greater adaptation to worker-socialism. The critical theoretical and political movement which

developed within the radical-left in Iran was in every way strengthening worker-socialism. But as a definite political tendency, Revolutionary Marxism in Iran was not identical to worker-socialism. It was an anti-populist bloc bearing different tendencies. It is obvious that with the demise of populism the useful life of this bloc, too, comes to an end.

The disintegration of populism and the formation of the CPI itself, as the practical evidence of the triumph over populism, naturally was bound to put an end to the utility of this common framework, breaking it down to its constituent elements. This development, signifying an important phase in the history of development of worker-socialism in Iran, took place to a large extent in the form of the emergence of splits within the CPI, since the latter had turned into the mainstream of radical socialism in Iran.

This common framework was in any event the official and principal basis for the formation of the party. Its programme, demands and traditions had all been accepted as the principles and truths on the basis of which the party should work. But the CPI did not remain confined to this current and its constituting tendencies. A number of other significant tendencies became involved in the CPI. In Kurdistan, Kurdish nationalism had from the outset, albeit in more mass and radical forms, taken part in Komala's⁹ tradition of struggle. In the Second Congress of Komala, Revolutionary Marxism officially became victorious. The nationalist trend acquiesced but later entered the party in the fringes of Komala. On the other hand, on a national scale, the CPI and, even before that, the so-called Revolutionary Marxist organizations and fractions became a pole of attraction for the Iranian radical-left as a whole. Thus, with some modifications, the various tendencies existing in the radical-left inevitably entered the party. One can picture the CPI in 1983 as a vehicle for the activity of all these tendencies under the general umbrella of "Revolutionary Marxism of Iran". It was only natural that in view of the development of political thought inside the party and, more importantly, in view of the objective changes on a social scale in Iran and internationally, this balance of the tendencies could not last. The combination of these factors moved the political tendencies in the CPI away from one another; a left, right and centre developed which were the result of the evolution and development of the internal tendencies of the party in the new circumstances.

Q: You said that these tendencies have diverged under the impact of factors outside and inside the party. What are these factors and in what forms do they show themselves?

M.H: The most important factor, in my opinion, is the developments which the so-called socialist movement in the world is going through. When "revisionism" loses its relevance, the radical-left, which has defined its identity on account of its "anti-revisionism", loses the basis for its existence. The radical-left in Iran, including the Revolutionary Marxist current which wholeheartedly stood for theoretical purity and a return to Marx's theory, enjoyed significance and relevance essentially on account of its criticism of, and opposition to, revisionism and not for being a framework for a social and class protest. Therefore what we were witnessing was the official party line losing its critical and challenging character vis-a-vis the world around it and turning into an ideology for a political party, a philosophy for party-management. It was a very well-known phenomenon in the party for a long time that its leaders wrote so that the party paper would come out and the radios would have programmes. That sense of legitimacy and urgency in bringing home one's ideas in opposition to other social currents - a feature of the era of anti-populist criticism - gradually disappeared. This was unavoidable

since the party's anti-populist framework of thought had accomplished its job and born its organizational fruit. After the formation of the party, the actual preoccupation became running the affairs of the party. I pointed this out in the editorial of the very first issue of *Besooy-e-Sosyalism*¹⁰, one year after the formation of the party. In any event, we can see the onset of this process of divergence of the tendencies in the form of the official line marking time and becoming dominated by fetishism of the organization. The lethargy of this current coincides with very important theoretical and political events in the entire so-called communist movement. This has prompted a surge of re-assessment and revision within the intellectual left. Only a communism which had the answers to this period's problems could show the same momentum and flourishing also in this period.

These answers were derived not from the former framework of thought but from the criticism of this framework from the standpoint of worker-socialism. In other words, when the limitations of the anti-populist framework and its practical incapacity in class organization became clear, worker-socialism - as a tendency present in the CPI - began to speak this time as a distinct tendency. In this period we see the appearance of a different literature by this line which is not rooted in the anti-populist thinking tradition. The debates on the question of the Soviet Union, the discussions on working-class organization, etc, though published as the official line and in the central organs, were obviously critical of this official line and even critical of some of the programmatic fundamentals and basic conceptions of the party. In my view, after the formation of the party, the worker line, the left current, gradually - and after the Third Congress, definitely - separates its course from the official party line. As far as the CPI itself is concerned, the discussion of worker-communism is put forward as a challenge against the centre. The left current claims that it has social and class differences with the thinking and practical tradition prevailing in the party.

The present situation of the right tendencies, too, is the result of the developments in the world outside. Kurdish nationalism is particularly influenced by the situation in the [Kurdistan] region. Outside the party, we distinctly see the dead end of this tradition. The political and practical confusion of the Kurdistan Democratic Party [of Iran] and of the opposition currents in Iraq has not escaped anyone. The nationalism which has kept itself alive in the CPI by conceding to more radical forms and borrowing a Marxist language also suffers from this dead end. Nationalism is nationalism; its social perspective and its outlook do not change by being present in the CPI. The crisis of bourgeois socialisms on a world scale, the inertia of the official line in the party, and, finally, the course of development of the Iran-Iraq war which narrows the scope for the activity of these forces, diminish this current's flexibility, power of manoeuvre and endurance. Add to this the offensive by the left in the party, then it is clear that this tendency must at last make a move and put up some resistance from its own positively-defined positions.

The New Leftist and social democratic tendencies are altogether the result of the recent international situation. The present developments have helped a section of the radical-left activists to recognize their [actual] political persuasions. Our whole argument had been that the Iranian left was essentially an anti-despotic democratic current. Ten years ago, owing to the prestige of Marxism, the dissident Iranian petty-bourgeoisie articulated its preoccupations and tendencies in the name of Marxism. But why should it retain this cover and title, now that in the whole world they are declaring the end of Marxism?

Moreover, the left Iranian intellectual has just found the opportunity to get to know the non-Marxist currents of thought on a larger scale. In these circumstances, with Gorbachevism in

the Soviet Union and a hole appearing in the ozone layer, etc, this tendency would not easily be content with a party in the specific anti-populist tradition - let alone its coming to terms with the present discourse on worker-communism.

All this means that in the CPI, just as in society as a whole, non-worker socialism is reaching an impasse and worker-socialism is separating itself from the history, theory and practice of the non-worker left. The world situation has greatly accelerated this process in the CPI.

Q: If both worker-communism and the earlier thought framework of the party represent an emphasis on and a return to Marxist orthodoxy, then your criticism today should not include a theoretical criticism of the party's former outlook. And, in effect, it seems that inside the party worker-communism has been understood as a criticism, not of the party's former system of thought, but of its practice. Do you think this conception is correct?

M.H: No. This is, of course, the way many comrades like to think, since it in some way portrays the present discussion as building on the previous one and as somehow preserving the historical continuity of the party. I believe worker-communism contains a serious theoretical criticism of the system of thought known as the Revolutionary Marxism of Iran. That both emphasize Marxist orthodoxy is not enough, even in a theoretical sense, to consider them as identical. The whole point is about our different conception of this Marxism and orthodoxy. That is to say, worker-communism as an assessment makes a serious criticism of our own intellectual and political past. Let me elaborate on this since I think it is an important point, particularly with regard to the fate of this current [worker-communism] in the Communist Party of Iran.

I said earlier that I start from the confrontation of movements as social phenomena, and that only on this basis can I understand contraposition of doctrines and systems of thought. The "Revolutionary Marxism of Iran" was a social intellectual-political movement. It was an intellectual framework for a real trend which emerged in the Iranian society at a particular period, producing very tangible and measurable results on a social scale. Many are fond of regarding it as a title which the Unity of Communist Militants¹¹ had chosen as a communist group. These people are not even good historians. The truth is that the Revolutionary Marxism of Iran was a critical current within Iran's non-worker radical-left which, gaining a wide-spread influence inside this left during 1978-1982, ultimately transformed the left's political and theoretical profile. This current questioned the common content of all the tendencies in the radical-left in Iran, i.e. populism, and became an instrument for a fundamental theoretical shake up within this left. In fact in the history of the Iranian left we have rarely witnessed such a classic case of the burgeoning and popularization of a criticism and a critical system. Just as a school in painting, music, or literary criticism, gains currency, the Revolutionary Marxism of Iran became generalized within the radical-left. Ideas which were initially voiced by a small group, very soon found spokesmen, agitators and advocates across the entire left. The pressure of this critical current grew in all the [left] organizations. There not only emerged strong tendencies in favour of this criticism, but its adversaries, too, very soon borrowed its terminology and formulations. This current represented the left-ward shift of radical socialism in Iran. Very soon it had comprised such a large force that effectively it became the mainstream of the radical-left in Iran, founding the most prestigious

and active political party of the radical-left, namely the Communist Party of Iran. During the 1979 revolution the Iranian left polarized, its centre disintegrated, its right shifted towards the Tudeh Party and social democracy, and its left, relying on this revolutionary-Marxist criticism of populism, grew into a powerful party current.

Clearly this critical current drew upon Marxist orthodoxy against populism, and many of its activists did not restrict or reduce Marxism to a criticism of populism. Yet, as a social movement, this trend portrayed a definite profile. What we, as activists and protagonists of this trend, understood of Marxism is one thing, and what was being put across by Revolutionary Marxism, as a defined, objective movement, is quite another. This latter aspect is far more significant, and is true of all movements. Only that part of the ideas and consciousness of the leaders and activists of a current turns into the intellectual and objective hallmark of a movement as a whole which corresponds to the material-social requirements and features of that movement. A movement comes to be engaged in a definite social preoccupation which is not a picture of the whole perspective of its activists, thinkers and leaders. The Revolutionary Marxist current represented the radicalization of Iran's intellectual left under the pressure of worker-socialism and the intellectual authority of Marxism which just then was being introduced in the Iranian left first-hand, or, at least, through a more principled interpretation. Anyway, as a tendency, Revolutionary Marxism resorted to orthodoxy to the extent that this served the purposes of a non-worker left active in a specific revolution. Perhaps many activists of this current in their minds held a wider, or a more limited, vision.

This movement's recourse to Marxism was taking place within the limitation of the specific social problematic that it had set itself. Worker-communism criticized and transgressed this very limitation. As a result, it set itself a set of theoretical and programmatic problems which essentially could not be posed, let alone resolved, in the framework of the Revolutionary Marxism of Iran. The crucial question is to where in the body of Marxism each of these trends - the "Revolutionary Marxism of Iran" and worker-communism - refers. A very brief and simplified formulation of my present theoretical criticism of the system of thought known as the "Revolutionary Marxism of Iran" would be that this current lacked a *historical* outlook and a *social* understanding of *Marxism as a theory and a movement*. In my opinion, this trend was a very good interpreter of Marxism as a theory - of course, inasmuch as the social cause that it pursued, necessitated recourse to Marxism. It drew essentially correct political and tactical conclusions from this theory. To date, every single position taken by this tendency on the key political problems during the 1979 revolution and after, has held its validity. Yet the problem was that for this trend Marxism was in the end still a theory; a theory which laid bare and criticized the realities of the capitalist world and expressed the worker's criticism of capitalist society. This criticism and theory was the starting point for conceiving a social practice. The Revolutionary Marxism of Iran sought to organize a practical, and of course working-class, movement on the basis of this theory. This is an inverted outlook. This trend's ahistorical outlook and its estrangement from one of the most fundamental pillars of Marxism is revealed precisely here. The Revolutionary Marxism of Iran did not as yet view Marxism - as a theory - in the same way that Marx treated theory as such. In other words, it treated Marxism itself - as a definite theory - in a non-social and ahistorical fashion. Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*, which in the most concise way express Marx's outlook on the relation between social and class thought and practice, apply also to Marxism as a definite theory. One cannot regard all of Man's ideas as products of society, attribute to them historical applications,

measure their truth or falsity by their social practice, and at the same time understand Marxism itself as an idea abstracted from, and having primacy over, social practice, independently of its historical application, and as a set of true axioms about the objective world. It goes without saying that the component parts of Marx's theory, his explanation of the different modes of production, of the source of profit, of the origin of the state, and so on, are all scientific and independently comprehensible tenets. But to accept these does not mean accepting Marxism, since the foundation of Marxism is criticism; not criticism by a mind, of the world outside it, but criticism by a definite social practice, by an objective material movement, of society as a whole. One cannot collect Marxist tenets as a set of beliefs and call it Marxism. Marxism means to stand in the very social position and in the context of the very social-critical practice which, to begin with, make the application of these tenets - as a criticism - possible. In the seminar [on worker-communism] I tried to explain how this specific social locus and this specific social practice is inseparable from Marxism as a theory, and how non-worker Marxism is a contradiction in terms.

I referred to this weakness of the existing intellectual framework in the Second Congress. I said that we should return not only to the theory of Marxism but to its social point of reference and base. Marxism is not a scholastic and philanthropic criticism of capitalism. It is the worker's criticism as a definite class and a living fighter in capitalist society. Standing in this social position is, for a political party, as much a criterion for being Marxist as accepting the theory of surplus-value. For our comrades, this was not a theoretical revision in the previous framework but, rather, a call for practical orientation towards the working class. But, as I pointed out, this is a profoundly theoretical question which reveals itself, and indeed has already done so, in serious differences in the theoretical analysis of the problems confronting us. We saw an instance of these differences in the discussions on the Soviet question.

The CPI's Programme, true to the tradition of the Revolutionary Marxism of Iran, attributes the final defeat of the workers' revolution in the Soviet Union to "the domination of revisionism". Our discussion, i.e. mine and comrade Iraj Azarin's, published in the bulletin on the Soviet question, criticizes and rejects precisely this formulation. Instead of looking for the causes of the defeat in the deviation of this or that individual from Marxism as a theory, we have as our point of departure the social movement of the working class, its limitations, and its perspective or lack of it. Only then do we go about examining the causes of the change in the application of Marxism as a theory by the social movement of other classes. On the concept of revisionism itself we reject the doctrinal viewpoint. We examine revisionism as the intellectual system and superstructure of social movements. We are in conflict with these movements on account of the opposition of the working class to them and not merely because they have deviated from the doctrine. On other questions, too, such as the international situation, workers' economic struggle, reforms, analysis of communism's history, determination of the tasks and perspective of the Communist Party, communist work inside the class, etc, we can see serious theoretical differences between worker-communism and the previous frame of thought. So long as the former outlook directed its criticism essentially against populism, these differences did not fully come to light. I said that in this particular field, i.e. as far as Marxist thought takes *populism* to task, one cannot say much more or even much different. But once populism is out and new issues, particularly the question of communist practice and the crisis of bourgeois socialisms, surface, the flaws of the former framework of thought become conspicuous. ■

NOTES:

1. The report, originally written in December 1988, to the Third Congress of the CPI, February 1989 - Ed.
2. A series of inner-party seminars on worker-communism by Mansoor Hekmat, held shortly after the Third Congress in February 1989 - Ed.
3. The central organ of the CPI - Ed.
4. A bulletin of debates and discussions on the Soviet question, published by the CPI. Three issues of the bulletin were published from March 1986 to April 1988 - Ed.
5. The bourgeois movement for the introduction of constitution, 1905-1911 - Ed.
6. The coalition front for Iran's liberal opposition from the 1940s onwards - Ed.
7. The national-reformist, pro-Soviet party in Iran - Ed.
8. The bulletin of *Marxism and the Question of the Soviet Union* published by the CPI - Ed.
9. Komala was founded in 1969, as the "Revolutionary Organization of Kurdistan's Toilers". After the 1979 revolution and in the course of the polarizations within the Iranian left, it was one of the main organizations which formed the CPI in 1983 - Ed.
10. The theoretical publication of the CPI. Its first issue was published in September 1984 - Ed.
11. A Marxist organization, co-founded by Mansoor Hekmat in 1978, and the most influential organization of the Iranian left. In 1983, along with Komala (see note 9 above), it founded the Communist Party of Iran - Ed.

Communiqué on the formation of the Worker-communist Party of Iran

With this communiqué we announce the formation of the Worker-communist Party of Iran.

The Worker-communist Party of Iran is a Marxist party, committed to organising the social revolution of the working class to abolish the capitalist system and to establish a new society based on the economic and social equality of all, their political freedom and the realisation of material and intellectual creative potentials of all individuals.

The Worker-communist Party of Iran is an internationalist party. It struggles for the international solidarity of the working class and for the achievement of its world objectives. It is committed to defending the interests of workers the world over.

Under the changing conditions of the world of today, and in the face of the ideological and political onslaught of world capitalism on the cause of socialism, heightened by the collapse of the Soviet bloc's false socialism, the Worker-communist Party of Iran considers defence of Marxism and defence of the worker-socialist cause as one of its fundamental tasks. WPI strives to strengthen and promote the socialist movement of the working class on a world scale.

In Iran, WPI fights for the rise of the working class as a powerful social and political force, for establishing workers' state and the implementation of the economic and political programme of worker-socialism. The overthrow of the ruling Islamic Republic is one precondition for the achievement of these goals.

The Worker-communist Party of Iran calls on communist workers and worker-socialist militants to join its ranks.

30 November 1991

Iraj Azarin - Mansoor Hekmat - Koorosh Modarresi - Reza Moqaddam