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# Anarchism, syndicalism & worker's struggles in Iraq

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<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L131xH400/18-5-db978.jpg>

1) "After the mass executions of the left that followed the Islamist takeover of the Iranian revolution..." \*\* The course of the Iranian Revolution, was briefly charted in the "Zabalaza" article "Religious Fundamentalist Regimes: A Lesson from the Iranian Revolution 1978-1979" online at:

[http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story\\_id=129](http://www.anarkismo.net/newswire.php?story_id=129)

In August 1977, 50 000 poor slum-dwellers successfully resisted their forced removal by police, then in December, police massacred 40 religious protestors and the resentment boiled over into open anger. Strikes and sabotage were on the rise while wages dropped due to an economic downturn. The shah imposed martial law and on "Black Friday", September 8, 1978, troops gunned down thousands of protestors. In response, infuriated workers launched a strike-wave that spread across the country like wildfire. Oil workers struck for 33 days straight, bringing the economy to a dead halt, despite fruitless attempts to send troops into the oilfields. On December 11, 2-million protestors marched in the capital, Tehran, demanding the ousting of the shah, an end to American imperialism and the arming of the people. Soldiers began to desert. On January 16, 1979, the shah fled to Egypt. In mid-February, there was an insurrection, with air force cadets joining with guerrilla forces - the leftist Organisation of Iranian

Peoples' Fedai Guerrillas, or Fedayeen, and the nationalist Mujahedeen - in over-running the military academy, army bases, the parliament, factories, armouries and the TV station. The Pahlavi regime collapsed and Khomeini, who had returned from exile, cobbled together a multi-party provisional government, but the people wanted more.

Women's organisations flourished, peasants started seizing the land and in some places, established communal cultivation councils, strikes were rampant and workers seized control of their workplaces, arranging raw materials, sourcing and sales themselves, even setting prices in the oil industry. A system of grassroots soviets - called "shoras" in Iranian and based on the old factory council idea - sprang up in fields, factories, neighbourhoods, educational institutions and the armed forces. Armed neighbourhood committees - called "komitehs" - based on the old Muslim scholar networks - patrolled residential areas, arrested collaborators, ran people's courts and prisons, and organized demonstrations. It was a true workers' revolution with secular revolutionaries and Muslim workers overthrowing the capitalist state side by side. A May Day march in Tehran drew 1,5-million demonstrators.

The former headquarters of the secret police-controlled official trade union federation was occupied by the unemployed and renamed the Workers' House. The new workerist federation, that replaced the old state one, the All-Iran Workers' Union, declared that its aim was an Iran "free of class oppression" and called for shoras to be "formed by the workers of each factory for their own political and economic needs". But the religious fundamentalist clerics lead by Khomeini were terrified of the power of the working class and haunted by the spectre of the imminent collapse of Iranian capitalism. If it collapsed, they could not reconstitute themselves as the ruling elite in place of the shah and there would be no profits for them to steal from the workers. Three days after the insurrection, the provisional government ordered workers back to work, but the strike, shora and komiteh movements just spread.

A month later, the government declared the shoras to be "counter-revolutionary", claiming that their minority bourgeois regime was "the genuine Islamic Revolution". Still the shoras spread, so the regime introduced a law aimed at undermining worker self-management by banning shora involvement in management affairs - while at the same time trying to force class collaboration by insisting that management must be allowed to participate in the shoras. The shora movement peaked in July but then the government offensive, combined with the inexperience of the left, began to take its toll. The National Front, Masses, Fedayeen and both the leftist and Muslim wings of the Mujahedeen all backed the provisional government mistakenly believing that an Iranian clerical-dominated bourgeoisie was better than the imperialist-backed Pahlavi dynasty.

Khomeini founded the fundamentalist Iranian Republican Party (IRP) to squeeze opposition parties out of the provisional government and at the same time established the Revolutionary Guards (Pasdaran), a political police force to marginalise the secular left within the komitehs which it wanted to mobilise as a supporter bloc. The Pasdaran were soon forcibly liquidating shoras, purging komitehs and repressing ethnic Kurdish separatists and women's organisations, while the Party of God (Hezbollah) was created as a strike-breaking force of thugs. The IRP also created a public works project to divert the energies of the most militant shoras - replacing them with fundamentalist shoras and Islamic Societies - and to rebuild the exploitative capitalist economy (all the while spouting populist and anti-capitalist slogans in the manner of all fascist dictatorships). The true workers' revolution was destroyed and for the Iranian working class, whether secular or Muslim, a long night of living under a new autocratic regime had begun.

The fundamentalist clerical regime had not set them free: it had only produced new forms of capitalist exploitation and police state repression. The lesson of Iran is a basic anarchist one: workers can never trust groups, religious or not, who chant the right revolutionary slogans but whose real aim is class rule.

2) "There have been rumors and some reports of anarchists active in Iraq but it seems that such forces are not yet significant." \*\* The Iraqi workers' movement arose only in the 1920s and 1930s because of the late development of an industrial proletariat centred on the oil industry and was initially dominated by the Communist Party of Iraq (HCI). The HCI suffered massacres at the hands of the ruling Ba'athist Party in the 1960s, but in 1973, the two parties' leaderships struck a pact. This enraged the HCI youth, about 300 of which broke away from the party in 1976 to form the anarcho-communist Shagila group. Shagila's primary activities were running an underground press and the assassination of Ba'athist security police goons. When the Iranian Revolution broke out, many Shagila militants crossed into Iran illegally to support their sister anarcho-communist organisation there, The Scream of the People, and the shorah and komiteh movement. But both Shagila and The Scream of the People were caught up in the Khomeinist massacres of the Left which were unleashed in 1979 and only a handful escaped into exile with their lives. Those who remained behind, alive, buried their weapons and printing presses. It is believed that a "second-generation" of Shagila militants may be involved in the current uprising, but we have no confirmation of this. - Source: a Shagila veteran in exile who cannot be named for security reasons.

3) "However there are other progressive forces who have managed to get news of their activities onto the web." \*\* One of the most significant progressive forces to emerge in Iraq in recent years is the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq (FWCUI), formed in December 2003, and its affiliate, the Unemployed Union of Iraq (UUI), which have spread like wildfire to most main urban centres in Iraq. The FWCUI states that its aim is to form "labour organisations that the workers elect by themselves, without the guardianship or domination from any authority, whether government or party." Its constitution expands on this theme, saying its aim is to "establish councils and directly elected labour unions inside the factories, workshops and enterprises by the workers themselves." It has taken a distinctly anti-chauvanist line, embracing all workers in the territory of Iraq whatever their ethnic origin, nationality, religion, gender or creed. It fights for bread-and-butter issues, but has also demanded unlimited political freedom and the right to strike and industrial action. Most crucially, its constitution states that the "General Conference [of worker delegates] is the highest authority in the federation and is called for assembly every six months" and that the "leading committee" of the federation, elected in secret ballot by the General Conference, is not an executive body but is merely a delegated body, strictly limited to abide "by all resolutions and recommendations of the conference and work for their implementation." This committee can in turn appoint "specialised committees" to deal with certain tasks, but these organs are merely "consultative" and have "limited validities". In other words what we have here is a directly-democratic grassroots syndicalist organisation that is not organised according to the usual top-down "democratic centralist" model in which the union executive controls the membership. Here, the control is exercised the other way around, making a good argument for the FWCUI to be included by anarchist analysts among the rising number of "alternative syndicalist" unions in countries as diverse as Mexico and Switzerland, with whom the resurgent revolutionary anarchist, revolutionary syndicalist and

anarcho-syndicalist movements have much in common. - Source: <http://www.uuiraq.org/>