

***The Revolution***  
**Helen Chapin Metz**

## **Bazargan and the Provisional Government**

Mehdi Bazargan became the first prime minister of the revolutionary regime in February 1979. Bazargan, however, headed a government that controlled neither the country nor even its own bureaucratic apparatus. Central authority had broken down. Hundreds of semi-independent revolutionary committees, not answerable to central authority, were performing a variety of functions in major cities and towns across the country. Factory workers, civil servants, white-collar employees, and students were often in control, demanding a say in running their organizations and choosing their chiefs. Governors, military commanders, and other officials appointed by the prime minister were frequently rejected by the lower ranks or local inhabitants. A range of political groups, from the far left to the far right, from secular to ultra-Islamic, were vying for political power, pushing rival agendas, and demanding immediate action from the prime minister. Clerics led by Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti established the Islamic Republican Party (IRP). The party emerged as the organ of the clerics around Khomeini and the major political organization in the country. Not to be outdone, followers of more moderate senior cleric Shariatmadari established the Islamic People's Republican Party (IPRP) in 1979, which had a base in Azarbaijan, Shariatmadari's home province.

Moreover, multiple centers of authority emerged within the government. As the supreme leader, Khomeini did not consider himself bound by the government. He made policy pronouncements, named personal representatives to key government organizations, established new institutions, and announced decisions without consulting his prime minister. The prime minister found he had to share power with the Revolutionary Council, which Khomeini had established in January 1979 and which initially was composed of clerics close to Khomeini, secular political leaders identified with Bazargan, and two representatives of the armed forces. With the establishment of the provisional government, Bazargan and his colleagues left the council to form the cabinet. They were replaced by Khomeini aides from the Paris period, such as Abolhassan Bani Sadr and Sadeq Qotbzadeh, and by protégés of Khomeini's clerical associates. The cabinet was to serve as the executive authority. But the Revolutionary Council was to wield supreme decision-making and legislative authority.

Differences quickly emerged between the cabinet and the council over appointments, the role of the revolutionary courts and other revolutionary organizations, foreign policy, and the general direction of the Revolution. Bazargan and his cabinet colleagues were eager for a return to normalcy and rapid reassertion of central authority. Clerics of the Revolutionary Council, more responsive to the Islamic and popular temper of the mass of their followers, generally favored more radical economic and social measures. They also proved more willing and able to mobilize and to use the street crowd and the revolutionary organizations to achieve their ends.

In July 1979, Bazargan obtained Khomeini's approval for an arrangement he hoped would permit closer cooperation between the Revolutionary Council and the cabinet. Four clerical members of

the council joined the government, one as minister of interior and three others as undersecretaries of interior, education, and defense, while Bazargan and three cabinet colleagues joined the council. (All eight continued in their original positions as well.) Nevertheless, tensions persisted.

Even while attempting to put in place the institutions of the new order, the revolutionaries turned their attention to bringing to trial and punishing members of the former regime whom they considered responsible for carrying out political repression, plundering the country's wealth, implementing damaging economic policies, and allowing foreign exploitation of Iran. A revolutionary court set to work almost immediately in the school building in Tehran where Khomeini had set up his headquarters. Revolutionary courts were established in provincial centers shortly thereafter. The Tehran court passed death sentences on four of the shah's generals on February 16, 1979; all four were executed by firing squad on the roof of the building housing Khomeini's headquarters. More executions, of military and police officers, SAVAK agents, cabinet ministers, Majlis deputies, and officials of the shah's regime, followed on an almost daily basis.

The activities of the revolutionary courts became a focus of intense controversy. On the one hand, left-wing political groups and populist clerics pressed hard for "revolutionary justice" for miscreants of the former regime. On the other hand, lawyers' and human rights' groups protested the arbitrary nature of the revolutionary courts, the vagueness of charges, and the absence of defense lawyers. Bazargan, too, was critical of the courts' activities. At the prime minister's insistence, the revolutionary courts suspended their activities on March 14, 1979. On April 5, new regulations governing the courts were promulgated. The courts were to be established at the discretion of the Revolutionary Council and with Khomeini's permission. They were authorized to try a variety of broadly defined crimes, such as "sowing corruption on earth," "crimes against the people," and "crimes against the Revolution." The courts resumed their work on April 6. On the following day, despite international pleas for clemency, Hoveyda, the shah's prime minister for twelve years, was put to death. Attempts by Bazargan to have the revolutionary courts placed under the judiciary and to secure protection for potential victims through amnesties issued by Khomeini also failed. Beginning in August 1979, the courts tried and passed death sentences on members of ethnic minorities involved in antigovernment movements. Some 550 persons had been executed by the time Bazargan resigned in November 1979. Bazargan had also attempted, but failed, to bring the revolutionary committees under his control. The committees, whose members were armed, performed a variety of duties. They policed neighborhoods in urban areas, guarded prisons and government buildings, made arrests, and served as the execution squads of the revolutionary tribunals. The committees often served the interests of powerful individual clerics, revolutionary personalities, and political groups, however. They made unauthorized arrests, intervened in labor-management disputes, and seized property. Despite these abuses, members of the Revolutionary Council wanted to bring the committees under their own control, rather than eliminate them. With this in mind, in February 1979 they appointed Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani head of the Tehran revolutionary committee and charged him with supervising the committees countrywide. Mahdavi-Kani dissolved many committees, consolidated others, and sent thousands of committeemen home. But the committees, like the revolutionary courts, endured, serving as one of the coercive arms of the revolutionary government.

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In May 1979 Khomeini authorized the establishment of the Pasdaran (Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps or Revolutionary Guards). The Pasdaran was conceived by the men around Khomeini as a military force loyal to the Revolution and the clerical leaders, as a counterbalance for the regular army, and as a force to use against the guerrilla organizations of the left, which were also arming. Disturbances among the ethnic minorities accelerated the expansion of the Pasdaran.

Two other important organizations were established in this formative period. In March Khomeini established the Foundation for the Disinherited (Bonyad-e Mostazafin). The organization was to take charge of the assets of the Pahlavi Foundation and to use the proceeds to assist low-income groups. The new foundation in time came to be one of the largest conglomerates in the country, controlling hundreds of expropriated and nationalized factories, trading firms, farms, and apartment and office buildings, as well as two large newspaper chains. The Crusade for Reconstruction (Jihad-e Sazandegi or Jihad), established in June, recruited young people for construction of clinics, local roads, schools, and similar facilities in villages and rural areas. The organization also grew rapidly, assuming functions in rural areas that had previously been handled by the Planning and Budget Organization (which replaced the Plan Organization in 1973) and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Trouble broke out among the Turkomans, the Kurds, and the Arabic-speaking population of Khuzestan in March 1979. The disputes in the Turkoman region of Gorgan were over land rather than claims for Turkoman cultural identity or autonomy. Representatives of left-wing movements, active in the region, were encouraging agricultural workers to seize land from the large landlords. These disturbances were put down, but not without violence. Meanwhile, in Khuzestan, the center of Iran's oil industry, members of the Arabic-speaking population organized and demanded a larger share of oil revenues for the region, more jobs for local inhabitants, the use of Arabic as a semi-official language, and a larger degree of local autonomy. Because Arab states, including Iraq, had in the past laid claim to Khuzestan as part of the "Arab homeland," the government was bound to regard an indigenous movement among the Arabic-speaking population with suspicion. The government also suspected that scattered instances of sabotage in the oil fields were occurring with Iraqi connivance. In May 1979, government forces responded to these disturbances by firing on Arab demonstrators in Khorramshahr. Several demonstrators were killed; others were shot on orders of the local revolutionary court. The government subsequently quietly transferred the religious leader of the Khuzestan Arabs, Ayatollah Mohammad Taher Shubayr al Khaqani, to Qom, where he was kept under house arrest. These measures ended further protests.

The Kurdish uprising proved more deep-rooted, serious, and durable. The Kurdish leaders were disappointed that the Revolution had not brought them the local autonomy they had long desired. Scattered fighting began in March 1979 between government and Kurdish forces and continued after a brief cease-fire; attempts at negotiation proved abortive. One faction, led by Ahmad Muftizadeh, the Friday prayer leader in Sanandaj, was ready to accept the limited concessions offered by the government, but the Kurdish Democratic Party, led by Abdol-Rahman Qasemlu, and a more radical group led by Shaykh Ezz ad Din Husaini issued demands that the authorities in Tehran did not feel they could accept. These included the enlargement of the Kordestan region

to include all Kurdish-speaking areas in Iran, a specified share of the national revenue for expenditure in the province, and complete autonomy in provincial administration. Kurdish was to be recognized as an official language for local use and for correspondence with the central government. Kurds were to fill all local government posts and to be in charge of local security forces. The central government would remain responsible for national defense, foreign affairs, and central banking functions. Similar autonomy would be granted other ethnic minorities in the country. With the rejection of these demands, serious fighting broke out in August 1979. Khomeini, invoking his powers as commander in chief, used the army against other Iranians for the first time since the Revolution. No settlement was reached with the Kurds during Bazargan's prime ministership.

Because the Bazargan government lacked the necessary security forces to control the streets, such control passed gradually into the hands of clerics in the Revolutionary Council and the IRP, who ran the revolutionary courts and had influence with the Pasdaran, the revolutionary committees, and the club-wielding *hezbollahis*, or "partisans of the party of God." The clerics deployed these forces to curb rival political organizations. In June the Revolutionary Council promulgated a new press law and began a crackdown against the proliferating political press. On August 8, 1979, the revolutionary prosecutor banned the leading left-wing newspaper, *Ayandegan*. Five days later *hezbollahis* broke up a Tehran rally called by the National Democratic Front, a newly organized left-of-center political movement, to protest the *Ayandegan* closing. The Revolutionary Council then proscribed the front itself and issued a warrant for the arrest of its leader. *Hezbollahis* also attacked the headquarters of the Fadayan organization and forced the Mojahedin to evacuate their headquarters. On August 20, forty-one opposition papers were proscribed. On September 8, the two largest newspaper chains in the country, Kayhan and Ettelaat, were expropriated and transferred to the Foundation for the Disinherited.

In June and July 1979, the Revolutionary Council also passed a number of major economic measures, whose effect was to transfer considerable private sector assets to the state. It nationalized banks, insurance companies, major industries, and certain categories of urban land; expropriated the wealth of leading business and industrial families; and appointed state managers to many private industries and companies.