How Anarchists Saw the Iranian Revolution

Tom Goyens

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Eight weeks into Trump's war with Iran, the origins of the Islamic Republic are worth revisiting. The regime now confronting Washington was born in the upheaval of 1979, when the Shah's pro-Western monarchy collapsed and Ayatollah Khomeini seized the revolutionary moment. But the Iranian Revolution was no unified uprising. The anti-Shah movement brought together a volatile mix of factions: secular nationalists, pro-Soviet Communists, Marxist guerrillas, religious left-wing militants, and Islamic fundamentalists. By 1980, Khomeini had outmaneuvered his rivals and consolidated a regime that has endured ever since.

How did anarchists interpret these dramatic events as they unfolded amid violent direct action and repression, propaganda, and ruthless power politics? These were hardly new phenomena. Anarchists had been analyzing such features of radical upheaval since the French Revolution. But was Iran different?

To explore that question, I returned to the archives and examined some twenty articles published in the European anarchist press at the time. Their writers pieced together events largely from Western media reports and, on occasion, from correspondents inside Iran itself. What follows is not a comprehensive study, but rather a thematic snapshot of the libertarian[1] response to one of the late twentieth century's defining revolutions—an event that, forty-seven years later, has once again returned to the headlines.

Shared Struggle Against Domination

Demonstrations against the Shah's regime spread across Iran throughout 1978 and were met with escalating violence. One of the regime's most feared instruments was SAVAK, the secret police, notorious for torture and assassination. In January, several thousand people protested in the religious center of Qom, where security forces killed several demonstrators.

By September, the Shah had declared martial law. Soon afterward came further bloodshed at Jaleh Square in Tehran. The most shocking event of the year was the torching of the Cinema Rex in Abadan on August 19, which killed between 370 and 470 people. Though widely blamed at the time on SAVAK, the attack was later traced to Islamist militants targeting what they saw as Western decadence.

The anarchist press unequivocally condemned the Shah and welcomed the broad struggle against domination. In the wake of the summer violence, the West German anarchist paper *Der Schwarze Gockler* [The Black Rooster] emphasized the temporary unity of Iran's diverse opposition—ethnic, religious, and political groups joined in common resistance.

The paper also interpreted the Abadan cinema fire—wrongly, as it turned out—as a likely regime operation, insisting that "the only ones capable of such barbarity are always those in power." The claim reflected a familiar anarchist distrust of official narratives. In the same article, titled "Long Live Tyrannicide," the destruction of banks, party offices, and state buildings was praised as a rational response to oppression.[2]

Enthusiasm for popular revolt was tempered by anxiety that one form of domination might simply replace another, a theme to which we will return. In September 1978, for example, the French anarchist Marie-Madeleine Hermet published the first of several thoughtful reflections in

[1] The term 'libertarian' refers to the common European meaning of anti-authoritarian socialism, not the American meaning of free market, minimal government ideology.

[2] "Es lebe der Tyrannenmord," *Der schwarze Gockler* (Karlsruhe), Sep 1978.

Le Monde Libertaire. A former Catholic missionary turned atheist libertarian, Hermet approached events in Iran with caution rather than celebration.

"Is it a mass movement?" she asked, or merely "an outburst of religious fanaticism?" While acknowledging the courage of the crowds and the legitimacy of their grievances, she doubted whether the revolt was truly emancipatory. Widespread illiteracy, she argued, made many people "even more unconditionally devoted to religious leaders than to political ones." What troubled her most was the possibility of "a revolution of a religious type…"[3]

By January 1979, the French anarchist Alain Sauvage also questioned where the revolt was heading. The rebellion was broad and powerful, he argued, but united only negatively—against the Shah. Such unity was tactical and temporary, and "cannot fail to break apart as soon as a new regime takes power in Tehran."[4]

Writing in London's *Freedom*, Shahin likewise admired the uprising while fearing its outcome. Yet he insisted that one achievement could not be denied: the "self-activity" of ordinary people who had, "by their own will, brought down a system."[5]

Anti-Imperialism

For anarchist commentators, the Iranian Revolution could not be understood solely as a domestic revolt against the Shah. It unfolded within a larger system of imperial power, Cold War rivalry, capitalist dependency, and strategic control. Yet these writers differed on whether the revolution might break this system or merely exchange one form of domination for another. Far from being merely "anti-American," the libertarian press offered a multi-layered critique of empire.

The Shah was rarely seen as an autonomous ruler but as a client sustained by Western power. According to *Der schwarze Glockler*, the United States was the real "power behind the throne."[6] Hermet, writing in 1978, offered a broader geopolitical reading. She stressed Iran's oil wealth, strategic Cold War location, and the involvement not only of the United States, but also Britain, the Soviet Union, China, and West Germany. "It thus appears," she concluded, "that the Shah's dictatorship rests on economic and strategic considerations." Domestic despotism and foreign domination are intertwined.[7]

If the Shah was a client ruler, Iran itself appeared as a geopolitical prize. Several commentators saw the superpowers treating Iran less as a people than as strategic territory. Alain Sauvage argued that, for Washington, Iran served as a bastion against Soviet influence in the Middle East. Once the Shah's regime began to crumble, the central question became how to preserve that alignment.

Sauvage suspected that the United States was less interested in saving the monarch than in managing succession. Khomeini, he warned, might prove an acceptable replacement if he remained capable of interpreting religious rule in ways that did not "hinder the development of capitalism and consumer society."[8]

[3] Hermet, "Les troubles en Iran: Révolution, Islam et socialisme," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Sep 14, 1978.

[4] Sauvage, "Un peuple en march, mais vers quoi?" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Jan 4, 1979.

[5] *Freedom*, Feb 10, 1979.

[6] "Es lebe der Tyrannenmord."

[7] Hermet, "Les troubles en Iran."

[8] Sauvage, "Un peuple en march, mais vers quoi?"

Yet empire was not understood as exclusively Anglo-American. Anarchists often universalized domination rather than moralizing only against the West. In March 1979, one month after Khomeini consolidated power, the celebrated French anarchist writer Maurice Joyeux (1910–1991) published a polemical essay arguing that the "sham revolutionaries" invoking Islam were helping to strengthen "the spiritual imperialism of the Muslim world." What the world was witnessing, he wrote, was the "classic interplay of imperialisms."[9]

A similar dual critique of imperialism and religious domination appeared in the Detroit anarchist journal *Fifth Estate* in December 1979. The ongoing hostage crisis, it argued, was being used to inflame nationalism and xenophobia. "We spit on the American flag and the Iranian flag, on all flags." Yet the journal was equally hostile to the new regime, describing Islam as containing the psychological elements needed to mobilize the population "around a program of self-sacrifice and submission."[10]

Not all libertarian anti-imperialism took the same form. Whereas Maurice Joyeux portrayed Iran as a battleground of rival imperialisms—Western, Marxist, and Islamic—leaving little room for revolutionary hope, the Spanish anarcho-syndicalist paper *Solidaridad Obrera* approached events through the lens of the struggle for social and economic autonomy. Contrasting Henry Kissinger's call for an American military presence with Abolhassan Bani-Sadr's plea for an economy that "produces for itself," the paper briefly entertained the possibility that Shiism might support decentralized forms of social organization. Even here, however, the central question remained whether genuine self-management could emerge from a movement already captured by new authorities.[11]

Against the New Masters

If anti-imperialism led anarchists to examine the foreign forces surrounding Iran, anti-authoritarianism shaped how they judged the revolution itself. For these writers, the central question was never simply whether the Shah would fall, but what kind of power would replace him. Their answer was stark: unless hierarchy itself was dismantled, revolution would merely change uniforms. Domination, not just a particular regime, is the root problem.

Writing in November 1978, Marie-Madeleine Hermet sharpened this classic anarchist critique by turning from state to ideology itself: not only rulers, but doctrines. She feared that the Iranian Revolution might harden into a crusade in which "the New Bibles being brandished are, alongside the Judaic and the Christian, the Qur'an, Capital, Mein Kampf, and the Little Red Book."[12] Sacred texts and secular dogmas alike, she suggested, demanded obedience rather than freedom.

A few months later, in February 1979, with Khomeini ascendant, Hermet believed events were confirming her fears. What did Iranians truly hope for, she asked? If they sought individual autonomy, equality, and freedom of thought and action, disappointment surely awaited them. Hopefully, they did not wish "to pass from the condition of slaves of the Shah to that of slaves of Allah and of a religious potentate." Deeply sensitive to what she saw as the stultifying effects of

[9] Joyeux, "En Iran, face à la réaction religieuse, ce sont les femmes qui portent l'espoir des peuples arabes abrutis par l'Islam!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Mar 22, 1979.

[10] "Crisis in Iran—None for Me, Thanks," *Fifth Estate*, Dec 4, 1979.

[11] "La cara oculta del Irán," *Solidaridad Obrera* (Barcelona), Apr 20, 1979.

[12] Hermet, "Révolution, Oui! Croisade, Non!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Nov 16, 1978.

revealed religion, she ended with a severe warning: "as long as a book, even if it be the Qur'an, decides for people, those people can never claim to have come of age."[13]

By April, after the revolutionary government began executing supporters of the old order, the earlier warnings about a fresh authoritarianism seemed vindicated. "The case of Iran allowed for no revolutionary hopes of any kind from the outset," wrote Fausta B. in the Italian anarchist paper *Rivista Anarchica*. The mass movement against the Shah, the author argued, had drawn much of its strength from the religion embodied by Khomeini. "But was all this not foreseeable?" Fausta B. asked, "Was it not known that the struggle served to replace one power with another—one even more terrible because it has been rooted in people's consciousness for millennia?"[14]

On December 3, 1979, a new constitution making Khomeini the Supreme Leader of Iran was approved by an official 98%, though large sections of the population boycotted the referendum. An editorial in *Le Monde Libertaire* argued that beneath the language of faith lay a familiar struggle for power among competing elites, especially within the clergy. In the East as in the West, the paper observed, "all clericalisms conceal, beneath the verses of faith, the ambitions of a caste." By then, the revolutionary mystique had faded, revealing ordinary power politics beneath sacred language.[15]

By the end of 1979, many libertarian observers concluded that Iran had not abolished authority but sanctified it. They distrusted any institution claiming sacred or ideological authority over human beings. The language of faith, they argued, concealed an old drama: rival elites competing for command while ordinary people remained subjects.

From the beginning, anarchists suspected that Iran's revolution might end not in freedom, but in clerical rule. Today, with the benefit of hindsight, the religious character of the revolution appears obvious. But during 1978 and early 1979, events in Iran remained fluid and uncertain. Anarchists nevertheless sensed the danger early. Long hostile to clerical authority and the quite tyranny of piety, they viewed theocratic politics as inherently hostile to human emancipation.

Amid the protests of late 1978, the French anarchist and former missionary Marie-Madeleine Hermet noticed that revolutionary energy among the poor and illiterate masses was increasingly expressed in religious terms. More troubling still was what she described as a "cult of personality surrounding Ayatollah Khomeini," which gave the anti-Shah uprising the "air of a crusade."[16]

Even if Shiite modernists collaborated with Marxist-leaning intellectuals toward something resembling "Islamic socialism," Hermet doubted such a synthesis would be viable. An alliance between the mullahs and Marxists, she believed, would prove deeply "unsettling."[17]

Drawing on history, Hermet reminded readers that revolutions often end not in liberation, but in restored order. She sharpened the point with a striking image: "The Crusaders were well-armed 'soldiers' when they entered Jerusalem. So it may well be a Muslim army, with red battalions, that will restore order in Iran!"[18]

Other libertarian writers worried less about Khomeini as an individual than about the clerical machinery surrounding him. Shahin, writing in *Freedom*, warned that religious power flowed through a vast network of mullahs and mosques that shaped everyday life. "It's the bigotry of

[13] Hermet, "Une révolution rétrograde," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Feb 15, 1979.

[14] Fausta B., "Se Komeini Fosse Una Donna," *Rivista Anarchica* (Milan), April 1979.

[15] "Iran: La Corde Raide," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Dec 13, 1979.

[16] Hermet, "Les Troubles en Iran: Révolution, Islam et socialisme," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Sep 14, 1978.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Hermet, "Révolution, oui ! Croisade, non!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Nov 16, 1978.

hundreds of minor officials which would be the problem," wrote Shahin, "Think of priests in Ireland."[19]

Not all anarchist observers were equally alarmed in the early months of 1979. Writing in January, Alain Sauvage argued that although Islam tended "to dull and regiment the masses," Shiism might still allow a more positive political evolution. Besides, he asked, "how could one imagine a regime worse than that of the Shah of Iran?"[20]

After February 11, 1979, however, the direction of the revolution became harder to ignore. The Shah's regime collapsed, Khomeini took power, and the institutional foundations of the Islamic Republic rapidly took shape. The Islamic Revolutionary Guards were established in May, and by June, Khomeini was denouncing liberals and leftists alike as counter-revolutionaries hostile to Islam.

To many libertarian commentators, the revolution now seemed to be confirming their worst suspicions. Religion had become the central mechanism of domination. Hermet declared the events in Iran a "retrograde revolution," the opposite of genuine emancipatory.[21] The Italian paper *Rivista Anarchica* argued that Islamic authority was even more entrenched than political dictatorship because it was "rooted in people's consciousness for millennia."[22]

In July 1979, the German anarchist paper *Freie Presse* reported on the criminalization of homosexuality under the new regime and condemned revolutionary courts carrying out executions for sexual or moral offenses.[23] One form of domination, the paper argued, had simply given way to another. Drawing comparisons to Nazi Germany and Castro's Cuba—where "deviants" were sent to forced-labor camps—it concluded bitterly: "In Persia, the imperial plague has been driven out by religious cholera."[24]

By late 1979, Iranian anarchist exile and translator Rahsepar was confirming many of the earlier libertarian fears. Writing in *Le Monde Libertaire*, he argued that the uprising of 1978 had emerged not from political parties, but from the people "under the influence of religion." These religious forces, he wrote, "succeeded in channeling the anger of the masses into their own structures. They had 3,000 study circles and 180,000 mullahs." Rahsepar also confirmed severe repression against homosexuals and dissidents. The religious organization was merging completely with the structure of the state, creating a system in which laws could neither be challenged nor changed.[25]

The Left's Illusions

If anarchists distrusted clerical rule, they were no less wary of a revolutionary Left eager to take over the state. The uprising of 1978 and early 1979 brought together Marxist intellectuals, guerrilla organizations, and, as one German anarchist paper sneered, "dogmatic communists of

[19] Shahin in *Freedom*, Feb 10, 1979.

[20] Sauvage, "Un peuple en marche, mais vers quoi?" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Jan 4, 1979.

[21] Hermet, "Une révolution rétrograde," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Feb 15, 1979.

[22] Fausta B., "Se Komeini Fosse Una Donna," *Rivista Anarchica* (Milan), April 1979. #3

[23] These reports are documented by the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (https://iranhrdc.org/denied-identity-human-rights-abuses-against-irans-lgbt-community/#511_executions_in_the_immediate_aftermath_of_the_revolution).

[24] "Todesurteil gegen Homosexuelle," *Freie Presse* (Wetzlar), July 14, 1979. #1,2.

[25] Rahsepar, "Iran d'hier a aujourd'hui," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Nov 22, 1979; see also "Crisis in Iran" *Fifth Estate*, Dec 4, 1979.

the Moscow school."[26] To anarchists, these groups represented the authoritarian Left: movements that claimed to speak for the people while trying to centralize power in their own hands.

This fear ran through much of the libertarian response to the Iranian Revolution. Writing in November 1978, Marie-Madeleine Hermet worried that both the "sword and the censer" might fall into "feverish and bloodthirsty hand," whether those of "ayatollahs, of Marxists (Leninist or otherwise), of Stalinists or Trotskyists, of Maoists."[27] The danger, in her eyes, was not simply one ideology replacing another, but the recurring spectacle of revolutionary elites claiming the right to rule in the name of liberation.

For more than a century, anarchists had defined themselves against what they regarded as the authoritarian Left. They cared less about the traditional divide between Left and Right than about the divide between libertarian and authoritarian politics: between decentralization and centralized power. The German anarchist Rudolf Rocker warned in 1947 that the modern "extreme left" had embraced "a new absolutism" far more expansive than the monarchies of the past.[28]

To many anarchists, Iran revealed how badly the Left could misread a revolution. Maurice Joyeux saw nothing surprising in Khomeini's rise to power. What puzzled him instead was the shock of the Left itself. "What is less understandable," he wrote, "is the disapproving astonishment of men of the Left and far Left" confronted with a pattern that had repeated itself for two centuries: one ruling faction overthrowing another with the support of ordinary people, only to establish a new form of domination.

In Joyeux's view, parts of the Left were helping to deceive the masses while reproducing the very power structures they claimed to oppose. What he called a "catch-all Marxist leftism" had become an exhausted and coercive ideology that "pushes peoples into hopeless struggles where they will find only new masters."[29]

Others saw the same pattern repeating across the twentieth century. Writing in *Rivista Anarchica*, Fausta B. pointed to the recurring illusion of "revolution" in Russia, Cuba, China, and Portugal. Echoing Joyeux, the author wondered how the Left could repeatedly lose "its capacity for understanding, analysis, and objectivity?"[30]

For many anarchists, the events of 1979 fit a pattern visible since the French Revolution itself: ordinary people overthrowing one system of domination only to fall under another. Whether clothed in nationalism, Marxism, or religion, movements claiming absolute truth and centralized authority tended to produce new ruling classes. The tragedy of Iran, in their eyes, was not simply that a revolution had failed, but that so many on the Left had once again mistaken power for liberation. The problem was not only who held power, but how power itself was exercised.

Freedom of Choice

The oppression of women in Iran remains one of the clearest expressions of the theocratic order established in 1979. The nationwide "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising that followed the

[26] "Es lebe der Tyrannenmord," *Schwarze Gockler*, Sep 1978.

[27] Hermet, "Révolution, oui ! Croisade, non!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Nov 16, 1978. #4,5.

[28] Rocker, *Zur Betrachtung der Lage in Deutschland : d. Möglichkeiten e. freiheitl. Bewegung* (New York; London; Stockholm, 1947), 9.

[29] Joyeux. "En Iran, face à la réaction religieuse, ce sont les femmes qui portent l'espoir des peuples arabes abrutis par l'Islam!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), Mar 22, 1979. #4.

[30] Fausta B., "Se Komeini Fosse Una Donna," *Rivista Anarchica* (Milan), April 1979. #1.

death of Mahsa Amini in police custody in September 2022 revealed not only the courage of Iranian women but also the unresolved struggle over bodily autonomy, public morality, and state power that began with the Islamic Revolution itself.

More than any other group, women may well feel a particularly bitter sense of betrayal. In the late 1970s, women of all classes and persuasions played a major role in the movement to overthrow the Shah, even though the monarchy had introduced a limited, top-down modernization. Scholars have often focused less on what women contributed to the revolution than on what the new regime later imposed on them. The anarchist writings discussed here also rarely mention women protesters.

Throughout 1978 and early 1979, Khomeini encouraged and celebrated women's participation in the struggle against the Shah. Large numbers answered the call, joining demonstrations, encouraging male relatives to become active, or hosting anti-regime meetings in their homes. Khomeini and his allies needed the broadest possible coalition against the monarchy, and women were essential to that mobilization.

Yet even during this uneasy alliance, Khomeini never concealed his vision of a religiously ordered society grounded in gender hierarchy. "A nation whose respected women demonstrate in modest garb [*hijab*] to express their disgust with the Shah's regime," he proclaimed, "such a nation will be victorious."[31] Khomeini welcomed women into the revolution, but not into equality.

Writing in *Freedom* on February 10, 1979, the day before the Iranian armed forces stood down and allowed Khomeini to assume power, Shahin was among the first commentators to identify dress codes as a "symbolic test case" for Iran's future, especially for women. He predicted widespread harassment by what he called "self-appointed thought police." Shahin also noted that the little "liberation" women experienced under the Shah largely concerned clothing and public appearance rather than any fundamental transformation of women's social position.[32]

Shahin's warning pointed to a broader historical reality: struggles over personal appearance can become larger conflicts over power and conformity. The right to choose one's appearance is not frivolous; it touches identity, dignity, and humanity itself. Conflicts over hair and dress have repeatedly served as flashpoints against coercive social norms. Afros in the United States symbolized Black pride and resistance; in the Soviet bloc, Western youth fashion was treated as ideological deviance; during China's Cultural Revolution, outward appearance became intensely politicized. In post-1979 Iran, however, such norms were not merely social pressures but legal mandates enforced through arrest and violence.

One of the first reactionary acts of the new regime was not the introduction of a new decree, but the abolition of an old one. In February 1979, the Family Protection Law, which had expanded women's rights in marriage and divorce, was dismantled. A series of new decrees followed in March. Women could no longer serve as judges. Divorce became the prerogative of the husband. Women who wished to keep their jobs were expected to appear veiled.

When International Women's Day arrived on March 8, over one hundred thousand women and men gathered in Tehran to protest the new restrictions, especially compulsory veiling. Demonstrators carried signs reading "We will fight against compulsory veil; down with dictatorship," and "'Women's Day of Emancipation is neither Western, nor Eastern, it is international." Women protesters were repeatedly assaulted in the streets.

[31] Quoted in Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 151.

[32] *Freedom*, February 10, 1979.

Despite the resistance, repression deepened. In June 1979, the education ministry banned co-educational schooling and shut down workplace day-care facilities, measures that pushed many women out of employment and back into the home.

By the summer, the revolutionary coalition had fractured. Many women who had supported the overthrow of the Shah now faced a new authoritarian order.

The rapid marginalization of women confirmed for many anarchist observers that the revolution had entered a counterrevolutionary phase. Yet anarchists did not entirely agree on what the women's movement represented, what its goals should be, or whether opposition to religious authority alone was sufficient to challenge broader structures of domination.

For the French anarchist writer Maurice Joyeux, the struggle of Iranian women exposed the fundamentally authoritarian character of political Islam. The title of his essay of March 1979 declared "In Iran, in the face of religious reaction, it is women who carry the hope of peoples benumbed by Islam!" He condemned what he called the "spiritual imperialism" of several Middle Eastern regimes and argued that the most radical position was "the will of women to break with the Qur'an and to live freely." "Only women go to the heart of the problem," he wrote, "for only they rise up against what is essential: the moral dictatorship of spiritual imperialism."

Yet this interpretation simplified the diversity of Iranian women's views. Many women who opposed compulsory veiling remained religious and objected less to Islam itself than to the state's monopolization of moral choice.[33]

Other anarchist writers worried that focusing exclusively on religious oppression or legal discrimination did not go far enough. Writing in April 1979, Fausta Bizzozero, cofounder of *Rivista Anarchica*, praised the courage of the Women's Day demonstrators but argued that many of their demands remained limited to civil and legal reforms. The right to work, dress freely, and enjoy sexual autonomy were essential freedoms, she acknowledged, yet demands of this sort "do not in any way call power or the class structure into question."

Bizzozero also rejected explanations that reduced the Iranian crisis to male domination alone. Her remarks were prompted by statements made by American feminist Kate Millett who attended the Women's Day demonstration before being arrested and deported. Millett denounced both Khomeini and Pope John Paul II as embodiments of male chauvinist authority. Bizzozero objected that replacing male rulers with female ones would not dismantle hierarchy or coercion. "If, instead of Khomeini, it were Indira Gandhi, and instead of the Pope a woman pope," she asked, "would that change anything?"[34]

Other anarchist observers were more encouraged by the organizational forms emerging within the Iranian women's movement itself. The Canadian anarchafeminist paper *Open Road* reported that Iranian feminists had organized a Committee for Women's Rights and raised funds to publish a newspaper. In New York, activists created a Circle for Support for Iranian Women, while in London an Iranian Women's Solidarity Group worked to challenge media portrayals of Iranian women.[35]

The Iranian anarchist exile Rahespar, writing in *Le Monde Libertaire*, argued that the Iranian feminist movement possessed a distinctly "libertarian character" precisely because it operated

[33] Joyeux. "En Iran, face à la réaction religieuse, ce sont les femmes qui portent l'espoir des peuples arabes abrutis par l'Islam!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), March 22, 1979.

[34] Fausta B[izzozero], "Se Komeini Fosse Una Donna," *Rivista Anarchica* (Milan), April 1979.

[35] "Revolting Women in Iran," *Open Road*, Summer 1979.

outside party structures. Small autonomous groups coordinated protests and publications without centralized leadership.[36]

Most anarchist observers agreed that the resistance of Iranian women revealed both the authoritarian direction of the revolution and the persistence of autonomous struggles against state attempts to regulate everyday life and bodily autonomy.

An Anarchist Alternative?

Anarchists did not simply criticize the emerging Islamic regime or denounce Marxist authoritarianism. During 1978–79, several libertarian writers outlined a decentralized alternative based on federalism, self-management, and the abolition of the state.[37]

Rahespar, sensitive to Iran's ethnic diversity, advocated a "federative system among all ethnic minorities." In his view, the creation of separate nation-states, including a Kurdish state, would merely reproduce new forms of dependency and foreign influence. He criticized the Kurdish Democratic Party for its Marxist-Leninist orientation and rejection of decentralization. Ethnic groups should defend their identities, Rahespar argued, but outside the framework of the nation-state.[38]

As we have seen, many anarchists feared that the Iranian Revolution would merely replace one hierarchy with another. Writing in November 1978, Hermet argued that a genuine revolution had to reject not only the monarchy, but also the army, political parties, and clerical authority. "If any kind of hierarchy emerges," she warned, "the Revolution is doomed."[39] Sauvage likewise saw ordinary Iranians trapped in a geopolitical struggle while political and religious organizations maneuvered to seize power. Liberation, he argued, could not come through "religious or political channels."[40] Shahin warned that the uprising lacked a genuine "libertarian substructure" and was therefore likely to produce another authoritarian regime.[41]

Events during 1979 seemed to confirm these anarchist fears. Following the seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979, *Le Monde Libertaire* argued that the hostage crisis was not simply a spontaneous student action but a political maneuver involving leftist groups operating under the protection of Khomeini's regime. The paper condemned a form of "leftism" that avoided direct confrontation with clerical power and instead reinforced the new Islamic state. The students, it argued, had missed a more effective political strategy: using the embassy documents to stage a symbolic "trial of American imperialism."[42]

More broadly, the author warned that revolutions often destroy their emancipatory aims through extremism, violence, and new forms of authoritarianism. Unless Iranian revolutionaries rejected both religious and secular fatalism, the revolution would merely reproduce another oppressive order.[43]

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[36] Rahsepar, "Iran d'hier a aujourd'hui," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), November 22, 1979.

[37] "Es lebe der Tyrannenmord," *Schwarze Gockler*, September 1978.

[38] Rahsepar, "Iran d'hier a aujourd'hui," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), November 22, 1979.

[39] Hermet, "Révolution, oui ! Croisade, non!" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), November 16, 1978.

[40] Sauvage, "Un peuple en marche, mais vers quoi?" *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), January 4, 1979

[41] *Freedom*, February 10, 1979.

[42] "Iran: La Corde Raide," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), December 13, 1979.

[43] Ibid.

Despite mounting repression, libertarian groups did emerge inside revolutionary Iran. In May 1979, activists formed the Malatesta Group, named after the Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta, to promote libertarian socialism based on self-management and federalism. The group rejected terrorism and called for cooperation among radical currents.[44] Around the same time, the Persian-language anarchist bulletin *Nafarman* ("Rebellious"), probably edited under a pseudonym by Ahmad Reza Ravanbakhsh, began circulating clandestinely.[45]

Even during the Iran–Iraq War, anarchist activity persisted. In October 1980, reports from a "Tehran Libertarian Group" appeared in *Nafarman* and were later reprinted abroad in *Le Monde Libertaire* and *Freedom.*[46] Distribution had become dangerous, but libertarian publications from abroad still reached readers inside Iran.[47]

[44] "Naissance du groupe Malatesta," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), June 28, 1979

[45] "Communiqué," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), March 13, 1980.

[46] "Informations internationales," *Le Monde Libertaire* (Paris), October 23, 1980.

[47] "From the Home Front Tehran," *Freedom*, October 25, 1980.

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Originally three parts, I have merged them in this post. Here are the original links to part 2 and 3: https://tomgoyens.substack.com/p/how-anarchists-saw-the-iranian-revolution-a46, https://tomgoyens.substack.com/p/how-anarchists-saw-the-iranian-revolution-9aa

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