

IN THESE TIMES



There is little to cheer about

By Fred Halliday

LONDON

THE END OF THE 14-MONTH conflict between Iran and the U.S. may bring relief to the hostages and their families and enable Iran to improve its international diplomatic position. Yet, as one chapter of this dispute ends, another may be about to start. Inside Iran, the forces competing for power will now rival each other in claiming credit for the end of the affair—for successfully confronting the U.S. and for bringing about a solution that will be seen as a victory for Iran.

Both factions also can be expected to compete for access to the material prize of the final settlement: some \$8 billion that Washington has handed over. Since the war with Iraq began on Sept. 22, Iran has had, in effect, two arms-purchasing policies—one carried out by the official army and its supporter Bani-Sadr, the other by the *Pasdaran*, or Islamic irregulars, backed by Premier Rajai and his clerical allies. Each group will now be keen to use the assets released by the U.S. to strengthen its hand. And one can expect perhaps even greater conflict between the two factions now that one major threat—that from the U.S.—has been removed by the hostage settlement.

One can expect, too, that the initial mood of patriotic relief in the U.S. will not last for long. The hostages themselves may be tempted to point out that the whole crisis could have been avoided in the first place if Washington had listened to the advice of its Tehran embassy staff and refused the Shah admission to a New York hospital in October 1979. If the hostages are grateful to Carter for securing their release, they may also blame him for his initial blunder.

The Iranian decision to press for a settlement of the hostage issue reflects a number of changes in the domestic balance of forces in that country. The war with Iraq has certainly contributed to this. It has highlighted just how diplomatically isolated Iran is—neither the UN, nor the Islamic League, nor the non-aligned countries have even formally condemned what is a clear act of aggression by Iraq. Iran also needs its U.S. funds to replace materiel lost on the battlefield if it is to sustain the long, drawn-out conflict with Iraq that now seems probable.

More than the problems of war.

But the war has not made the Iranians as immediately pliant as many in the West initially expected, and there was no direct connection between the outbreak of the war, with all its attendant problems, and Iran's new willingness to negotiate on the hostages.

The war broke out on Sept. 22. Yet it

was a speech by Khomeini earlier in September, followed by a confirming vote in the Iranian Parliament on the ayatollah's four conditions, that set the context for the present round of talks. And though some have suggested that the Russians tipped Tehran authorities off about a possible Iraqi attack, no linkage between the two issues can be shown. Moreover, the economic pressure on Iran caused by the war seems now to have been exaggerated; though the Abadan refinery was knocked out, Iran has been able to continue exporting oil in its crude form at a rate of about one billion barrels a day, bringing in revenues of around \$1 billion a month—just below the pre-war level.

A more decisive factor in altering Iran's stance has been the shift in domestic alignment. It was a conflict between the militant Islamic clerical faction and the more cautious "liberal" grouping that first prompted the seizure of the



hostages on Nov. 4, 1979. While there was widespread anger in Iran over the fact that the Shah had been admitted to New York—and little trust in the U.S. claim that the ex-monarch was in fact seriously ill—it was not anger alone that prompted the organized assault on the embassy and the well-mobilized mass demonstrations that followed. Rather, the clerical forces saw an opportunity to discredit the then-government of Mehdi Bazargan and to keep up the pressure on Bani-Sadr when he was elected president a few months later.

Most of the militants holding the hostages were from a group called the Organization of Muslim Strugglers led by the right-wing ideologue Dr. Peiman. Khomeini did not, on present evidence, authorize the seizure; but he had prepared the political climate in which it oc-

curred by a particularly strong denunciation of the U.S. two days before, and his son, Ahmed Khomeini, was implicated. Once the seizure occurred, the Imam saw fit to give it his blessing and to prevent any precipitous solution as long as there was not a consensus in Iran on how the matter should be resolved. What was at stake, however, was not primarily Iran's relations with the U.S. but rather the distribution of political power within the new Islamic republic.

The benefits at home.

For months on end the clerical forces refused to give ground on the hostage issue. They saw it as a way of heaping discredit on the "liberals" who could be accused of wanting to maintain links with the West. It mobilized great waves of enthusiasm across Iran, drawing on the history of deep resentment of U.S. support for the Shah. And it helped bring most of the left behind the clerical forces, thereby further isolating "liberal" remnants of the secular bloc.

Nor were the international repercussions such as to offset these domestic gains. Each U.S. move appeared to confirm the validity of the militants' position. The seizure of Iranian assets, the threats from Washington, and finally the failed Tabas raid in April 1980 all helped consolidate the position of the hostage-takers inside Iran and projected

employment, even the most steadfast Islamic militants could see that it was the time to seek a settlement. Reagan would be in the White House at the end of January, and then, as Iran was beginning the negotiating process, the war with Iraq broke out.

The bad outweighs the good.

It may be a long time before a thorough evaluation of the hostage conflict can be made, but certain pros and cons are already clear.

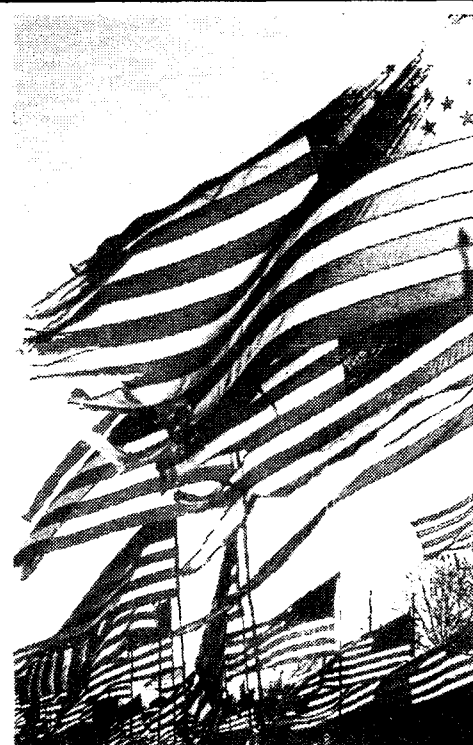
On Iran's side two points can be made. The first is that on any balance sheet of illegality and criminal behavior the verdict is still overwhelmingly in Iran's favor. The U.S. organized the coup that overthrew a democratically elected government in 1953 and for a quarter of a century colluded with the bloody dictatorship of the Shah. When Reagan talks about "barbarians" he is seeking to occlude this past U.S. criminality. Moreover, the Iranians have handed back their captives unharmed. Yet Reagan is apparently prepared to send arms to Islamic militants who, far from handing back their captives, boast that they kill their prisoners and mutilate them before doing so, tearing out their eyes and chopping off their tongues—to wit, the Afghan rebels. Reagan's use of the term "barbarians" is, to say the least, selective.

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From South Korea to El Salvador, those likely to suffer from a new U.S. aggressiveness have the Ayatollah Khomeini to thank.

Iran's image as a center of revolutionary militance around the world. The Soviet Union made only the most tepid of criticisms of the embassy action and the American reaction to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan blew away whatever reserve for the U.S. Moscow might have retained. The disarray of NATO countries in response to U.S. calls for a complete boycott of Iran was also welcome news in Tehran.

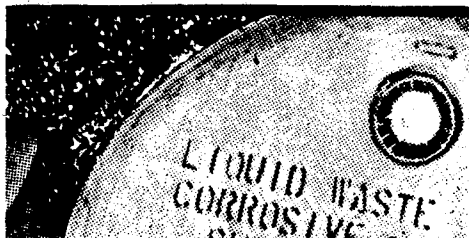
But by late summer of 1980, this situation had altered. A new parliament had been elected and the clerical forces had finally secured the nomination of Mohammed Ali Rajai as prime minister, thereby establishing a political base from which they could take the initiative on the hostage issue and use it to advantage. The level of mass militancy could not be sustained indefinitely, and sooner or later the U.S. could be expected to launch new military attacks that would, even if they failed, cause serious damage to Iran. With growing revolt in the provinces, disaffection in the bazaars, and rising un-



IN THE NATION

THE ENVIRONMENT

Communities don't wait for Washington to act on hazards



Feds overrule local controls on nuke cargo

By Mark Alan Pinsky

WASHINGTON

IN AN ELEVENTH-HOUR RULE-MAKING, the Carter administration's Department of Transportation (DOT) has issued new regulations on the transport of radioactive materials that would pre-empt some 100 state and local actions to either restrict or prohibit radioactive cargoes in densely populated areas.

The new regulations, which would not take effect until February 1982, have drawn sharp criticism from environmentalists and anti-nuclear groups and from the National League of Cities, which immediately urged outgoing Secretary of Transportation Neil Goldschmidt to reject them. The day the rules were announced, New York representative Ted Weiss and Geraldine Ferraro introduced a bill in Congress to block their implementation.

It was a New York City ordinance that first prompted department action. In 1976 a provision was added to the New York City Health Code that put strict limits on radioactive shipments within city limits. That same year, Brookhaven Laboratories on Long Island—a research facility that relies on radioactive materials shipped through New York—asked the Department of Transportation to study whether the Health Code violated federal regulations.

When DOT determined that no clear federal rules existed, it initiated a rule-making proceeding in August 1978, invoking its authority under the Hazardous Materials Transportation Act of 1974. Proposed regulations were first issued in January 1980 and drew a heavy response from both Congress and the public. More than 1,000 written comments were received

from individuals and elected officials, and more than 1,600 pages of transcripts were compiled from seven public hearings. Some of these hearings, including a spirited session in New York, were scheduled only after members of Congress pressured DOT to widen public participation in the rulemaking process.

But the results of that process, critics say, gave short shrift to widespread public concern about the unnecessary risks of routing radioactive cargoes through communities. In fulfilling the seemingly neutral purpose of providing a uniform national standard, they charge, DOT has merely accommodated the nuclear industry by simplifying the regulatory process without strengthening safeguards. The new rules, according to one congressional aide, are "uniformly insufficient."

The DOT measure recommends interstate highways as the safest route, but allows individual states to plan alternative routes if they deem it necessary. If a state takes no action, the DOT's recommended interstate routes become official policy. The federal agency's decision to delay implementation of the regulations for approximately one year was made largely to facilitate states' consideration of alternatives, according to DOT spokesman Lee Stanton.

But observers expressed doubt that large states with methods to handle radioactive traffic could complete alternative route planning in one year—possibly leaving weak federal guidelines in place of more stringent state plans. (DOT spent approximately two-and-one-half years simply setting up general guidelines.)

Opponents also charge that the new regulations unjustly override the rights of states and municipalities to determine policy in this sensitive issue. (The National League of Cities was joined in trying to stop the regulations by the National Association of Counties, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Association of Attorneys General and the City of New York.)

In addition, the DOT's proposals for labelling different types of radioactive substances and for assessing risk have been attacked as too weak. According to David Berrick, anti-nuclear lobbyist for the Environmental Policy Center, the new regulations "contain no safety measures founded on methodology that could help states develop routing policy."

From another corner, the government's own Government Accounting Office has cited serious deficiencies in DOT pro-

grams to ensure the safe transport of both radioactive and toxic substances. According to a GAO study issued in November, injuries resulting from accidents involving hazardous materials more than tripled from 1971 to 1979 and property damage more than doubled over that same period. The GAO report—which considered the just-issued regulations in its investigation—concluded that "the Department can neither determine the extent of problems involved in transporting hazardous materials nor assure the Congress—and the American public—that it is using its limited staffing and funding resources efficiently and effectively."

Opposition to the regulations will continue, according to Fred Millar of the Potomac Alliance. "We have demonstrated widespread objection to the DOT," Millar said in an interview, "and we will keep up the pressure."

The City of New York—which has received no applications to ship radioactive cargo since its 1976 health code provision took effect—plans to take "some kind of legal action," according to Barry Schwartz, an attorney in the city's legal offices. Schwartz said the city is now studying the regulations and hopes to file suit by mid-February. And the DOT's Stanton indicated the Department expects additional legal challenges.

Mark Alan Pinsky works on Capitol Hill for Rep. Ted Weiss.



In one city, at least, you have a right to know

By Caron Chess

PHILADELPHIA

PHILADELPHIA WILL SOON BECOME the first place in the country where both workers and community residents have a "right to know" the names of toxic substances handled by local industry.

like Stockman, the simplest way to hack money away from the food stamp program would be to invoke existing law and reduce benefits across the board so as to bring the overall program into line with the current funding ceiling. But to do so might well trigger congressional debate, which in turn would provide the defenders with an opportunity to rally and beat off the attack.

Or Reagan could stick to his purist sentiments and seriously attempt to prune waste from the program by routing out the children who are stuffing themselves at the school lunch table. But that's more easily said than done, since every food stamp recipient would have to be hauled into the local welfare office and inspected for fraud and deception. Every recipient, in theory, at any rate, has the right of due process. Paring waste could turn into a costly administrative nightmare.

Finally, the new president could let the food stamp program alone, raise the

A legislative package adopted last week by the city council and virtually assured of the mayor's signature, will require every Philadelphia business to disclose which of a list of toxic chemicals they use, manufacture, store or discharge into the air. This data, along with information on the health effects of each chemical, will be kept on file, available to the public. The legislation also gives the city the authority to regulate the storage of toxics.

The toxics debate that has been raging across the country hit Philadelphia with full force after the Delaware Valley Toxics Coalition (DVTC)—a coalition of community, environmental and labor groups—initiated the right-to-know legislation. After seven months of bitter controversy, DVTC prevailed over determined opposition of both the city administration and local industry.

Even before public hearings on the matter, the stage was set for a classic confrontation. On one talk show after another, members of the coalition doggedly pointed out that Philadelphia has one of the highest cancer rates in the nation and that the public should have, at the very least, a right to know the names of chemicals to which they are exposed. The Chamber of Commerce warned that forcing businesses to divulge "trade secrets" would ultimately cost the city jobs as industry left for less restrictive locales. When Rohm & Haas, a leading industry opponent, took city council members on a plant tour, the coalition parried with a news conference at which Ralph Nader hailed the legislation as "a model for the rest of the nation."

By the day of the hearings, coalition outreach efforts had rallied the support of more than 40 organizations as diverse as the United Auto Workers, the Sierra Club and the Philadelphia Council of Neighborhood Organizations. According to Jim Moran, co-director of the Philadelphia Area Project on Occupational Safety and Health, a leading group in the coalition, the diversity of support ensured that "the legislation couldn't be dismissed simply as a labor question." (Although right-to-know bills have been passed in four states, Philadelphia's legislation is unique because it extends beyond the workplace and grants community residents access to information.)

The broad scope of the Philadelphia bill allowed the campaign to tap into the ongoing efforts to combat industrial pollution in several neighborhoods. As Jerry Balter, a Public Interest Law Center attorney who drafted DVTC's bill, put it, "The legislation dealt directly with people's lives, so they understood the need to become involved."

The extent of that involvement was evident during the hearings. More than 100 supporters of the bill donned surgical masks to dramatize their concern about toxics, packed the city council and

ceiling to maintain benefits this year, and plan a careful attack further along in his administration.

This is conservatism at its harshest. Not merely cruelty but illusion is running rampant. For the food stamp program is efficiently run and certainly is not ridden with substantial fraud. It already has been pared back to the bone. In itself the program is austere well beyond the level of savagery. It has fallen far behind the rate of inflation. Administrators say that five-sixths of the recipients cannot purchase minimally nutritious meals for \$1.25 a day. Added to which, the program is a useful way of reducing the food surplus. Indeed, on any rational ground it is difficult to explain the onslaught except by saying that Reagan's Republicans purely and simply hate the poor.

Alexander Cockburn and James Ridgeway write a regular column for the Village Voice, where this piece first appeared.

Stamps

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decline, food stamps make up the difference. In effect, food stamps are a form of revenue-sharing. A moderate Republican such as Governor William Milliken in Michigan would face havoc if Reagan were to dump Chrysler, throwing workers out of jobs, while at the same time cutting back social welfare programs.

Some farm groups, including the National Farmers Union, are moderately supportive of the food stamp program. Food stamps originally (before World War II) were conceived as a way to get rid of the farm surplus, and that purpose remains. That's why the program still is administered by the Department of Agriculture, not by Health and Human Services.

The effect of \$9 billion on farm products is substantial, especially in the

areas of dairy products, meat and cereals. But those familiar with the hoggish self-mystification of American farmers will not be surprised to find that many of these sturdy yeomen (themselves shot full of government aid like a hog with steroids) oppose their own self-interest out of undistilled class hatred for the recipients.

These then are the forces ranged for battle in Reagan's coming attack on social welfare programs. But the field of play itself makes the situation perilous.

Let them eat crow.

Because of general inflation and the steadily rising price of food (food prices are expected to climb by 15 percent this year), there's not enough money in the food stamp program to pay the benefits. Last year Congress had to appropriate extra funds. And this year's funding—\$9.8 billion—will run out in August, two months before the end of the fiscal year. For architects of Dunkirk economics

made front-page headlines.

The president of the fire fighters' union stressed the need for adequate information in order to take proper precautions when fighting industrial fires. Health professionals, economists and federal government officials countered industry's arguments with factual evidence.

While industry's hard-line position was predictable and relatively easy to combat, the city administration's vigorous opposition came close to defeating right-to-know. The legislation stalled in committee after the city proposed a watered-down version of DVTC's bill and attempted quietly to confuse council members with its complex counterproposal.

But the coalition responded to stepped-up industry lobbying with its own letter-writing, phone-ins and demonstrations and pulled the few strings available to it. Americans for Democratic Action's inside knowledge of the council was critical. As Moran put it, "Whatever ways you could campaign, I think we did it. We had countless strategy meetings fine-tuning it all."

After the chanting disruption of two council meetings, the committee agreed to reconsider the bill. Enough right-to-know supporters came to the committee meeting to thwart the city administration's attempts carefully to orchestrate defeat of the DVTC bill. Instead, the committee sent DVTC, industry and the city to the negotiating table to hammer out a new proposal. The legislative package recently voted out by council was the result.

"A year ago the city had hardly given a thought to the toxics problem. Now the public has forced the administration and industry into granting legislation regulating the emission and storage of toxics and granting workers and community residents the right to know about hazardous substances. We call that a victory," Balter said.

Caron Chess is a staff member at the Delaware Valley Toxics Coalition.



Reagan's man thinks silence is best solution

By David Lindorff

NEW YORK

NO ONE IS SURPRISED THAT Reagan's choice to head the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), Ben C. Rusche, comes to Washington from a very pro-nuclear corner—in this case, the South Carolina Energy Institute, of which he was executive director.

But what is particularly disturbing about Rusche, who as head of the NRC will have all of our health and safety in his hands, is his record as "health and safety" officer for the nation's largest chemical company, E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co. of Wilmington, Del.

That might sound like a count in his favor, particularly since—on paper—du Pont is one of the safest companies in the country to work for. But many of its plants in the South—especially in Rusche's own South Carolina—boast safety records that strain credulity. Take, for example, the 700-employee du Pont plant in Florence, S.C., which claims to have gone 3,127 calendar days and nearly 11 million man-hours without a day lost to an on-the-job injury. Or the 3,100-employee textile fibers plant in Kinston, N.C., that claims to have gone 620 calendar days and 10.2 million man-hours without a lost day.

Given that both plants are full of toxic chemicals, hot plastics and resins, heavy

equipment and the like, such statistics look too good to be true—and in fact they are. They exist because Rusche and his successors at the company systematically kept employees from collecting disability benefits or even reporting work-related injuries.

Du Pont is currently the target of a national organizing drive by the Steelworkers Union, which claims to have signed up a majority of workers at half the company's 100 plants. The major organizing issue at most of those plants has been health and safety.

Last year, while covering the Steelworkers' campaign, I met several victims of Du Pont's safety program—people with impaired hearing, mutilated hands, injured backs and other disabilities. All were from the Kinston plant, but none were listed as blemishes on its perfect safety record.

One worker, for example, had had his thumb smashed between two rollers in one accident, and had seriously injured his back lifting heavy equipment in another. In both cases, the company kept him off the injury list by paying him to continue to come to "work"—each day he reported to the company infirmary, where doctors fed him pain killers and tranquilizers. A private doctor later diagnosed the "sprain" in his back as a rup-

tured disk, and he's now fighting the company in court for compensation. But for the time being, du Pont's Kinston safety record remains spotless.

Similar incidents abound, according to union organizers. They are supported by a 1973 Nader study of du Pont that resulted in a book, *The Company State*. In it the authors wrote, "The company has tried to make a good safety record appear phenomenal by questionable tactics. Injured workers are often transport-

ed from their sickbeds to work so that a statistician can report that no workdays have been lost due to accidents or injuries; blue-collar workers have also been singled out and severely reprimanded for minor injuries."

If this is Rusche's approach to health and safety matters, he will fit right in at the NRC, which already has a history of covering up problems instead of facing them.

David Lindorff is a New York writer.

