

# THE MEANING OF IRAN

*Why the Anglo-Soviet armies moved. The extent of Nazi penetration. Significance of Molotov's note. The policy of Riza Shah. An editorial article.*

THE joint Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran is in the first place a terrific kick in the teeth for Adolph Hitler. It drives home the fact that he is now dealing with strong, tough-minded, realistic opponents, men who know from hard experience that if you mollycoddle the fascists, they invariably step on your face. The occupation of Iran represents the first concrete fulfillment of the Anglo-Soviet alliance of July 12. It was that alliance which restored the initiative to the anti-fascist world; last week's action in the Middle East highlights the fact that in the ruthless struggle which faces us, the anti-fascist forces are increasingly gaining the initiative whereas the fascist forces are losing it. Hitler is more and more compelled to face issues and situations created for him; he is less and less able, as in the bitter years gone by, to force the anti-fascist world on the defensive. Of course, the Soviets never relinquished the initiative in their own dealings with Hitler, and the secret of their foreign policy lay precisely in its firmness. But the point is that the USSR no longer stands alone.

The issue in Iran is simple, and ought not cause any of the confusion that accompanied, for example, the events in Finland a year and a half ago. Molotov's note to the Iranian minister, a classic for its straightforwardness and painstaking detail, tells the whole story. He names the names of German agents, who have made their way into "important official posts in over fifty Iranian departments" . . . to sow "unrest and disorders in Iran" . . . and "provoke Iran against the USSR." He gives the facts and dates of numerous attempts to smuggle arms into Baku, of espionage in Azerbaidjan, all of which "in the crudest and grossest manner trampled on the elementary requirements of respect for the sovereignty of Iran" and converted it into the scene of "preparations for a military attack on the USSR." When, after protests, the Iranian government declined to do anything in the matter, Britain and the Soviet Union took it upon themselves to do so.

Most impressive of all in Molotov's declaration is his emphasis on the historic friendship of the USSR and Iran. He gives all the details of how the Soviet government, from the outset, nullified the czarist concessions, returned control of telegraph and railway lines, the docks and banks belonging to czarist nationals to the Iranian government. Molotov emphasizes moreover that by Article Six of the Soviet-Persian non-aggression pact, the USSR always had the right "to take the necessary military measures in the interests of self-defense" should a "third party" endeavor to "convert the territory of Persia into a base for military hostilities against Russia." And if any assurances on this score were needed,

both the British and Soviet notes underline that the Allied troops would withdraw from Iran when the danger had passed.

A GLANCE at the map will show the strategic importance of Iran, bordering on India and the Indian Ocean on the one hand, and the Caspian and Soviet Caucasus on the other—with Turkey and the entire Arab littoral to the West. Obviously, the Nazi offensive into the Ukraine, as well as German negotiations with Turkey, underscore the growing possibility that Hitler might establish himself in between the Soviet oil fields and the wealthy oil reserves on Iranian soil. Hitler could gain a real pincer from the northern and southern shores of the Black Sea, and he might be able to fortify himself for a long war with the oil of Iraq, which produced some 27,000,000 barrels in 1940, and the oil of Iran, whose production exceeded 60,000,000 barrels. The proverbial ounce of prevention would save many pounds—and millions of rubles, not to mention lives later on. In the immediate and larger strategy of the war, it was a vital move.

Since February 1921, Iran has been governed by the strong hand of Riza Shah Pahlavi, once an officer in the czarist Cossack armies, who has emulated Kemal Ataturk to the west in his devotion to Iranian nationalism. Riza Shah, despite his own anti-Bolshevism, depended on the friendship of the USSR in trade and other matters in the early twenties, especially in his effort to get the British armed forces, which had occupied most of Persia, off his soil. He carried through many important reforms, guarded the sovereignty of his country jealously.

The British were a major factor in Iranian life, but the Germans had never reconciled themselves to the loss of their position in this strategic country. With the resurgence of German capitalism under Hitler, its businessmen became extremely active, and whereas in 1934 they had been supplying a third of Iran's imports, by 1940 they were supplying more than fifty percent. German bankers had acted as godfathers at the inauguration of the Iranian national bank; German instructors dominated the agricultural college at Teheran. German businessmen were able to offer their goods at lower prices than their competitors, the difference being paid by Hitler from the onerous tax burden on the German masses. The *Lufthansa* planes, with swastika under wing, made regular flights from Berlin to Athens to Rhodes to Bagdad, and stopped off at Teheran on the way to the Afghan capital, Kabul. And significantly enough, the chairman of the *Lufthansa* was Herr von Strauss, the same gentleman who headed the notorious Berlin-to-Bagdad rail-

way project thirty-five years ago. He became the vice president of the Reichstag under Hitler, and typifies the continuity of imperialist interest in Wilhelm's and Hitler's Reich.

But as in the Balkans, trade facilitated Nazi political strategy. And with every turbine, railway car, dredging machine, and textile loom Nazi agents disguised as technicians and engineers arrived at Iran. Some London figures place their number at 25,000, which is probably too high; the Iranian minister in Washington says that there were only six or seven hundred German nationals in Iran which is ridiculously low. There must have been thousands, worming their way into strategic administrative and economic positions, an alarming phenomenon in a country of some 15,000,000 tribesmen, peasants, artisans. Some two weeks ago, reports came of an attempted putsch against the Shah, inspired by Nazi agents in connivance with several disgruntled military chieftains. After repeated remonstrance, the USSR and Britain agreed that the Shah was balancing himself all too cleverly among opposing forces. These were no times for rope tricks.

WHAT ARE the implications and consequences of this development? At this writing, it is impossible to say whether there will be substantial resistance by the Iranian armies, what the Shah will do, or what the Nazis can accomplish by sabotage and intrigue. Irrespective of the military problems involved, some things are clear:

First, a physical contact has at last been created between Soviet and British armed forces. It is true of course that the British action appears qualified by the fact that they are defending their empire proper, and have not yet attacked Hitler on the continent where his energies would be most directly diverted. It has been suggested that this is a "common rear" rather than a "common front." Nevertheless, this association of British and Soviet troops is symbolic and of enduring importance.

Second, the railway line from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian now becomes a vital connecting artery of Soviet-British communications. In an early editorial, *NEW MASSES* pointed out that this rail line was perhaps the most feasible way of getting supplies from the British empire to the fighting fronts. Evidently President Roosevelt's decision to permit the direct flight of American planes via Africa to the Near East fits in with an Anglo-American general plan to get supplies up the Persian railway—American supplies as well as British.

Third, Hitler has now been blocked from the remaining sources of oil, unless he wishes to violate Turkish neutrality and divert huge

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# TURNING POINT FOR THE WORLD

*Mankind's future, R. Palme Dutt writes, has been "brought on to the battlefield." On June 22 fascism began its "supreme gamble." The alignment of world forces in the titanic conflict.*

MUNICH has been avenged even in the hour of its seeming victory. The conspirators of Munich built up the military power of German fascism, and shattered the bastions of peace, hoping to turn that military power against the Soviet Union. Thereby they let loose a different war. Thanks to their handiwork, which led first to the destruction of the liberties of the other European nations, and then to the most dire peril of the British people, the long-planned criminal offensive of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union has at length been let loose. The Soviet people, who could have led the world in peace, while holding fascism in check, had their policy been followed, have now, because of the refusal of their policy, to face the bloodiest ordeal. In place of the bloodless victories of the peace front, they have now the grimmer task to show the world how to fight and defeat fascism, that monster begotten of capitalist reaction and intrigue, which the social and political corruption of the ruling structure in all the capitalist countries first unchained and allowed to ravage the world, and then proved incapable to master. In unity with the peoples of all countries, they and we together will accomplish this task.

BUT THIS CLIMAX toward which the entire policy of the Munichites was directed, and for the sake of which they were prepared to sacrifice the interests of their peoples, has come about under very different conditions from their original dream. The launching of the offensive of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union, which should have represented the highest point of victory of the whole program the sponsors of Munich intended to achieve, has instead led to the victory of the very program they intended to destroy. The launching of the offensive of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union, in place of being followed by the Munichite dream of the united front of world reaction, has been followed by the British-Soviet pact of mutual aid and the growing unity of the British, American, Soviet, and Chinese peoples in the common cause of national freedom and defense against aggression. This is the positive achievement which shows the path of hope and confidence in the present grave hour.

We still have to be prepared to go through heavy trials. We have to be prepared for new sharp turns in the present complex situation. But the path is step by step opening out, across all obstacles, for the common victory of the peoples. The logic of history is defeating and will defeat the logic of counter-revolution.

World history always works itself out with a greater richness and complexity, with more

twists and turns than even the most powerful political insight, the insight of the great masters of Marxism, could attempt to plot out beforehand in detail. In the hour of Munich, when such critical alternatives opened out before the world, none could have attempted to lay down with certainty beforehand the precise concrete form in which those alternatives would finally work themselves out.

At that turning point the immediate visible alternatives proclaimed themselves in three main forms: the victory at the eleventh hour of the peace front and the checking of fascism; the victory of the policy of Munich and the launching of combined counter-revolutionary war against the Soviet Union; or the third alternative, against which the Marxist supporters of the peace front gave the most explicit warning, that the refusal of the peace front by the Western powers would give rise, not to the intended war of the combined counter-revolutionary front against the Soviet Union, but to the Nazi offensive to the West and the consequent outbreak of imperialist war in Western and Central Europe. These were in fact the immediate alternatives between which the event revealed the final choice, consequent on the strength of the Soviet Union and the weakness of the popular democratic forces in the West.

But who at that time could have ventured to foretell that, when the refusal of the peace front had in fact led within less than one year to the outbreak of imperialist war in Western and Central Europe, the very development and consequences of that imperialist war should give rise to a situation in which, at the moment of the launching of the Nazi offensive against the Soviet Union, the alternative common front against fascism should at last be formed in the midst of war? Such has been the final working out to date of the alternatives which opened at Munich.

SHARP TURNS and changes are increasingly characteristic of the modern international situation. They are a symptom of the extreme instability and breakup of the old order, and especially of the complications resulting from the parallel development of the imperialist antagonisms for the redivision of the world, alongside the existence and growing strength of the new type of state which is outside the system of imperialism and represents the interests of advancing humanity and the future world order. The problems confronting the ruling classes in all countries are daily more acute. In the present world situation, with the growing social and political stress within the old states and empires, there can be no stability. Ceaseless sharp turns of policy must inevitably

be expected, as the leaders of imperialism strive to cleave out a way from their dilemmas, now in this direction, now in that.

In the broadest historical sense the avenues of escape are narrowing for world imperialism. For over a quarter of a century, through the first world war, through Versailles, through the world economic crisis, through fascism, through Munich, through the second world war, imperialism has been drawing the noose tighter around its neck, and, with each twist and turn to extricate itself, adds a new knot. The forces on our side, the forces of awakening humanity, are growing in strength, are gathering and advancing to that unity which will ensure victory. But in terms of immediate power, of states, of resources, of armies, of organization, the balance is still overwhelmingly on the side of imperialism.

Therefore the whole present period requires, more than ever before in the history of the working class movement, the utmost skill of leadership, tactical speed, elasticity, boldness of initiative, and ability to maneuver, in order to meet each turn and new situation with a corresponding policy, to prevent any decisive unfavorable combination of forces, and to secure at each point the most favorable combination of forces at the given moment from the standpoint of the interests of the working class and the future of human liberation.

Only the most superficial and naive spectators are capable of seeing in these sharp changes of the world situation and the policy of the ruling classes, and the consequent sharp changes which the policy of the working class must carry through in order to meet each new objective situation, not the demonstration of the instability of imperialist relations and of the correctness of the policy of Marxism, but the triumphant proof in their eyes of the instability of Marxism. The old parrot cry of "somersaults" is still heard from a few irresponsible critics against the Communist Party. It appears that the Communist Party is accused of "somersaults" because it meets changes in the objective situation with corresponding changes in its policy. A party which failed to do this would not be a Marxist party.

This is so elementary that it is painful to need to waste any space in pointing it out. The accusation is as old as Marxism (e.g., the controversy over Marx's reversal of attitude in relation to the successive stages of the Franco-German War of 1870-71). The Bolsheviks at one time denounced a pact with the Liberal Cadets, and at another time made such a pact. In the summer of 1917 they demanded the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, and in the beginning of 1918 dispersed it by force. In the autumn of 1917 they denounced