

Our Party will go forth stronger:

Radio International interview with Hamid Taghvaei on the recent split in the CPI

In the past two years, there have been discussions on important issues, namely the strategy for gaining political power within the Worker-communist Party of Iran (WPI). Following these discussions, 24 members of the Central Committee have resigned from the WPI and established another party. We will be speaking with Hamid Taghvaei, the WPI Leader, on this.

Siavash Daneshvar: Hamid Taghvaei, the WPI has issued a press release announcing that the WPI's Congress is to be held during 18-19 September 2004. We have also been informed that following discussions over the past two years in the WPI, 24 members of the Central Committee have resigned and established another party. Please explain.

Hamid Taghvaei: Unfortunately, these 24 individuals preferred not to participate in the Congress and have instead left the Party. As you said, these resignations follow discussions within the Party leadership in the politburo and in the plenums of the central committee that began after the passing away of Mansoor Hekmat. Recently, these discussions have become heated and have effectively obstructed Party activities after the 4th Congress. The Party had become weakened and reached a dead-end both in the politburo and executive committee. There was no other alternative than to inform the party cadres and involve them in the discussions. The central committee itself was unable to resolve the situation because of the deadlock between the two opposing views. These discussions were published within the Party and are also available to the public in Persian.

After the distribution of these discussions within the cadres of the Party, these comrades decided to leave rather than participate in the Congress, which is naturally and logically the highest authority of the Party and the organ that has elected the Central Committee. It is the Congress that is the ultimate source for reaching political and organisational decisions based on these discussions and is the only authority that can get the Party out of this deadlock in order to show the way and galvanize the party. These comrades preferred not to do this. In my opinion, the main reason for this is that their political position was rejected by a majority of cadres and they realised that their perspective cannot gain the upper hand in the Congress and therefore they separated. The Congress however will go ahead. Our Party will go to this Congress to bring this period to an end and emerge stronger and with lucid and transparent policies for the work that lays ahead.

Siavash Daneshvar: What was the basis of these differences? If you were to take a snapshot of these differences and give a clear image of the differences, what would you say the two perspectives were?

Hamid Taghvaei: In brief, the basis of these differences was over political power. It is natural that our Party, which is now a social party with a large base and widespread influence, can contemplate the overthrow of the Islamic regime of Iran and have on its agenda the leading of the revolution and gaining political power. Based on this, the 4th Congress passed a number of strong and sharp resolutions on the prospect of the revolution and the task of organising and leading the revolution which is taking shape. It also passed a resolution on the organising of the working class in Iran and the relationship between the working class and political power. However, though these comrades voted for these resolutions, they had very clear theses and ideas contrary to those resolutions. After the 4th Congress, their continued discussions showed that they were clearly opposed to the resolutions and would not defend them.

Given this situation, the discussions within the leadership were published within the Party. The content of the debate was whether the WPI could gain power by organising a revolution today in Iran and by leading it. Our position is that when power is gained, we will immediately proclaim a Socialist Republic, which has been our policy and Mansoor Hekmat's right from the beginning.

Theirs is that there is no impending revolution, the Islamic regime will collapse instead and that when this happens, even if the Party gains political power, we must still not proclaim a Socialist Republic because the movement against the Islamic regime is not socialist. Therefore, they advocate gaining political power primarily via a coalition and compromise with other parties in order to reach power. It is only later in their perspective that socialism will arrive. These two perspectives are opposing views. These two views have had extremely heated debates between them over the past two years, yet still the decisions and the practice of the Party has always been based on the radical perspective, our Party' perspective. In fact, the 4th Congress was a step forward in this direction and resolved resolutions with regards to the revolution and political power; those who resigned from the Party always had issue with this even though they had voted for the resolutions of that Congress, which stated that revolution is the basis of our work and that we have no other alternative route to gaining political power other than organising and leading a revolution. They nonetheless questioned this strategy and stressed the gaining of power without a revolution. So instead of revolution and overthrow, they focused on gaining political power via negotiations, diplomacy, a Constituent Assembly and so on. We stood up to these Right-wing views and did not allow them to become dominant and influence the activities of our Party; this in itself caused problems. It made it difficult for them and they felt they could not work in this framework. Over the past three months, as I stated before, the Party's leadership was paralysed and couldn't work. That is when we decided that the debates had to

become overt. A Congress was called for in order to bring these discussions to a resolution. Those who resigned, however, refused to accept the Congress. In my opinion, they refused because they received a profound response from the majority against their views and so they left the Party.

Siavash Daneshvar: What's the problem with their views and the solutions they provide - that a party can also take power via negotiation and diplomacy. Hasn't the WPI thought of the fact that it may have to join a coalition government that it doesn't like? What's your problem with their theses?

Hamid Taghvaei: Of course, this is possible. It's not a no go area for us. The Party can, according to its assessment and depending on the balance of power, participate in a coalition government. However, this is profoundly different from making that the basis of your Party line and strategy. Their way is not Mansoor Hekmat's way. Not only because it is principally wrong but also because in practice it will lead you to nowhere. It is impossible for a radical, maximalist, revolutionary Party like ours to get to power in any way but revolution. A Party like ours has to be with the revolution, organise the revolution, and have power on the streets so to speak for it to be able to participate in a parliament or cabinet; only then can such participation be contemplated and possible. Many radical revolutionary parties have done this many times in history. But this is possible only when revolution is in your strategy, when you have gathered force in the streets. Otherwise, they won't let us in parliament. They won't let us enter the top echelons. Bourgeois parties have the army, money, and bureaucracy behind them, and are hopeful for gaining power via these means. For example, the monarchist opposition in Iran has capitalised on the USA and Europe bringing them into power. Like Khomeini who came to power with the support of the west. All bourgeois parties work in the same way. But for a radical communist party, its source and reliance, its foundation of power is on the working class and the deprived population. It has no other foundation. Therefore, any theory that doesn't see this source of power, not only won't reach power in an unprincipled manner, it will not gain power full stop. It will become a party that will be taken advantage of. In Iran, we had the Tudeh Party and Ranjbaran Party* as examples of this from the 1979 revolution. We had socialists like Babak Zahraee** or those who were consultants to Bani Sadr at the beginning of the Islamic regime, consultants to the Liberals, or on the other side became the consultants to the Islamic Republic's Party. The Tudeh Party defended the Islamic regime's Party and said they were a mass party and so on. We saw what happened to them. They were taken advantage of. The Islamic Republic established its power and then slaughtered them all.

Therefore, the debate is not on whether it is an unprincipled way of achieving political power but that it is not the way to achieve power. Instead it is only a way of advancing the current

government and the anti-revolutionary government. I'm not even worried about tomorrow. If our Party takes this position, in my opinion, the Party will lose its social base on a mass scale today. The radical workers who are with us, the revolutionary women who are with us, those who want to get rid of the misogynist Islamic government, the masses of people who consider themselves secular, and not only don't want religion in the state but want to eradicate it from the face of society, they are gathered around our Party because of its radical perspectives. If our Party changes its policy to theirs, and advocates that there is to be no revolution in this period, and that if there is anything it will be the collapse of the regime, and that it is not even then our turn, and instead advocate a scenario which includes a declaration and a constituent assembly and a referendum to gain power - these are the discussions that have been unfortunately raised by these individuals - then the Party itself will disintegrate. It will lose its vast social base. And the people of Iran will once again get stuck in another revolution without a leader, without a voice, and misery similar to what happened in the revolution of 1979 will befall them. We cannot allow this to become the dominant policy and even be represented in our Party. These were discussions that had been closed before. During Mansoor Hekmat's time, no one advocated that socialism would frighten people and make them disperse. They are arguing that now is not the time for socialism. Or if one mentions socialism, those who are for women's liberation or modernity or anti-religion, will take flight. These are strange theses. Mansoor Hekmat has said that if you scratch any person's skin, you will find a socialist underneath. Now with these theses, the people of Iran will run away from socialism and can't accept it? All these views and policies would have uprooted the WPI. Our party is a radical revolutionary Party that represents the majority of people, the majority of freedom loving and equality seeking people in Iran and these types of theses are like shooting ourselves in the foot. We couldn't allow this to take place. Nonetheless we didn't tell these individuals to leave the Party; this was never our position. We said that if you are a minority, accept it, and stay in our Party. But unfortunately they couldn't accept that and left.

Siavash Daneshvar: What has been the response of the Party's cadres and members vis-à-vis these discussions?

Hamid Taghvaei: After the publication of these discussions in the Party, this Right-wing faced a deep and harsh critique by the majority of the cadres who gained access to the oral and written discussions. We published all the discussions on a site in the Party. It was extremely clear-cut. These theses and opinions were so contradictory and in opposition to our tradition and policies and particularly the line that Mansoor Hekmat represented that it was clear for all that these have no place, they are not our positions, and it was clear what destructive results they could have for our Party and the revolution in Iran. In my opinion one of the reasons that these comrades left was because they were unable to respond to the critique they faced. They effectively avoided the debate by labelling it an inquisition; they didn't respond and left the Party

instead. It is obviously this reality that left them with no choice but to reject the Congress and declare that they won't attend because they knew if they attended, the Congress would criticize their views and policies and that they would become a minority in the Party and that even their status in the Central Committee would be under question and that they could not be elected to the next Central Committee. These calculations and considerations obliged them to leave.

Siavash Daneshvar: As a result of these differences, has the WPI been weakened; what is the plan of the Congress; what response does it want to give to this matter?

Hamid Taghvaei: In the history of our Party, this has happened before. If one only considers the numbers, yes our Party has been weakened compared to if there was not such a view and discussion, and the Party was working as before. But if you consider the fact that this viewpoint had to be critiqued in this Party and brushed aside, our Party has been strengthened. We did not want even one person to leave - this is the decision that they unfortunately made - but this perspective had to leave the Party. This perspective had to be isolated and criticised. As I said earlier, it goes directly back to our social status, presence, and influence; this perspective would have uprooted our status, presence and influence. It had to be done. If you look at it in this way, we came out victorious and were once more able to defend the essence and pillars of our policies and aims that WPI has always followed. In this theoretical struggle, we were able to come out clearer, more open, and the Party became a pressure point against these Right-wing views. As a result, the Party has been rejuvenated, and this is at a good starting point. At the next Congress, I am certain that it will be a high point in the history of the Party and the worker-communist movement and the history of the Left. Society will very soon realise who is really representing Mansoor Hekmat's line, and who has separated from what. It is very clear. It will be evident that this is not merely a separation from the Party but from radical, maximalist and revolutionary politics, and the strategy that Mansoor Hekmat represented. Society will appreciate this and I am sure our Party will go forth stronger, more influential and become more widespread.

This is not the first time; in other times we have had resignations. You see our Party is a social party, which means that we effect developments in society and are also affected by developments in society. The opinions that were raised in our Party are not new ones. They are present in society and these perspectives are represented by other movements, the Right movement, by the so called 'Reformist' 2nd Khordad movement, which represents perspectives similar to these arguments albeit in a Left package. We have seen these before. There was a period when we separated from the Communist Party of Iran after having a face off with nationalism of that period and again during the rise of the 'Reformist' movement in Iran, with the same theses, some left our Party. Now in different times when the Party has reached such a social and objective position in which it can gain power and political power is accessible and

that they see that the revolution that we have been talking about did not happen with the speed they were expecting and is taking longer, this leaves the door open for the Right and for its theorisation; we see how under the name of party and political power, there is a call to abandon the revolution, socialism and communism. As I said before, this Right-wing will face a dead-end and make the Party a means to be taken advantage of by the ruling classes, to be used and discarded. I want to point out that this is a part of our struggle with the class that we are fighting against; this is not a struggle outside the walls of the Party alone, it has also always been part of the battle within the Party, in the form of theses, programmes, and occasionally silence, and on other occasions with obstructions. We have always faced these situations.

The comrades who left are all radical comrades who could have remained but they decided not to and like all separations, a thousand other factors also played a part, but I want to reiterate that their perspective is Right-wing, bourgeois and contrary to our position. Again, this does not in any way mean that the activists that followed that policy are purposely and with full knowledge following the Right. I hope that the legitimacy of our position becomes clear and that those who have left return.

Siavash Daneshvar: What plans do you have for the Congress?

Hamid Taghvaei: The Congress is extraordinary because of these extraordinary discussions. It will be held on the 18 and 19 of September and for the first time, because it is extraordinary, all members can participate and have a direct vote. Like our other congresses, it will be open to the public. It will, in my opinion, be a strong and exciting Congress, because we will once more go back to our intellectual fundamentals, the radicalism and humanitarianism that our policies have always represented and the immediacy of the revolution that we want to organise and the immediacy of the free, equal and socialist society that we want to create, and the possibility of them all. We will again discuss, reiterate and once more reinforce our programme with our radical revolutionary strategy. We will come out of this Congress more transparent, clearer, more powerful and more radical.

Siavash Daneshvar: As the Leader of the WPI, what is your message to members and supporters in Iran?

Hamid Taghvaei: My message to all the activists and supporters of the Party in Iran is that we have successfully overcome another round of political and intellectual struggle with the Right-wing perspective. Though we didn't want anyone to resign, or leave, at the end this was beyond our control. Unfortunately some comrades decided to leave, not continue this discussion and refused to take part in the Congress to resolve this discussion. But despite all this, our Party has come out of this successfully, stronger, more radical and more determined. During the debates,

the Party was in practice following the correct and radical line. This has been strengthened; become more united, and removed the addendums that those who resigned put forth and so on. I am certain it will free up a lot of energy so that our Party can take a hug leap forward. In this move, all the activists in Iran are partners and must become partners. We want everyone to follow these discussions carefully. And with the Party, alongside the Party, continue to carry the banner of revolution and socialism and go forward.

Translators: Maryam Namazie and Fariborz Pooya

* Ranjbaran was a pro-Albanian, Pro-Khomeini party

** Babak Zahraee was the leader of a pro-Khomeini Trotskyist group

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<https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2004-09-01/split-iranian-and-iraqi-left>