

the secret assassinations of progressive intellectuals and the banning of their works, and the wholesale massacre of the masses in certain villages of Algeria by the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). In Afghanistan, the invasion of the Taliban and Northern Alliance of each other's areas during the last decade, in which they have indiscriminately killed the masses and raped little girls and women as a prize of jihad - these are the al-hamdo-lal-lah - "praise be upon God"- fruitful jihads. The big jihads of the last two decades - the war between Iran and Iraq, the war of the Afghanistani Mujahedeen against the occupying Soviet army - were aided and fought with the advanced "God sent" weaponry dispatched from the arsenals of the Western imperialist powers and with the aid of their satellite intelligence. What makes jihad reactionary in nature is not waging armed battle. The world amply shows that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. It is the political and social objectives of jihad and the way it is fought that makes it reactionary.⁹

In the 1980s, the Islamic fundamentalist movements called for jihad for the seizure of political power and the establishment of Islamic sharia societies. But their calls have changed to some extent. Now most of them are calling for jihad as a way of striking blows at the enemies of Islam and for the sake of Islamic self-purification. The success of jihad is no longer guaranteed, but it is said that victory will be granted whenever God decides - *toufigh men allah*. This kind of superstitious talking to the people has a ring of modern-day politics to it. It is telling the masses, "Let me use you efficiently and don't ask why things are not changing or when victory will come." There have been two shifts that have influenced this change in the perspective of the Islamic fundamentalist movements. 1) These movements have lost their big allies amongst the imperialist powers in the aftermath of the Cold War. 2) The bankruptcy of the Islamic states in Iran and Afghanistan, where not only poverty, dependence on imperialism and all sorts of social injustices have continued for the great majority of the masses, but the enforcement of sharia has made the lot of the people even worse. These Islamic projects have proven that the promised Islamic society is not Eden but the continuation of backwardness, poverty, debilitating ignorance and all kinds of discrimination, as well as national subjugation and humiliation.

Along with jihad there is a complementary concept of shihadat or martyrdom for the cause. There is a wide gulf between shihadat and the revolutionary concept of daring and readiness to sacrifice one's life for revolution. The latter is in the service of the clear aim of achieving victory - the seizure of political power by the workers, peasants and all the other oppressed masses and the overthrowing of private appropriation and exploitation. In shihadat, achieving an earthly political aim is secondary, and ascending to the summit of "closeness to God" is primary. In fact, in Islam shihadat is the highest goal of jihad. Becoming a martyr (shahid) is an end in itself, preparation for travelling to the other world and securing well-being and happiness in the other world. This is what makes the doctrine of shihadat reactionary.

The appalling conditions that the masses face provide enough reason for them to want to strike at the enemy by any means possible. In fact, in Palestine the Islamic Hamas group, by promoting a series of suicide missions, only gives vent to the anger of the masses and leaves them spectators to individual acts, however spectacular, instead of taking the more difficult road of finding the way to make them active participants in sustained collective armed struggle. Shihadat is based on, and nurtures, desperation and the masses' lack of hope that they can actually change this world. The masses need a revolutionary and scientific ideology that can raise their sights and enlighten them about real winnable war strategies against their powerful enemies. The masses of the Middle Eastern countries do not need jihad. Since it is the product of an ancient oppressive society, jihad would only bring more suffering. Plus, with the hocus-pocus of jihad, the masses cannot rid themselves of powerful reactionary state powers and their imperialist masters. The masses need to scientifically see how an enemy as strong as the imperialist powers can be brought down by a correct strategy. And for taking the enemy by strategy there will be a huge need for audacity and sacrifice by the masses, including laying down one's life. But

laying down one's life is not the goal. The goal is to lay down the enemy's life and to destroy the system of exploitation by destroying the powers that guard it - at the heart of which lie their state powers and their armies.

Religious ideology is injected into the masses as a fantasy escape route from this horrible world. Marxism teaches the masses to face the world as it is and change it accordingly. Marxism is completely based on the realities of the world and, therefore, is capable of changing it. Marxism teaches the masses that there is no supernatural being to aid them. The masses do need "magic". But this magic has always been and can only be a conscious human product. And today it can be produced if the masses wield the only ideology and science that belongs to them. Marxism, being thoroughgoing materialism, has to, and has been, constantly developing; without this development it would die out. Marxism has developed through epoch-making revolutions and by absorbing the advancing knowledge that human beings acquire through production and scientific inquiry - it has developed to Marxism-Leninism-Maoism. Marxism-Leninism-Maoism is the powerful scientific revolutionary ideology of the proletariat. It is this class that, under the leadership of its greatest representatives, Marx, Lenin and Mao, has been able to produce a scientific world-view, a political, military and economic line that truly reflects the interests of the exploited masses. For the first time in the history of class society, the exploited masses do not have to resort to ideologies that come from the ancient or modern arsenals of the exploiting classes.

2. Factors Giving Rise to Islamic Forces

Three decades ago the overwhelming majority of the political forces opposed to the ruling cliques in the Middle Eastern countries and their imperialist backers were secular - genuine communist forces, pro-Soviet phoney communist forces, and secular nationalist forces. Look at Iran, Egypt and Palestine. After the Second World War, in Iran two major political forces opposing the Shah's regime and its imperialist masters were the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party and the National Front led by Mossadegh, who was toppled in 1953 by a CIA-led coup, with the help of the Mullahs. In the Arab countries, it was mainly secular nationalist forces. In Egypt, these forces were led by Jamal Abdul Nasser, who picked up the flag of opposition to foreign domination whilst suppressing genuine revolutionary forces. In Palestine, it was secular nationalist forces and Palestinian left-leaning forces that led the struggle against Israel, while the Islamic forces gained influence mainly in the 1980s. This raises the question of what factors have been fuelling the Islamic movements. The following must be examined: 1) How Islamic political forces were brought onto the political stage by deliberate imperialist policies. 2) How the destructive workings of the imperialist system have provided a framework for the development of these forces. 3) How the bloody suppression of, and failures of, the revolutionary communists left a vacuum to be filled by them.

One of the obvious reasons for the growing influence of the Islamic forces has been the deliberate policy of the Western imperialist powers and their client states in the Middle East to contain the revolutionary masses, as well as the advances of their Soviet imperialist rivals, by fanning Islamic forces. In the 1970s, throughout the Middle East, a network of mosques was developed with the consent and encouragement of the respective regimes. In 1977 General Zia ul-Haq carried out a US-backed coup against Bhutto in Pakistan and inserted sharia into the Pakistani constitution. In Iran, the Monarchical Philosophy Association headed by Western-educated Islamic scholars was founded with the thesis that Iranian society needed a new ideological identity with a heavy dose of Islam. While the revolutionary communist forces were hunted, killed, imprisoned or pushed into exile by the Shah's regime, all kinds of Islamic discussion forums were made available for spreading Islamic thought among the intellectuals. The alliance of the clergy with the bazaar merchants and users was allowed to expand the network of mosques and house-to-house Islamic preaching, and they were even given considerable freedom to mix in criticism of the Shah. Only a small underground Islamic-left guerrilla organisation, the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, did not enjoy that freedom. In 1980, after the military coup in Turkey,

fanatical pro-Ataturk, secular-minded generals went to Switzerland to bring the Islamic leader Arbakani back from the exile that they had imposed on him earlier. He returned to form the Islamic Refah Party. The Islamic forces were given room to establish their control over the basic masses, and granted millions of dollars for Islamic schools. During the counter-insurgency against the Kurdish upsurge, hezbollah forces were used extensively by the Turkish army.

While it is true that those running the oppressive societies in the Middle East had a deliberate policy of placing Islamic forces on the political stage, the question remains as to what underlying workings produce and reproduce them. It must be said that these forces cannot be reduced simply to "echoes of the past", even though they pledge to roll back their respective societies. They are products of the modern structures of the Middle Eastern societies, which are in turn products of the deep imperialist penetration of these societies that has reorganised and integrated them into the world-wide web of the imperialist system. This has been a very tumultuous process and one of the ugliest in history, in terms of the human suffering inflicted. This is an ongoing process that breeds crisis and suffering on a massive scale for the peoples of the world - "globalisation" being its latest chapter.

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism reflects the incurable crisis of the neo-colonial states in this region, their massive permanent poverty, whilst tremendous riches are pumped out of this region into the West. It reflects the spasmodic rise and fall of the middle classes; the displacement of populations from one end of their country to the other, and from inside to outside of their country; and the never-ending clash between being stuck in the pre-capitalist era and being dragged into the maelstrom of world capitalism. These countries are in constant turmoil. Even the reactionary classes are beset with bitter splits and ruthless competition.

Islam has been the ruling ideology in Middle Eastern societies for a long time. And the religious establishment has been a part of the ruling structures - both before and after the domination of the Middle East by the colonialist and imperialist powers of the West. However, their position in the ruling structures underwent some changes in the aftermath of the First and Second World Wars. After the First World War, the British carried out major transformations in the various countries they dominated. They resorted to what is now called "nation building" in imperialist lingo: establishing centralised states with modern armies and police forces, roads and railroads, etc. This was part of building fortresses against the newly born socialist Soviet Union, and gave rise to figures like Reza Shah of Iran and Ataturk of Turkey. After the Second World War came another nodal point. Taking over from British imperialism, the US carried out major economic and political restructuring in several key countries it now dominated. The result was a new class configuration: the working class expanded, and a modern school system churned out modern intellectuals, some of whom became state functionaries and technocrats, whilst others joined the progressive and revolutionary milieu. A big part of the religious establishment was alienated, and in most of the countries their veto power over legislation was overturned.

The Islamic forces that seized power in Iran in 1979 had been shaved off from the power structures following the Second World War. After the First and Second World Wars the feudal economic base and its corresponding superstructure were dealt heavy blows in separate waves of imperialist penetration. The clerical establishment, which had been a powerful pillar of state power, was pushed aside in several waves, first after the First World War when the British introduced a semi-colonial centralised state structure, and then again after the Second World War. The US sponsored land and other reforms that the Shah of Iran carried out in the 1960s under the name of the "White Revolution". These weakened the clergy to a considerable degree. But the White Revolution did not uproot feudalism, it simply reorganised the semi-feudal mode of production and linked it to global imperialist relations. Moreover, because the further penetration of "modern" relations was on a capitalist basis and was concerned to preserve the existing state structures, it did not seek a decisive showdown with feudal representatives, ideas and institutions, but instead sought compromises with

them so as to integrate them into the neo-colonial system. Ayatollah Khomeini protested two chief features of the Shah's White Revolution: the distribution of land among the peasantry, limited though it was, and the granting of the right to vote to women. When the "modernisation" drive hit the rocks, the Islamic forces that had been pushed out of the power structures came back to hound the Shah and his US masters. This imperialist modernisation created a lopsided and disarticulated economy to such a degree that it not only inflicted suffering on millions of people, but it even became dysfunctional.

Similar dynamics developed in other countries such as Egypt. Starting in the 1960s, the so-called modernisation drive there uprooted the peasantry in vast numbers, but bureaucrat capitalism could not absorb them into the token modern factories, agri-businesses and infrastructure construction activities.

This was a major phenomenon throughout the Middle East. The big cities swelled with populations displaced from the countryside. The urban middle class, which had grown in the 1960s - one expression of this was growth of the secular school system and the number of university students - started to feel the squeeze. The Islamic movements, originating from clerical centres, used all of their wits to connect with the rage of the poor masses, who were swelling the cities, and a section of the urban intellectuals.

The revolutionary communists, obscurantist religious forces and nationalists found themselves on the same side against the Shah of Iran and its US masters for a short but intense and turbulent period. A section of the urban poor - largely the displaced peasantry - followed Ayatollah Khomeini. It is not true that this displaced poor is inherently Islamic. It is the case that Islamic ideology spontaneously boils from the semi-feudal structures of the society and is there to be resorted to by the distressed masses. But a similar crowd of urban poor to that which greeted Khomeini in 1979 in Tehran, the capital of Iran, had marched there a decade earlier in mourning for a popular woman singer-dancer called Mahvash.

The third and extremely important factor is the crisis within the communist movement internationally. The restoration of capitalism in the ex-USSR in the mid-1950s was the first source of this crisis. Islam did not gain such a prominent place among the masses opposing the status quo because of its political vigour, theoretical clarity or practical radicalism. The crisis within the international communist movement created a huge vacuum of leadership among the masses, which was filled by the Islamic forces who in turn were being virulently promoted by the Western imperialist powers. Just as the socialist revolutions in Russia (1917) and China (1949) and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966) had tremendously boosted the growth of communist and revolutionary secular movements in the world as a whole, including in the Middle East, the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union and the betrayal of the national liberation movements by it and the pro-Soviet so-called Communist Parties was a blow to the genuine communist forces. On the basis of Soviet foreign policy interests, the pro-Soviet parties started to collaborate with reactionary regimes. For example, they "discovered" "progressive" elements in the Shah of Iran and in Arab socialism and Islamic socialism in the Arab countries. The revisionist coup in China (1976) was a second major blow, which in the 1980s caused tremendous crisis in the communist movements in these countries, as well as on a world scale. These defeats, along with bloody suppression of the genuine revolutionary communist forces by the reactionary regimes and imperialists, gave an opportunity for the growth of opposition under Islamic flags. When there is no powerful alternative to idealism, obscurantism and imperialism, then assorted reactionaries seize the opportunity.

When China was a red power base, it provided a resounding argument for revolution and a revolutionary vision of society. It was a powerful magnet for the oppressed masses everywhere. It was a flag for the people that dared to change the world themselves and not wait for some god to decide whether he wants to bother. It was a shining example of internationalism, aiding all the struggles of the people around the world. It gave heart to the world's

oppressed.

Imperialist Lunacy Is Not Better Than Islamic Fundamentalism

In reaction to Islamic fundamentalism, there is a trend among the intellectuals of the Middle Eastern countries to proclaim that the first and foremost problems of these countries come from "within"; that "we can't blame it all on the foreigners", in other words, on colonialism and imperialism. This argument has some truth to the extent that it calls attention to age-old problems strangling Middle Eastern and a great many other countries - namely, vast feudal remnants. But the bigger truth is that since the integration of these countries into the world imperialist system, these "internal" and "external" problems have become intertwined - the problem comes from the rule of certain classes and their ruling ideology and political power that today are intrinsically interwoven with imperialist economic and political domination. These classes have their roots in the capitalist and feudal exploitation of the workers and peasants, and at the same time they are integrated into a world system. The current problems of these countries cannot be sought in their distant history, because the contemporary Third World countries are constructs of the imperialist era. Without correctly identifying the obstacles to the progress of these societies, one cannot find solutions. Both the Islamic forces and those who whitewash imperialism are wrong in their conception of the root causes of the problems. Therefore, their solutions are wrong. The first proposes going backwards with reactionary programmes. The second closes its eyes to the savagery of imperialism because its bombs are supposedly the seeds of modernisation and enlightenment being spread over these countries. This pro-imperialist line has always existed among the upper echelons of Middle Eastern intellectuals. Often, despite their own intentions, it has made them technocrats of imperialism.

It is the world capitalist system - imperialism - that is preserving the reactionary states in the Third World countries, condemning so many of the world's people to misery and starvation, and robbing the whole world of the enormous potential power of the all-round development of the creativity and cultural and scientific ability of the masses. This world system is structured in such a way that it does not allow the masses of the Third World to empower themselves. Imperialism and feudalism have locked the oppressed countries into backward conditions. Look at this simple fact: the US forces landed in Afghanistan with bags of dollars to buy the political and military allegiance of the tribal leaders in order to establish the kind of political arrangements their empire needs in that part of the world. The dollar is a social relation. It shapes the socio-economic conditions in the world. The structure of relations between the imperialist countries and the oppressed nations is part - and in fact a decisive part - of the world capitalist system. It is imperialism that is the main force shaping the internal class and social relations within the oppressed nations. The reactionary classes within these oppressed nations - i.e. the big landlords, industrialists, traders and bankers - are class allies of the world capitalist system. They are imperialist "operatives" within these nations. Sometimes the relations between the master imperialist and the local reactionary classes become tense. Yet, in the final analysis, their lives as feudal comprador classes depend upon their diverse connections with the imperialists. It is, therefore, not possible to separate "internal" and "external" problems because they are not separate. Both must be overthrown at the same time.

There is widespread feudalism both in the economic base and the superstructure of these societies. Basically, they are passing through a long, slow and painful transition period from the feudal to the bourgeois epoch. The intertwining of religion and state, the status of women, the strong patriarchal social relations and nepotism are all manifestations of this situation. But these societies have been under the thumb of imperialism for a long time. The imperialists have been the foremost agent of whatever modernisation exists in these countries and, at the same time, have integrated these countries' backward economies in a subservient way into their world web of capitalism. Whilst introducing modern productive forces, they have imposed a lopsided economic development, where advanced sections of the economy exist as small detached islands surrounded by

vast backward areas. The very workings of the world capitalist economy have devastated the local economy of these countries and have left them at the mercy of the violent swings of the world market and changing ecology. At times, the imperialist powers have deliberately adopted the policy of strengthening the forces of feudalism. Afghanistan is a glaring example of this. What has dictated, and will dictate, the penetration of imperialism into these countries is profit, greed and political dominance. Only an anti-feudal and anti-imperialist strategy and programme can open the doors for the all-round development of these societies.

New-democratic and Socialist Revolution - The Only Solution

Political Islam has failed. Wherever it came to power, it failed to establish anything new for the masses. It kept the old oppressive relations intact. The rich stayed rich and the poor stayed poor, and the grip of the imperialists on the economy and political power remained as strong as ever. Political Islam does not represent a cover for the coalescence of traditional ethics and tribal unity under a new regime. It mainly and fundamentally represents specific class aspirations in Muslim countries. It is the banner of a section of the exploiting classes raised in order to gain incorporation into the ruling power structures. These class forces care about the masses only so long as they need foot soldiers. As Lenin emphatically put it, today even the reactionaries need the masses to carry out their projects. The rise of Islamic forces signifies a grave crisis among the reactionary states in the Middle East. Political Islam has not, and cannot, cure this disease. With or without an Islamic cover, these states are crumbling. That is the main reason that their guardian - the US - has been compelled to land its military forces in the Middle East. It must now deal with this situation in person. The US can show off its air power as much as it desires. But on the ground the angry masses are besieging its neo-colonial client states. What is lacking is strong Marxist-Leninist-Maoist parties capable of putting themselves at the head of these masses, organising their unquenchable thirst for liberation and their tremendous energy in powerful people's wars, and leading victorious new-democratic revolutions. This is the only way to both uproot feudalism and solve the centuries-old problems suffocating these countries, and to cut off the strangling yoke of imperialism once and for all.

Endnotes

1 A supporter of the Communist Party of Iran (Marxist-Leninist-Maoist).

2 Ilya Pavlovitch Petroshevsky, Islam in Iran. This authoritative Marxist source book on the history of Islam presents valuable scientific analysis of the socio-political roots of Islam. To paraphrase Petroshevsky, the emergence of Islam at the beginning of the seventh century AD is inseparably connected with the developments in class society and the beginning of a complicated social and political movement among the Northern Arabs. Islam became the ideological mantle that led to the establishment of an Arabian state and its military and political expansion throughout Arabia.

Muhammad was an intellectual from a family of small merchants in Mecca. His family (the Bani Hashem family from the well-to-do Ghoreish tribe) were the guardians of a collection of idols worshiped by different tribes and families. Mecca had a strategically important geographic location. It was a centre for foreign trade, including the slave trade. The trading routes connecting India and the Byzantine empire (Syria, Palestine and Egypt) passed through Yemen (in the South) and then Mecca (in the North). Iran under Sassanid captured Yemen in the sixth century and diverted the transit route in its favour. Foreign trade diminished in Mecca. Mecca was also a centre for internal commodity exchanges between Arab nomads, who traded dairy products for dates, grain and craft items from Mecca. The Ghoreish tribe lived in Mecca. Some of its member families became very rich from trade and usury, through which they ruined smaller families and merchants (such as the Bani Ommayeh family, initially the main enemies of Muhammad, but who later united with him and led the expansion of the Islamic empire). Others were modest merchants and agriculturalists (such as Bani

Hashem, Muhammad's family). All of them ruthlessly traded slaves from Ethiopia, and exploited them in agriculture as well. The disintegration of the tribal community and the development of private land ownership, and the consequent increasing gap between the rich and the poor of each tribe, shook up the Northern regions of Arabia. A tremendous social and economic crisis engulfed them. Muhammad took it upon himself to unite the scattered, warring tribes of the Arabian Peninsula to deal with the crisis. For this, a unified state for all of Arabia was necessary.

3 Defeats by the Western colonialists during the nineteenth century loom large in Islamic literature. The British consolidated their hold on the Middle East in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and during that same period dismantled the Ottoman Empire. Tsarist Russia went into the Caucasus and Central Asia in 1857. That half-century was a turning point. It ended the centuries-old balance between the Muslim and Christian empires. The Christian world had surpassed feudalism. But the Muslim world was still grappling with the past.

Various Islamic forces that are less fundamentalist and closer to nationalism use nostalgia for the pre-colonial past as an ideological banner for uniting the people: marching through the streets of Ramallah carrying a portrait of Salahedin Ayubi (a celebrated victorious fighter for the Islamic empire against the Crusaders); fantasising about the Ottoman empire, even though the Arab feudals and kings happily helped the British to oust it; and endless nostalgia about how Islamic civilisation was more advanced than European, which was still in the Dark Ages (which is true, but let's take care of the future!). This history has given way to a lot of debate over "why the Islamic portion of the world was not able to compete with European colonialism". This in itself is a big subject of historical study and analysis among the intellectuals in Muslim countries, but this debate is beyond the scope of the present article. Nevertheless, a correct proletarian approach would start from the point that, while it is important to explore this aspect of the development of human society, the proletariat does not struggle against today's ruthless reactionary empires (i.e. the imperialists) with the objective of restoring past empires. First of all, the proletariat did not even exist then, so it does not have any lost empires to cry over or fight to revive. Secondly, these past empires - in the East and West and regardless of religion or ethnicity - were oppressive and not worth getting nostalgic about. The proletariat can freely say, as Marx did: let the dead bury the dead (in other words, let the bourgeois and feudal class forces cry over their own past). We have the future to fight for, a future society completely different from all previously existing class societies.

4 Among the ideologues of the current Islamic movements are: Khomeini, Motahari and Taleghani from Iran, Seyyid Qutb from Egypt, Maududi from Pakistan and Al-Turabi from Sudan.

5 In the 1980s, the CIA under the Reagan administration carried out covert operations against the new Sandinista regime in Nicaragua. The reactionary Nicaraguan and Cuban mercenaries, who were run by the CIA's Oliver North, were called the Contras. This operation was funded by revenues from cocaine smuggling and the selling of arms to Iran through Israel. The scandal was called Iran-Contragate.

6 Especially since 11 September, there has been an enormous amount of propaganda in the Western media, including in the liberal intellectual press, arguing that Islam is different from other religions, that it is inherently more rigid and less open to inquiry than the other major religions, and that this is the reason why the Arab and Muslim world is so poor and has such backward leaders (feudal sheikhs and the like). This implies that the people in the West are so much luckier because they live under regimes based on the much more open-minded Judeo-Christian ethic, and that in turn is why they enjoy more prosperity and greater liberty. This is a Western chauvinist argument. In terms of the scriptures and traditions of Islam it is necessary to call attention to the fact that the Koran and Islamic tradition is in many ways simply an updated and concretised extension of the Judeo-Christian scriptures and traditions - as well

as others such as Zoroastrianism, Greek philosophy, etc. All these religions are equally oppressive and reactionary.

It is ahistorical to say that Islam is inherently incapable of reform. Throughout its history, Islam has responded to changing social conditions. In fact, many varieties of Islam are products of mass rebellions, invasions, power struggles, great debates, the flourishing of science in parts of the Islamic world, learning from the Greeks, Egyptians and Babylonians, advances in mathematics, astronomy, etc. It is also true that the Islamic world was in many ways scientifically and intellectually more developed than the world of medieval Europe. When the Muslim empire was established in the seventh century, Europe was in the Dark Ages. In the following centuries, Christianity went through the Inquisition, burned heretics at the stake, and so forth. However, the hold of religion and feudalism was overthrown by capitalist revolutions in Europe, whilst feudalism continued to maintain its grip on the Islamic lands. But capitalist development in the West was not Christian-ordained. Some say that if it had not been for Protestantism and Calvinism, capitalism would not have developed in the West. But it is the other way around. When capitalism developed (which did not have to happen the way it did, i.e. emerging in Europe first), it forged a unified world history. And in this process Islam continued to be part of the superstructure of societies that are both oppressive and subordinate. When European and American colonialism and imperialism penetrated these countries, it gave rise to the semi-feudal, semi-colonial, lopsided societies that we see today. The domination of Islam in the superstructure of these societies represents both the strong presence of feudalism and colonial-imperialist bondage. This is how history developed, and it is ahistorical to argue which religion is better.

Another ahistorical view is that Islam should catch up! It cannot and should not try to "catch up". The world is saturated with imperialist-capitalist countries already. And the Islamic countries do not need to produce Islamic Luthers or Kants. That era has passed and attempts to reproduce it are bound to be reactionary.

7 Ali Shariati, an Iranian, is one of the most famous Islamic thinkers. He tried to forge a modern revolutionary Shiism. He is the founding father of a new trend among Shiites. Ayatollah Khomeini considered him an eclectic.

Shariati goes back to the origins of Shi'ism to claim that it has an immense revolutionary potential. He injected this new reading of Shi'ism with modern sociology, including aspects of Marxism, to produce what is portrayed as an anti-colonial, native identity, called "Coming Back to Self" after the title of one of his most important writings. He lumped the exploited and exploiters in the West together as "others" and portrayed Fatemeh, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, as a role model for modern Muslim women.

His political aim was to counter the growing influence of Marxism among Iranian intellectuals.

8 In the nineteenth century the hierarchy of the Shiite faith was institutionalised like this: Grand Ayatollah at the top, followed by the Ayatollah and then the Hojat-ul-Islam. Only Grand Ayatollahs can practice Taghleid.

9 A word should be said here about the People's Mujahedeen Organisation of Iran, since it differs in certain respects from most fundamentalist Islamic movements. It was founded in the late 1960s as an anti-imperialist guerrilla organisation and fought against the Shah and US imperialism. It had clearly defined political goals - the overthrow of the Shah and the ousting of imperialism from Iran - and its perspective for future society was a "classless Towhidi society", a classless society where everything belongs to god. At its inception, it was a radical petit-bourgeois organisation, which felt required to resort to Islam in order to gain legitimacy among the Muslim population and to distinguish itself from the Marxist political organisations. At the same time it

felt the need to incorporate Marxist notions, such as classes, exploitation, imperialism, etc., into its theory to distinguish itself from the reactionary clergy and Islamic fundamentalists.