Newman calls his first GA meeting

Over 40 students attended the first formal GA meeting to be held since the last meeting on March 8, 1977 when a quorum of 30 voted to lower its quorum to 25. (Photo by John Griswold)

Poet predicts collapse of Iran govt

By Elaine Douglas

The government of Iran may soon collapse or be overthrown, Iranian poet Reza Baraheni told an audience at MIT this week. "A few years ago this would have been unthinkable," he said, but "Carter's betrayal of his human rights policy has reinforced the people's resistance." Baraheni and other Iranian spectators at the April 26th meeting described an Iranian populace outraged and disillusioned by President Carter's failure to criticize violations of human rights in Iran. MIT Professor Nassim Chomsky, who also spoke at the meeting, said the US could not lead an authentic human rights campaign because US economic interests usually benefit when human rights are suppressed in the third world.

"On November 15, the day Carter met with the Shah in Washington," Baraheni said, "sixteen students died when police tried to break up a group of 4,000 students who had gathered for a poetry reading at Tehran University.

"But the Shah wanted to be seen shaking hands with the President who made human rights a main issue," Baraheni went on. "The Shah promised not to raise oil prices and Carter never mentioned human rights. Later, Carter agreed New Year's at the Shah's palace in Tehran and the State Department issued a statement saying that President Carter and the Shah held identical views on human rights. This was a stab in the back of all Iranians who believed in Carter's promises," he said.

The French jurist, Madeleine Lefue-Veron, who spoke at MIT April 15, also dwelt on the theme of disillusion in Iran. "Carter's human rights policy raised much hope for the people are suffocating under dictatorship," Lefue-Veron asserted, "but these hopes have been dashed, precipitating a political crisis. For the US, Iran will turn into another Vietnam," she declared.

Lefue-Veron visited Iran in late 1977 to investigate allegations of repression and torture. The recent period of instability in Iran began in June 1977, Baraheni said. It has been marked by general strikes in more than 50 cities and demonstrations and riots in which buildings were burned. Students, clergy and their followers, urban peasants, and other sectors of society have been involved. Troops have repeatedly been called upon to fire on the population and though these orders have not always been obeyed, hundreds have died and many more have been arrested.

Baraheni said that early in November 1977, 58 prominent Iranians issued an "unprecedented" statement denouncing "an end to the Shah's rule, elections and the convening of a parliament, the right to form political parties, freedom of assembly and speech, and punishment for the torturers."

In Iran "the press is totally controlled, all communications are censored, and any gathering of more than three persons is illegal," the truth has no existence in Iran," Lefue-Veron declared. "If one does not praise the regime, one must choose between prison or silence."

Individuals are arrested on any or no pretext, she said, and detained indefinitely without trial. Their families are not told where they are. If they are tried, they are judged by a military tribunal behind closed doors. Defendants have no right of discovery, and even can be re-arrested and tried for the offense of which they were previously acquitted."

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