

### The Iranian Revolution

When the Shah relaxed censorship laws in 1977, Iran erupted into a series of demonstrations and dissents. The writings of Ayatollah Khomeini began to circulate widely, and the amount of protest material in general began to flood the country. All through the 1960's and 1970's, Iranians were deeply discontent with the dictatorship of the Shah, but the flood of protest material fanned this discontent into a raging passion. People demanded more reforms, more human rights, more freedom, and more democracy.

There were two distinct revolutionary movements. The first was the religious movement headed by the *Ulema*; this movement demanded the return to a society based on the *Shari'ah* and *Ulema* administration. The second movement was a liberal movement that wanted Westernization, but also demanded greater democracy, economic freedom, and human rights. As the revolution proceeded, these two groups gradually merged to form a unified front. The spark that erupted into revolution was a protest in Qumm on January 9, 1978. A group of students protested the visit of Jimmy Carter, the American President, and the government's attacks on Ayatollah Khomeini. In particular, they demanded that Khomeini be allowed to return to the country. The police opened fire on the students and killed seventy.

1. What did the people of Iran want in 1977?
2. What were the two movements that wanted change?
3. What happened in Qumm?

This set in motion an inescapable pattern that steadily destabilized the Shah's government and reduced its legitimacy in the eyes of both Iranians and the world. In Shi'a tradition, martyrdom requires a commemoration of the martyrs forty days after they have been killed. So forty days after the massacre at Qumm, Iranians took to the streets to commemorate the dead students and, by extension, to protest the government. Again, Iranian police opened fire on the crowd. Over one hundred people were killed in Tabriz on February 18, the fortieth day after the Qumm massacre. On March 30, forty days after the massacre at Tabriz, over one hundred demonstrators were killed in Yazd. And so on. By August, demonstrations had become constant all over Iran.

The Shah was losing control. He appointed a new prime minister and made an attempt to allow demonstrations to proceed without violence. But on September 8, a day Iranian historian's call "Black Friday," Iranian troops fired on a Tehran demonstration and killed several hundred people. On September 9, the Shah declared martial law and imprisoned as many opposition leaders as he could lay hands on. Because of this, the revolutionaries changed tactics from demonstrations to strikes. Beginning in October, a long series of strikes, including oil-workers, began to cripple the nation.

1. What began to happen in Iran after the first attack at Qumm?
2. What was "Black Friday?"

Even though the Shah convinced Iraq to evict Khomeini, when Khomeini moved to France he became more powerful than ever. He suddenly gained an international audience, and the French and British in particular sympathized with his dissent against the Shah. He spoke regularly to Iran through "speeches" were recorded and distributed all throughout Iran. The Shah realized that he would have to let Khomeini return to the country, but Khomeini refused. Since the Shah's government was illegitimate, Khomeini declared that he would never step foot in Iran as long as the Shah was in power.

In November, the Shah turned the government into a military government in order to force strikers back to work. But the worst, everyone knew, was about to come. The month of Muhurram was approaching, the month in which Shi'ites traditionally celebrate the martyrdom of Husayn. It is a passionate and highly religious month, and since the protests against the Shah were largely religious in nature, everyone knew that the country was on the verge of exploding.

Muhurram began on December 2 with demonstrations, and these demonstrations would continue all throughout the month. They were massive, in the millions, and it was clear that the demonstrators, not the government, were in charge. They seized government buildings, shut down businesses with strikes, assassinated government officials. Iranian demonstrators knew this was the month of martyrdom and many would dress in white (the garb of martyrs) and try to provoke government troops to fire on them.

On January 16, 1979, the Shah left Iran for good. On February 1, Khomeini returned to Iran to a welcoming crowd of several million people. On February 12, the Prime Minister of Iran fled. The Revolution was over and Khomeini declared a new Islamic Republic.

1. How did Khomeini gain power while in France?
2. What happened during the Muhurram?
3. What happened in January and February of 1979?

In a speech given to a huge crowd after returning to Iran from exile February 1, 1979, Khomeini made a variety of promises to Iranians for his coming Islamic regime: A popularly elected government that would represent the people of Iran and with which the clergy would not interfere. He promised that "no one should remain homeless in this country," and that Iranians would have free telephone, heating, electricity, bus services and free oil at their doorstep. While many changes came to Iran under Khomeini, these promises have yet to be fulfilled in the Islamic Republic.

Under Khomeini's rule, Sharia (Islamic law) was introduced, with the Islamic dress code enforced for both men and women by Islamic Revolutionary Guards and other Islamic groups. Women were forced to cover their hair, and men were not allowed to wear shorts. The Iranian educational curriculum was Islamized at all levels with the Islamic Cultural Revolution; the "Committee for Islamization of Universities" carried this out thoroughly. Since his death in 1989, Iran has gone through a series of troubling times and is currently working on peaceful negotiations with the West.

1. What did Khomeini do when he got to power?