

## Khomeini's massacre of the children of Iran

by Thierry Lalevée

On Nov. 20, 1985, the 40th anniversary of the convening of the Nuremberg Tribunal to hear evidence of Nazi Crimes against Humanity, the Schiller Institute, headed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, issued a call for the convening of a new Nuremberg Tribunal. Its target: the Crimes against Humanity of the International Monetary Fund, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, the international drug trade and terrorism, the mad and bloody adventures of Muammar Qaddafi, the genocide policies of the Malthusian lobby, and the Ayatollah Khomeini's barbarism against Iran's own people and neighboring states.

The institute's call read in part:

"A most bloody and unbending tyranny has been imposed upon the people of Iran, and many hundreds of thousands, probably millions, have died either fighting on the front in a never-ending war, or as a result of ferocious and bestial oppression. Tens of thousands of Iranian children and adolescents have been ritually sacrificed on the military front in the name of an insane interpretation of Islam, used as mine-sweepers to clear the way for adult soldiers. . . .

"This barbarism and these policies shall be considered as crimes against humanity."

A few months ago in France, a book by Freidoune Sahebjam was published: *Je N'ai Plus de Larmes Pour Pleurer (I Have No More Tears to Cry)* (edit. Grasset, Paris: 1985), one of the most dramatic accounts ever published of the crimes against humanity of the Ayatollah's regime, which came to power in February 1979. The book deals with one of the most barbarous aspects of the regime: The systematic massacre of tens of thousands of Iranian children from the spring of 1982 on.

There have been very few eyewitness accounts of such atrocities. As news slowly filtered out into the Western press,

these children were sent to their death through Iraqi minefields, or directly against the Iraqi army, unarmed, or armed only with dud grenades. None of these children knew of their fate, but the officers of the Iranian army and of the *Pasdarans* (Revolutionary Guards) were walking safely far behind the lines of children as the mines exploded.

Most children were killed. In the spring and summer offensives of 1982, more than 7,000 are reported to have been killed. The few survivors on the Iranian side were never allowed to speak. Some 2,000 had the luck of being taken prisoner by Iraq. But few of them were able to speak. Since the Islamic regime of Khomeini has denied ever using children in the war, the existence of these POWs was not acknowledged, and they could not be allowed to return to Iran. For the regime, they are conveniently dead. For the many families who have accepted the social and financial advantages of being a family "of martyrs," in a society where martyrdom is the ultimate blessing, they are also dead.

As Freidoune Sahebjam underlines in the introduction to the account of the story of Reza Behrouzi, as the child is called, it took many months before Reza was ready to speak to what he considered "foreigners." The book is the account of Reza's life as he himself told it. To do so, Reza had to overcome many emotional obstacles—that all he had been told since the age of seven concerning non-Iranians and Iranian opponents of Khomeini was false. He had also to overcome the psychological and physical trauma of what had happened to him since 1979, when he was merely 10-years-old.

The difference between Reza Behrouzi and other children may lie in poetry. From a poor peasant family, Reza was one of the rare children able to go to school and learn how to read and write; most others simply work in the fields. In school,

as he says, he learned poem after poem by Khayyam, Hafiz, and others, which he recited to himself to overcome his fears. "Today, still, my only friends are the poets, Hafez and Khayyam. Without them, I could not have found the strength to survive. They inspired me and helped me to fight when, for the fifth time, my spine was operated on to remove the bullets," writes Reza. Many other Iranian children, younger and older, have not overcome these fears, and have as yet refused to tell their story—it may take years before they fully understand what happened to them, if ever.

### **Destruction of the family**

The story of Reza Behrouzi is the story of an Iranian child who, not yet 13, was sent to the front, and also, the story of how a normal peasant family was utterly destroyed by the Khomeini regime.

Reza was a child in a peasant family living near the village of Botchan, close to Kerramshahr. Only three persons in the village, the mayor, the policeman, and the pharmacist, knew how to read and write; therefore, newspapers could not be read; and radio and television was non-existent. A glimpse of national life came only when the Shah and Shahbanou happened to visit the regional capital, the brother of the Shah came to the mountains to hunt, or an army general passed through.

In such a village, it made little difference when, one day, the portrait of the Shah was replaced by a photo of Khomeini. The villagers had cultivated the land on behalf of a Teheran-based landowner; after 1979, they did it on behalf of the state which had nationalized it.

Life only changed in September 1980, when the war with Iraq erupted. Suddenly, there were regular visits from military officers, to brief the villagers on the progress of the war, led "by the Imam," against the infidels, the Iraqi Sunnis. In the spring of 1981, the adult men of the village were called into the army; none, including Reza's father, ever returned. The family had become the family of a Martyr. In the summer of 1981, Reza's older brother, 17-years-old, was called into the army, and his death was soon announced. In the fall of 1981, his second brother, 15-years-old, was sent to the front and killed. Of what had been a large family, there only remained the mother, three sisters, and Reza.

For each of these martyrs, Reza's mother received a handsome pension from the state. Taken under the protection of a local Hojatesislam who was not uninterested in Reza's mother's new income, the family was moved off the land to a nearby city and given a house. A change of life as well as a change of status; a small peasant family had become one of the pillars of Khomeini's regime by becoming an important Family of Martyrs. There, reports Reza, a dramatic change took place in his mother—still a young woman who had lost everything she had lived for. Threatened by her mullah that refusal would endanger her regular income, his mother decided to send him into the army.

At age 12, Reza found himself on the Iraqi war front; one of the youngest soldiers, he was found unfit to carry weapons. Indeed, his first assignment, in the spring of 1982, together with several thousand other children 13- to 15-years-old, as well as men over 60, was to walk into the Iraqi minefields. They were told to walk straight in front of them toward Najaf and Kerbala. They had been warned, "If one falls, do not stop, go on walking." As Reza describes, none of them ever realized, even afterward, that they were walking on minefields. Explosions took place, but they all believed these were artillery bombardments from the Iraqi side.

The lines of children began faltering. But suddenly, the "12th Imam" appeared on a nearby mountain on a white horse. A brief apparition at first, followed by a longer appearance. It was, of course, an actor who called on the children to go on walking, and to meet him soon in Paradise. For Iranian Shi'ites, who have been expecting the reappearance of the Imam for centuries, the effect was electrifying; children didn't walk, but ran for joy, into the minefields. That day, 1,500 children died. Reza was wounded in the leg and back.

In almost any army, such wounds would have meant discharge—but not in Iran. Treated for a month in Ahwaz, Reza was back in the war by June, helping to clear what remained of the city of Khorramshahr, the houses and the corpses, all dead for more than a year. As the local army commander told them, the prize for the best soldier in Khorramshahr would be the honor of being sent to the front again. Hence, in July 1982, Reza Behrouzi was again at Hossienieh on the Iraqi border, and was told to follow his unit into Iraqi territory, with the orders: "No prisoners, no wounded." That order applied to both Iraqi and Iranian soldiers. Iranian wounded were shot by the Pasdarans, rather than sent back to Ahwaz.

On July 14, 1982, Reza was hit by an Iraqi shell and paralyzed for life. After weeks on the front, where he had less to fear from the Iraqis than from the brutalities of the Pasdarans, and the systematic rape of young children by the mullahs (he narrowly escaped), he was taken prisoner by the Iraqis, who took him to a hospital where his life was saved.

Sahebjam's book has yet to receive the publicity it deserves. This story is still being covered up. The Swiss government, which had originally, through the Red Cross, accepted the creation of Iranian Exile Committees to welcome to Switzerland Iranian child POWs from Iraq, closed them down. In January 1985, a new organization called "Peace for Children" was established with the help of the author of the book, as well as Ali Palhavi, the nephew of the former Shah of Iran, who, imprisoned under the Shah, remained in Iran under Khomeini, until he fled into exile in France. His break with the regime concerned the massacre of Iranian children.

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