

ASSOCIATION FOR THE SUPPORT OF VICTIMS OF MOJAHEDIN-E KHALQ

ANNIVERSARY OF FRENCH POLICE RAID ON MKO TERRORIST HEADQUARTERS

Former Members Brief a Seminar on the Prosecution's Progress

On 17 June in 2003, the forces of justice and law in France confronted a terrorist cult and its leaders when police raided the Mojahedin's Paris headquarters and over 160 personnel were arrested including top woman Maryam Azdonlou (aka Maryam Rajavi). In response the MKO flouted the rule of law and tried to evade justice using blackmail, ransom and ultimately by burning its members in the streets of European cities in an effort to force the French government not to pursue its legal process.

Unperturbed the French judiciary is collating evidence with which to bring prosecutions on terrorist charges. On the first anniversary of this event, 17 June 2004, several former members and officials of the MKO held a joint seminar



and press conference in which they revealed some basic facts about this terrorist cult. The seminar, in Forest Hill La Villette, was held to reflect support for the courageous action taken by the judicial system of France, and in particular paid tribute to the courage of Judge Bruguiere. Over 80 political personalities, as well as their families, took part. The majority of the participants were from among the ex members of the MKO. There were also more than a dozen reporters from Persian, French and English speaking media and some foreign guests. At the start of the seminar, the Perse et Avenir Association was introduced. This association was founded by some of the ex members in France.

Mr Mehdi Khoshhal then introduced his recent book 'Chantage' [Duplicity] which comprises a collection of articles about the self burnings which took place last year. He gave a detailed briefing about the incidents and then dedicated the book to Judge Bruguiere. Following this, a documentary of secretly filmed meetings between Massoud Rajavi and other leaders of MKO with the secret services of Saddam Hussein was shown. The films clearly exposed Mr Rajavi's involvement in many of the criminal acts of the Saddam regime and included evidence of the written appreciation given by Saddam himself to Massoud Rajavi for his successful massacre of the Kurdish people in their uprising in 1991. The films also exposed

EDITORIAL

Welcome back to this second edition of Survivors' Report.



This month has been a very busy time for us. Some readers will be aware of the case of Khodabandeh and Bassam. In April last year, Ebrahim Khodabandeh and Jamil Bassam, both active members of the Mojahedin and NCRI, were arrested on the Syrian border while smuggling several million US dollars, passports and documents out of Iraq.

They were charged with aiding a terrorist organisation and held in Syria for two months before being handed over to Iranian security officials and flown back to Iran. Since then, British politicians have led a campaign to free them and return them to the UK where they had refugee status. Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action for the two men. The Mojahedin organisation also campaigned for the two men, claiming that they were being tortured and in daily danger of execu-

tion. In spite of two visits by MEP Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne to the two men in Iran, from which she reported that the two men were in good health and being treated well and were allowed home to visit their families, the Mojahedin have persisted in their claims that the two men are under severe torture and will be imminently executed. Iran-Interlink editor Anne Singleton decided to visit the two men herself with two Members of UK Parliament and find out what was really

happening. You can read her report in this edition. Meanwhile, June 17 marked the anniversary of the arrest of MKO leader Maryam Rajavi in Paris. She is still awaiting trial in France. Survivors' Report contributors visited Paris for a seminar to show some of the evidence available to the French judiciary. While in Paris, contributors also visited former Iran president Dr Abolhassan Banisadr with whom they exchanged experiences and views. Reports on these events can be found in this issue. ■

Anniversary of French Police Raid on MKO Terrorist Headquarters Former Members Brief a Seminar on the Prosecution's Progress

the role of Maryam Azdonlou (Rajavi), as the MKO second in command, in issuing orders to terrorise and assassinate people. Maryam Azdonlou gave direct orders which targeted ordinary civilian people in Iran, as well as ordering suppression inside the organisation such as the torture of disaffected members in MKO prisons and in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison of Saddam's secret services. The documentary clearly shocked participants in the seminar. Mr Farhad Javaheriyar and Mr Massoud Tayebi, ex officials of the MKO give briefings about the films and documents and talked about the decisive role of ex

MKO members in revealing the true nature of the MKO's leaders and their two decade relationship with the secret services of Iraq. The MKO up to now has chosen not to say anything about these documents. Mr Tayebi, a film producer, talked about the way that these secret films were made and where the microphones were hidden by Saddam's secret service agents. He also explained how all the military, political and intelligence orders were given by the secret services to MKO and how they were checked and approved directly by Saddam before being handed over to Massoud Rajavi. In this seminar, Mr

Akbar Sharbaf and Mr Ali Qashqavi, two of many ex members who have been imprisoned for many years in MKO prisons and later in the notorious Abu Qorab prison, described the various kinds of tortures inflicted on them and how they were transferred to Iraqi intelligence officers on the direct order of Maryam Azdonlou (Rajavi). Talking about the conditions of the prisons including Abu Quraib prison, they emphasised that all these barbaric inhuman actions were being carried out on the direct orders of Maryam Rajavi (nee Azdonlou, the wife of Massoud Rajavi) and that the torturers, just before starting, would on many occasions say that Madam (Maryam Azdonlou) has asked



for ‘special treatment’ for you. These reports and evidence were so shocking that their effect was clearly visible in the participants faces and left the reporters and foreign guests deep in thought. Also in this meeting, Mr Abbas Sadeghi Nejad, Ardeshir Parhizkari, Karim Haghi and Farhad Javiheri Yar had a Q & A session in which they answered some of the participants’ questions.

Mr Parhizkari in a brief speech, explained the true nature of the MKO and gave warning about the presence and activities of the cult throughout the civilised world. He also expanded on the dangers posed by such a group which, facing the temporary [and legal] arrest of its leader in Paris, can sanctify tens of its brain washed members and burn them in the streets of European countries. In other situations, said Mr Parhizkari, such a cult is certainly capable of drowning the world in fire and blood if needed and is able to create catastrophes next to which, the tragedy of September 11, 2001 would look very small. Mr Sadeghi Nejad also described conditions in the MKO’s prisons and the brutal torture carried out in these prisons. He especially referred to the mass imprisonment and torture of over 500 disaffected members in 1994 during which several were killed under torture, including Parviz Ahmadi and Ghorban Ali Torabi. He witnessed their deaths in his own cell while imprisoned. Following these revelations, Mr Karim

Haghi explained the legal procedures and the progress of the case brought by former MKO members against Maryam Azdonlou (Rajavi), the MKO and Massoud Rajavi and some specific individuals who were involved in breaches of the most fundamental human rights of these members, and he spoke about the views of the French lawyers involved.

Continuing the seminar, Mr Massoud Khodabandeh an ex official of the MKO and NCRI, who was formerly in charge of the personal security of Massoud and Maryam Rajavi, gave a speech about the role of Maryam Rajavi in terrorist activities and her deliberate targeting of civilian people in the streets of Iranian cities, as well as her direct involvement in the imprisonment and torture of ex members. He also explained the relationships between Maryam Rajavi and the intelligence services of Iraq under the rule of Saddam. Toward the end of the seminar, Mr Taghadosi, renowned Iranian opera singer now resident in Germany, spoke with deep emotion to the seminar. He told participant how he deeply regretted all his previous involvement with the NCRI and MKO and emphasised that they did not show their true face when they approached him to support them. Nevertheless, he stressed his profound apologies to the victims of the MKO, in particular to Mrs Robabeh Shahrokhi (known as ‘Mother Rezvan’) who has, even in her old age,

been a victim of the MKO [Mrs Shahrokhi’s story features in the ‘Personal Experiences’ of this edition]. Taghadosi sang an aria entitled ‘Mother’ which he dedicated to Mother Rezvan. The audience was deeply affected by this gracious gesture. To sum up the seminar, Mr Jamshid Tahmasbi, an ex official of the MKO spoke about the current situation of the MKO. He described how the organisation is trying to white-wash its years of criminal activities and war crimes and thus be removed from the list of terrorist organisations of the USA and European Union. He talked of how it is also trying to conserve the body of its army in Iraq as it is afraid of even more revelations should more members come to European countries and add to what is already overwhelming evidence. Mrs Mitra Yousefi, wife of Mr Hassan Nayeb Agha (one time member of the Iranian football team and now a prisoner in the hands of this cult) delivered a speech on the reality of women’s place inside the MKO. She explained the degree of brainwashing in the MKO to the extent that for the top women personnel of the MKO their highest achievement is that they be ‘Kaniz’ [female slave] for Maryam Azdonlou. Mrs Yousefi said that since Iranians have always been proud that the degradation of slavery never crossed over Iranian soil into its culture, this is the utmost insult to their nationality and culture and to Iranian women. She said this was a clear example of the extent of brainwashing and suppression inside the Cult. To end the seminar Mr Taghadosi with his powerful musical voice led the participants in a rousing chorus of the song of Ay Iran, Ay Marz-e Por Gohar [You Iran, the Land of Jewels]. A full report of the seminar and the films shown will be published separately. ■

IRAN-INTERLINK VISITS IRAN

Mojahedin prisoners in Evin talk to UK MPs



By Anne Singleton

On Monday 14 June an extraordinary meeting took place in one of the world's notorious prisons. In Evin prison in Tehran, in a large cool airy room situated close by the prison hospital sat Sir Teddy Taylor, MP (Con) and Mr Win Griffiths, MP (Lab) from the UK, an independent reporter from the UK, and myself representing Iran-Interlink, and two Iranian lawyers.

The wing in which we sat contains prisoners who pose a threat to national security; members of terrorist organisations like the Mojahedin-e Khalq and other political opponents of the Islamic Republic, as well as individuals such as a High Court judge who had accepted a very large bribe.

Our meeting opened with an explanation from a team of Iranian security officials. This team we were told, is responsible for the Mojahedin prisoners. Very soon, the two men we had travelled so far to see were ushered one by one into the room. We met first with Ebrahim Khodabandeh, followed by Jamil Bassam.

In April 2003 these two men had been arrested on the Syrian border where the Mojahedin had involved them in smuggling out of Iraq

through Syria large sums of US dollars, documents, passports and other items, of which neither man had any prior knowledge.

After being held in Syria for two months while the Mojahedin tried to bribe officials there, the Syrians handed the men to Iran as nationals of that country. (Unfortunately Syria does not recognise the UN Convention on Refugees and the two men were travelling with UK refugee documents.) Once the men had been taken to Iran, the Mojahedin began its campaign to free them, or rather, began a campaign to publicize itself. The Mojahedin needs to have more and more martyrs in order to justify its intractable position vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic and so it took the issue to the UK and European parlia-

ments on the basis that the two men were under severe torture and facing execution. The NCRI, political front for the MKO, even issued statements announcing places and names of torturers of the two men and predicted for a year that they would be executed imminently.

In February 2004 whilst in Iran, Baroness Emma Nicholson, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee made her second visit, at the request of Iran-Interlink, to see the two men. She reported that they were in good health and had no complaints about their treatment, but were still awaiting trial. The Mojahedin dismissed her comments as lies and persisted in their tale that the men were being tortured and faced execution. Our current visit to Evin prison would test that assertion.

Ebrahim Khodabandeh was in good health. At 51 years old, he certainly looked much more relaxed and healthy than the last time I had seen him two years previously while still a member of the Mojahedin. At that time he weighed only 6.5 stones and appeared haggard and ill, with a haunted look about him. Now looking fit and well-fed, he smiled and talked confidently and openly about his experiences, from his arrest to his current treatment in the notorious Evin prison.

Jamil Bassam arrived soon after. The same age as Ebrahim he also looked and sounded to be in good health though he appeared a little more reserved. We were able to ask them about their treatment and prison conditions. Both are being held in the

same reasonably sized cell and have access to all Iranian newspapers, as well as whatever foreign publications are available in Iran. They have seven television channels [convicted prisoners also have access to a computer, though not internet] and are allowed to visit their families inside and outside prison on request. Both men reported that they were able to telephone their families in Iran within three days of their arrival in Iran and shortly afterwards were taken home on visits. Ebrahim has also been in regular telephone contact with his daughter in the UK since September 2003, three months after they arrived in Evin. His daughter and her family had been to visit Ebrahim just before our trip and he had been able to spend every day with them for two weeks. Ebrahim has three grandchildren.

We talked to Ebrahim and Jamil for over half an hour before being introduced to ten more prisoners who had been arrested while with the Mojahedin organisation. These were brought into the room in twos and in turn each told their stories. They spoke variously of their recruitment into the Mojahedin, the activities they undertook on behalf of the organisation and the relationship the organisation had with them, which was described in various detail by them all and described by one prisoner as a form of brutal brainwashing. Their accounts moved and disturbed us. They spoke with a passion which was palpably genuine and not as a result of duress. One prisoner in particular spoke for all when he directly addressed the MPs and pleaded with them to help others still inside the Mojahedin. He told them, "the Mojahedin puts on a respectable face in the west and collect signatures

from politicians, and that support is used directly against people like us in Iraq, they use this support to suppress us. They would tell us, 'how dare you disobey us when western politicians approve us'. We beg you to use your position as MPs to make sure the Mojahedin are not able to get support from members of parliament based on their lies and deception." The MPs were both moved by this direct appeal. These prisoners differed from Ebrahim and Jamil in that they had been arrested inside Iran whilst carrying out terrorist acts against various targets. While Ebrahim and Jamil are still on remand awaiting trial on charges relating to membership of and aiding and abetting a terrorist organisation, the other prisoners had all been tried and sentenced for terrorist crimes. None of these sentences appeared excessive in relation to the serious nature of these crimes. The longest sentence of ten years in prison had been handed down to a man who, acting on orders from the Mojahedin leaders, had carried out ten terrorist attacks in Iran and killed several people in those attacks. Certainly, given the gravity of these actions, we were all surprised by his sentence, having expectation that 'life' would be the minimum the judicial system would award to a member of one of Iran's most implacable enemies.

I spoke to one senior security officer after the meeting to seek an explanation for this apparent volte face in the way that the Mojahedin are being treated. I put it to him that in spite of the obviously stage managed nature of these prisoners' speeches what came across was the sincerity and openness with which they spoke. How then did this fit in with the commonly held view, reinforced by the Mojahedin itself, that Mojahedin pri-

soners were automatically tortured and membership of the organisation carried a de facto death sentence. The officer's personal view was that over the past twenty three years, the severity of treatment meted out to the Mojahedin reflected the level of threat the organisation posed to the national security of the country, so that Massoud Rajavi's armed bid for power in the attempted 1981 coup led to a harsh crackdown as supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini fought to defend their Islamic Republic. The treachery of the Mojahedin during the eight year war with Iraq in which Rajavi acted as a mercenary for the Saddam regime also brought about the harshest treatment of captured Mojahedin. But as this threat waned from the late 1980s to the minimal that it is today, then the need to punish and wreak revenge on the perpetrators grew less. 'It became clear to many of us', he said, 'that by suppressing our enemy we created more enemies. The Mojahedin were using the treatment of its prisoners [in Iranian jails] as a lever for recruitment. Talking to captured Mojahedin in our prisons we realised that they had been deceived into joining and that once inside the organisation they were forced to accept a very one sided picture of events.

Our view now is that these people are victims of the Mojahedin, not our enemies, and we should help them. The way we have chosen to do this is to allow them every opportunity to realise for themselves what the organisation has done to them and how, and why, and to make their own minds up about the truth and facts. We don't expect them to agree with us or support the Islamic Republic, he said, but at least we expect them to see what is real and what isn't.'

Our meeting with these prisoners certainly bore out the effectiveness of this policy. There was no sign that they were speaking under duress or seeking to lie in order to avoid mistreatment. Indeed Ebrahim now said that while he did not feel hatred for his erstwhile colleagues, he understood the culpability of the Rajavis to the extent that he rejected the organisation and would not return to it. On the other hand, Jamil was happy to state that he still regards himself as a member of the Mojahedin and that Iranian officials are fully aware of that. Both men have enjoyed equal opportunity to access information and the opinion of others, and had freely come to their different conclusions after their year in prison.

The other ten prisoners and Ebrahim spoke critically of the brainwashing and deception they had endured at the hands of the Mojahedin. At the same time, several, again including Ebrahim, spoke candidly of their continued rejection of Islamic rule and their belief in secular democracy. When asked by one of the MPs whether the Mojahedin would ever be instrumental in bringing this ideal to Iran, the prisoners unanimously expressed their belief that Massoud Rajavi would introduce a dictatorship even more bloody than that which he opposed. After spending five hours in the prison talking and listening, the visitors left for perhaps an even more extraordinary event as both MPs and myself were taken to dinner in a first class Tehran restaurant along with Ebrahim, who came escorted by a minder. With us were a translator and another minder. We were shortly joined by Mr Naraghi, a wellknown writer and advisor to the UN, an outspoken critic of the Islamic Republic, who

also acts as an aide to Mrs Shirin Ebadi. (This was surely a gesture by Iran's security officials to indicate the Islamic Republic's burgeoning confidence in tolerating political dissent.) Mr Naraghi presented Ebrahim with a signed copy of his book *Azadi* [Freedom].

Over dinner, with the minders at one end of the table enjoying their dinner, the MPs and Mr Naraghi were able to converse freely with Ebrahim and to elicit his views on various topics. I also took the opportunity at various times during my visit, to speak to Ebrahim without the near presence of minders. On one occasion I asked him whether he wasn't impatient to be tried so that at least the sentence he faced would be clear. Ebrahim told me he was in no hurry. Whatever his sentence was, he said, he believed he would be spending at least another year in prison. 'I need time anyway', he told me, 'to adjust my thinking. I'm not ready to be released now, I need to get the Mojahedin out of my system before I can think of getting on with my life in the outside world.' Officials hinted that Ebrahim and Jamil would face only a light prison sentence for their involvement with the Mojahedin and that that remission would be granted for good behaviour. The officials stressed however that a prisoner's statement of contrition or of their continued support for the opposition organisation had no bearing on the legal process and both men would undergo a fair trial with proper legal representation of their own choice. But the officials stressed that it was important that the men be given every opportunity to come to a genuine realisation and understanding of the behaviour of the Mojahedin toward them and their relationship with the organisation,

and to choose freely whether to continue their support for the organisation or to reject their involvement. Past experience had shown, they said, that this would be a significant factor in the men's ability to get on with their lives successfully after their release from prison. 'It really comes down to whether they can stand on their own two feet or not', one minder told me. Ebrahim was clear about this when I spoke to him. He said both he and Jamil, although they hadn't chosen to end up in prison, felt that somehow they had been saved by this action. Both men, he explained, felt they were safer in prison than if they had remained in Iraq to become hostages of Massoud Rajavi in his power games, or if they had remained in Europe and been asked to burn themselves on behalf of Maryam Rajavi [to exert pressure on the French government not to pursue due legal process]. On the five hour flight back to England I had time to think back on my visit. I reflected that long as my own journey was, the prisoners I left behind and the officials of the Islamic Republic had all traversed a much longer journey than I could have ever hoped to imagine before last week. ■



MEP Emma Nicholson Meets with Ebrahim Khodabandeh in Tehran shortly after the arrest

BANISADR MEETS POLITICAL OPPOSITION ACTIVISTS IN PARIS



On 18 June, 2004 Dr Abolhassan Banisadr (Iran's first post-revolution president) held a lengthy meeting with a group of ex-MKO members in which they shared with him their experiences of being in the MKO and the lessons which could be drawn from those experiences.

Participants in the meeting were Ali Ghashghavi, Amir Movasaghi, Akbar Sharbaf, Ardeshir Parhizkari, Farhad Javiheri Yar, Karim Haghi, Abas Sadeghi nejad, Jamshid Tahmasbi. They spoke in depth about their experience of over twenty years of struggle against the Islamic Republic of Iran for freedom and democracy in Iran. They explained their views about the practices of the MKO in these last 20 years. The meeting started with the introduction of the participants, and Mr Haghi gave a brief report on a seminar which had taken place the previous day in Paris. Then the participants introduced themselves individually and explained their own experiences over the last twenty years, along with their assessments of the MKO's current situation.

Mr Ali Ghashghavi started his speech with a description of conditions in Abu Ghraib prison where he spent some time after being transferred there from one of the MKO's prisons in Ashraf camp. He explained that he was first imprisoned and tortured for resisting the 'Ideological Revolution' as well as denouncing the co-operation between the MKO and the secret services of Iraq. After enduring long imprisonment and torture in the MKO prisons, he was transferred to Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison on the order of Maryam Azodanloo (aka Rajavi), where he faced starvation and torture by Iraqi agents supervised by MKO officials. He said the aim was to crush him into accepting their orders. This did not happen and he survived for 3 years and 8 month in the harsh conditions

imposed on him. He emphasised that despite all the misery and torture he has endured, he still stands by his belief in democracy, which was the main basis for his struggle that he had chosen from the first days of his activities.

Following this Mr Akbar Sharbaf expanded on his own experience. He said that practically all his life he has been with the MKO and started working with them from the time of the late Shah of Iran. He went on to spend long years in the prisons of the Islamic Republic of Iran and stressed that he, like the others, has never given up the struggle for freedom and democracy in Iran. He escaped from Iran after a temporary release from prison and joined the MKO. But after he disagreed with the way the MKO was operating, the MKO leadership decided first to imprison him and then to exert physical and psychological pressure on him to make him accept the MKO leadership and its actions.

Mr Sharbaf resisted, like others, and suffered the consequences. In a rare opportunity he tried to run away but he was arrested while trying to cross the border between Iraq and Jordan. He was handed over to the MKO by Iraqi intelligence agents and transferred to the MKO's special prison for torture. He spent over a year in MKO prisons in solitary confinement and under torture but still refused to sign a docu-





ment asking forgiveness from the MKO leader. Later, on the order of Maryam Azodanloo (aka Rajavi), he was transferred to Abu Ghraib prison under the direct supervision of Saddam's son, Uday Hussein. He explained how every ex member of the MKO was awaiting death and felt there was no light at the end of tunnel for any of them, but how, in spite of this, they still resisted and did not co-operate with the Iraqi agents or the MKO intelligence officers in the prison. They never believed that one day they would get out alive. Having their freedom now, he and his colleagues have grasped every opportunity available in the west to be the voice of many others who have been, and still are, the victims of this cult in Iraq. Mr Sharbaf follows keenly events in Iran and is an active member of the opposition group, the Republicans of Iran. He sees his activities now as a continuation of his past politics, but at a new and more effective level. Mr Ardeshir Parhizkari started by saying it is over 20 years that he has been active in the politics of Iran. During his description of his own experiences, Mr Parhizkari said that his brother had been executed by the Iranian Regime and he himself had been in Iraq for over 15 years. But, he went on to say, he has seen many things in Iraq which are unimaginable for many people. He had gone to Iraq to continue his struggle for freedom and democracy but he was imprisoned

by an even more notorious dictatorship, that of Massoud Rajavi and Saddam Hussein. They tried their best to make him accept their leadership and their methods. His refusal to accept has left him with permanent disabilities as a result of torture. After suffering long in the MKO's prisons, he was handed over to Abu Ghraib prison to terminate his voice.

Mr Parhizkari also managed to get himself to Europe and is still firm in his belief in a non-violent struggle for democracy in Iran. Over the past year he has published many articles discrediting armed struggle, which have been welcomed by politicians and personalities.

Mr Amir Movasaghi, a long term member of the MKO who went to Iraq when he was a teenager, started his account of events. He explained the very bad situation he endured in Iraq during which he never gave in and continued to resist the secret services of the MKO. He talked of many occasions on which he had been severely beaten and placed in solitary confinement. He expanded on this, saying that: In an MKO base in Iraq, a meeting was organised by Massoud Rajavi and Maryam Azdonlou. In front of over 3000 members and officials of MKO, including Mehdi Abrishamchi, Abbas Davari, Ghasem Jaberzadeh, Mohsen Rezai, and women like Fahimeh Arvani, Mahvash Sepehri, Mojghan Parsaiee, Roghieh Abassi, Jilla Tolou and other commanders of the MKO, Maryam and Massoud asked him to obey their orders without question. He did not accept and this went on and on until the leader condemned him to a barbaric punishment. He was forced to pass in front of all the people in the meeting and they had to spit at him one by one and swear at him. After

that he was beaten up until he was unconscious. This was their way of saying that he was expelled from the organisation. He was then transferred to an MKO prison in Ashraf camp and kept in the worst conditions possible for a year. Even the food which was given to him during this time was the rotted leftovers to which they would deliberately add sand and earth.

Refusing to ask pardon from Massoud Rajavi and Maryam Azdonlou, he was transferred to Abu Ghraib prison. He explained how the torture in this prison continued even up to 24 hours before the first bombardment by American forces. Saddam Hussein ordered the release of all the criminals from the prison 24 hours before the start of the war. But the ex members were kept only because of the personal demand of Maryam Azdonlou who had asked the head of the prison to get rid of these ex members one way or another. The survival of these people was the worst nightmare for the leadership of the MKO.

Mr Tahmasbi started his speech by explaining the grounds on which the dictatorship inside MKO was built. He emphasized that the hiding of Massoud Rajavi and the down turn of the MKO after the fall of Saddam does not represent any change of belief by the leadership of the cult, and that Rajavi is like an injured snake that, having another opportunity will start



all over again. He mentioned the orders given for people to burn themselves in Europe as an example of what Rajavi could have in mind. The only thing that stopped the continuation of these killings and burnings was the exposure of their intentions by ex members of the MKO in these European countries, which resulted in the order to stop these actions. Mr Tahmasbi also emphasized that his 25 years of struggle against dictatorship has not ended and he continues his struggle for freedom and democracy in Iran. Mr Abbas Sadeghi Nejad, by expanding on his own experiences shed light on the internal relations of the MKO. He explained how he was asked to go to Iraq and that his family would follow. On arrival at the camp he asked about his family. After a year, Mahvash Sepehri head of the fifth army of the MKO, told him that his wife had died in childbirth at a hospital and that he should forget about his wife and child. They had also informed his family inside Iran that he had died in an operation by the ruling regime of Iran. "For 13 years", he said, "we never believed that the other side could be alive."

"In 1994 I began talking about the MKO's strategy and all the nonsense which I could not dare talk about but had in my heart. The result was imprisonment and then solitary confinement and then I was tortured by one of the Secretaries of the National Council of Resistance [political front of the MKO] called Nader Rafiee Nejad. He was notorious as the Mojahedin's Lajevardi (Lajevardi was head of Evin prison in Iran). When outside Iraq, he would pose as a political figure and would participate in all the NCRI's meetings as the Secretary." Mr Sadeghi Nejad explained that he could

not believe that torturers like Nader Rajiee Nejad, Majid Alemian and Saddat Darbandi could be members of the MKO, but he had seen with his own eyes the torture and murder of people like Parviz Ahmadi, Ghorban Ali Torabi, Ali Khoshal, Elyas Karami and etc carried out by these people.

Mr Farhad Javaheri Yar, the author of 'From Evin to Abu Ghorab' expanded on his thoughts about the actual meaning of 'Country', 'People', 'Freedom' and etc according to the leadership of the cult. He compared the cult's ideology to the ideologies of the era of slavery when leaders were training and creating gladiators for their own purposes.

At the end Dr Banisadr told the meeting 'you can turn these accounts into part of your country's history if you put your experiences at the disposal of future generations'. Dr Banisadr expanded on the current situation of the totalitarian faction which heads the Islamic Republic of Iran and said that they have arrived at the end of their road and have lost their power to manoeuvre in front of the people. He also referred to the 'tripartite of force' in the political scene of Iran which involves Iran's totalitarian faction, the Monarchists and the Mojahedin. He emphasised that all of these forces have come to a dead end and the last word now is the word of the nationalistic forces which have not bent towards America, have not been involved in co-operation with Saddam's Iraq and have had not dirtied their hands with killings, tortures and massacres. These are the ones who will build a future for Iran which is bright and clear. In conclusion, the participants thanked Dr Banisadr for his contribution and for showing the way. ■

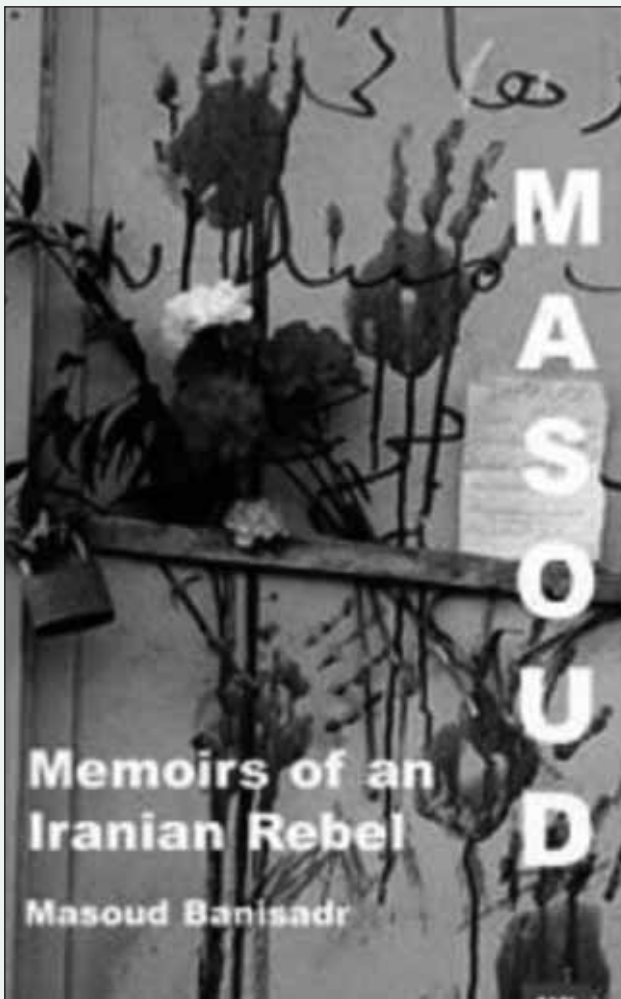
WHY DO FORMER MEMBERS REFER TO THE MKO AS A CULT?

According to experts, all cults or sects share the same characteristics, whether they are religious cults, social cults or, as in the case of the MKO, militant religious cults.

The MKO, displaying all five characteristics:

- Indoctrinates its members;
- Forms a closed totalitarian society;
- Has a self-appointed Messianic and charismatic leader;
- Believes that the end justifies the means;
- Has wealth which does not benefit its members.

The dangers presented by true cults are several. The most significant are that firstly, membership of a cult robs the individual of every one of the basic human rights as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Secondly, cult culture renders the individual obedient and unquestioning to the point at which they will perform any act, including terrorist acts, suicide or suicide bombing, at the behest of their ideological [cult] leader. ■



BOOK REVIEW

'Masoud - Memoirs of an Iranian Rebel' by Masoud Banisadr

ISBN 0 86356 374 0, Published by Saqi Books.

This revealing book must be on the reading list of anyone who ever believed the Mojahedin were the answer to Iran's theocratic rule. Masoud is the story of one man's life and struggle in the recent turbulent history of Iran. As such Masoud Banisadr's story is a unique testament to these times as he divulges his deepest thoughts and emotions so as to effectively take us with him on this difficult journey.

But Masoud's own journey also symbolises that of many thousands like him who struggled to find truth and honour in post revolutionary Iran. For many, like Masoud, the Iranian Mojahedin shaped the nature of that struggle. Masoud's is an honest account which seeks to describe accurately the ghastly perversions of the organisation's original ideology which eventually destroyed his trust and faith. (Excerpt 2) He does this in fluent detail. But what also comes across in that detail is that Masoud's view of the Mojahedin is limited to his own experiences in it. This book relates the truth, perhaps as much of truth as will be credible to readers, but it is certainly not all the truth.

Perhaps because he is aware there is a wider truth than his own perception of events, Masoud is often ambiguous in describing his relationship with the

organisation and its leaders, sometimes it seems he cannot decide whether he should love or hate. This subtext of emotional wavering, however, tells more about the effect the Mojahedin's psychological manipulations has on its subjects than the author knows. Masoud's inconsistency is not a failing in the telling of a story but is a symptom of the very experience he tries so accurately to describe.

At one point Masoud refers in passing to suicides among some members. As a member of the Mojahedin's 'diplomacy' staff who spent most of his time in the USA, Masoud would not have been aware of the terrible toll in suicides which ensued after changes in the ideology forced members in Iraq to either accept the new regime or suffer imprisonment and even torture. Suicides were not the sad individual

failures implied by the book, but a direct result of an unbearable ultimatum issued by the leader Massoud Rajavi: obey or you cannot exist! For many (more than implied by this book) this meant suicide, the means for which were readily made available – cyanide capsules for instance. For an even greater number this meant years in solitary confinement with the ultimate punishment being Abu Ghraib prison.

When Masoud left the Mojahedin he describes his near kidnap on the streets of London (Excerpt 1). This is his experience of the determination of the Mojahedin to hold on to its members. The book cannot, because Masoud had no insight into the murky depths of the Mojahedin, let us know what happened to the prisoners in Abu Ghraib who had also tried to leave the organisation.

Nevertheless, it is a revealing and interesting book which adds significantly to the growing number of individual's tales which, placed side by side, paint an altogether more sinister picture of the Mojahedin-e Khalq.

Excerpt 1:

There were more sinister incidents. One day I was called to meet a sister, Fereshteh, and discuss an urgent matter. We agreed to rendezvous at the Baker Street Underground station. I was early, so to kill time I left the station by a different exit and was surprised to see a member of the organisation waiting there. 'So', he said, approaching me, 'you were told to be here too?'

I was almost certain he didn't know I had left the organisation, so I answered, 'Yes, that's right, I'm supposed to be meeting Sister Fereshteh by the other exit.'

He said, 'Exactly, I was told to wait here, and Bahman is waiting somewhere else.' I asked if he knew why we were there. 'I don't know,' he said, 'but I guess it is important.'

Apparently Sister Nasrin is here to take somebody back to Paris with her.'

'Who?' I asked.

'I don't know. Perhaps you can ask her, she's waiting in the car with another brother somewhere near here.' It suddenly struck me what they were up to. They intended to take me back to Paris at any price; if they could not persuade me, they would do so by other means. I excused myself, saying I had better go to my appointed meeting place, and instead rushed to the stairs and fled back to my flat. After that I received a few more phone calls requesting meetings, but I did not let myself fall into the same trap again.

(pp 466-467)

Excerpt 2:

In November 1994, after a year of political activity on both sides of the divide, the State Department published a new report about the Mojahedin. According to this report, as in a previous one, they were recognised as a 'terrorist' organisation. The Mojahedin had, in the meantime, striven to show itself as a moderate, democratic force through a variety of measures, including the cessation of guerrilla activity inside Iran. Rajavi even followed a suggestion made indirectly by the CIA through back channels that the Mojahedin meet with members of the Kurdish resistance (then the great enemy of Saddam Hussein, our benefactor) as well as with special Israeli representatives (though at the time Labour held power in Israel, and a solution to the conflict with the Palestinians seemed inevitable).

But it was all to no avail. The State Department refused once more to have any dealings with us. Their choice was not based on our terrorist activities of the previous year, but of the prior year. They didn't 'buy' our moderation as a sign of our tendency towards democracy, as they saw no change in our attitude towards other political groups.

Changing names and faces in the organisation, even electing Maryam as future president, didn't help us whitewash our history as long as Rajavi was the sole ideological leader of the organisation and 'resistance'.

The report was a great blow to the Mojahedin. For years the organisation tried to prove that we had the full support of America in the fight against the Iranian regime. We had adduced hundreds of signatures of support from members of Congress, a 'letter' from

President Clinton, a photograph of him taken with our 'foreign minister', but to no avail...

Of course, American support could significantly change everything for us, and this was why Rajavi was so keen to have it. To achieve it he sent Maryam to the West, along with many other Mojahedin. But the goal eluded him, and to make things worse the organisation was, perhaps for the first time, facing serious internal problems. On the one hand it tried to prove how honest, genuine, democratic and liberal Maryam was. On the other, they confined members within the iron bars of the organisation's old beliefs, and encouraged them to be hard and unyielding, with no emotional connection whatever to the outside world.

Perhaps if they had been honest enough to admit that Maryam's message of 'love' and freedom was just a political device for furthering our goals, they could have saved us much confusion and soul searching, although they would always run the risk of losing some who had joined the Mojahedin and stayed loyal to them at great personal cost expressly for their honesty and probity.

The organisation had no solution to this dilemma. They tried to separate members from everybody else, including supporters, ultimately by asking supporters to leave our bases and find alternative accommodation. When this didn't work they organised weekly selfcriticism sessions to help us withstand the impact of the outside world. Perhaps the unbridgeable gulf between Maryam's words and their effect on members of the organisation was the main reason why Rajavi's decisions came thick and fast in the following months. (pp 414-415) ■

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES:

Mrs Robabeh Shahrokhi



My name is Robabeh Shahrokhi. I was born in 1934 in Sanandaj in Iran. I now live in Sweden. This is some of my story.

Once, in August 1985 while I was with the Mojahedin in Iraq I was in a building named 'Mesbah' in Soleimanieh. In the underground of the building there were a few cells. I had gone there with another person to find telephone leads. When we were going down the stairs I became afraid and thought to myself 'these look like solitary confinement cells'. Later, I was talking to another person about this experience. He asked me "what did you feel as you were going down into the underground?". I said I felt as though I was entering a solitary confinement area. Perhaps, I said, this building originally belonged to the Iraqis and they later handed it over to the Mojahedin. Ayoub, whose real name was Mehdi, said, "No, this prison belongs to the Mojahedin themselves." I was surprised. Ayoub told me, "Your own son, Davood, spent 50 days in this prison." Later when I asked my son if this was correct he replied, "Yes".

I also witnessed in the Shafahi building in Kirkuk that a seven year old boy called Mansour was imprisoned by himself and they had ordered his mother not to visit her son. He was imprisoned for three weeks in this building. A woman called Simin and another woman called Elham, who both live in Stockholm now, together with a woman called Shiva, were imprisoned on the fourth floor of Shafahi building for eight months. When I was working in the Hospital Section, I used to serve food for the patients. There we had patients who were prisoners, and I was ordered not to take food for them. These people are 'isolated'. In those rooms people like Mother Masoumeh Golestaneh and others were imprisoned. Sinaie, a translator, was imprisoned for six months. Asefe Torke, whose husband in Iran had been forced by the organisation to divorce her over the telephone, was imprisoned for three months. For six months I was denied being able to see my son Davood, by the organisation. Toward the end of February in 1989, Mehdi Abrishamchi and Mahboobeh Jamshidi called me. When I went there, Abrishamchi told me, "You know that your son had given up the struggle and wanted to leave. Well, he has killed himself. You can come tomorrow for the burial". They did not bury Davood under his own name. They buried him under the name of 'Ghasem Mahmood Akbar' which is an Arabic name. I protested against this. To this day I still do not have any clue as to the whereabouts of my son's grave and the organisation will not tell me the address. Without letting me know, they had told their own things to the Iraqi officials. An Iraqi court summoned me for a post mortem tribunal. Abrishamchi

and an Iraqi officer and Safar, Abrishamchi's lieutenant, took me to the court. The only questions they asked of me were: Have they taken you to the scene of the accident or not? How long is it that you have not seen your son? Then we came out.

After this I said that I wanted to leave the organisation. It took six months before they let me leave. During this time I was under constant pressure which resulted in mental health problems. I was afraid of asking any questions or making complaints. I was afraid they would treat me or my other children badly or do something to them. I came to Sweden as a refugee. But even here I was not safe from the Mojahedin. On the 3rd September 1993, two people attacked me and broke my teeth. I have no doubt they were acting on orders from the Mojahedin. Again, on 3rd September 2002, the Mojahedin's agents broke into my house and destroyed all my photographs and took some and damaged other of my property. In spite of my age, I refuse to be intimidated and will continue to tell the truth about this organisation. ■

SURVIVORS' REPORT

Association for the Support of Victims of Mojahedin-e Khalq ©2004

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