



**‘The basis of socialism is the human being... Socialism is the movement to restore human being’s conscious will.’**

**- Mansoor Hekmat**

*The great Marxist thinker and leader of the Worker-communist Party and worker-communist movement, 1951-2002*

## Mansoor Hekmat and women’s emancipation

*‘Discrimination against women is a hallmark of the world today’. ‘The Worker-communist party struggles for the full and unconditional equality of women and men, the immediate repealing of all laws and regulations that violate this principle.’*

The above are the words of Mansoor Hekmat, the great Marxist thinker and leader of the Worker-communist movement. Those who are familiar with and have read his work, have listened to his speeches, and known him personally will recognise his uncompromising, direct and profound humanist voice. He was a unique Marxist leader who cannot be separated from the

history of his time as he has influenced and affected it. He based his theories on humanity and human interest regardless of sex, race, nationality and religion and managed to change people’s expectations and attitudes towards life wherever his writings and his voice reached. As far as the women’s movement is concerned, his ideas have provided the best guiding light for activists in this field. He has either been directly or indirectly involved in the establishment, expansion and launching of campaigns against sexual apartheid in Iran, stoning, and Islamic laws. As in many other areas, he was path breaking, innovative and original in his struggle for equality and women’s

emancipation.

Zhoobin Razani (Mansoor Hekmat) was born into an educated, middle class family in Tehran in 1951. His father was a civil servant and lectured at the University of Tehran; his mother a head teacher and later lawyer. He grew up playing football in the vast yet un-built areas of Tehran, enjoying the freedoms of childhood. Like many boys his age, his ambition was to become a football player. He joined football teams and played several matches for his schools. He was more of an out-door boy and rebel than a teacher’s pet. Yet he did very well

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## Organisation for Women’s Liberation Ceremony

A ceremony to announce the establishment of the Organisation for Women’s Liberation will be held on Saturday 24 December 2002 in London at 2:00pm. Speakers at the ceremony are the organisation’s founder, Azar Majedi, and Mina



Ahadi, both veterans of the women’s liberation movement. The ceremony will be held at the Meeting Room, Manor House, 316 Green Lanes, London N4. For more information, contact Azar Majedi, +44 (0) 7789801250 or e-mail: azarmajedi@yahoo.com.

at school and achieved great marks in his studies. He was particularly good at maths.

Politically, his family was mainly opponents to the Iranian monarchs and in favour of secular, left ideas. Religion, superstitions and sexism were challenged in his family; naturally at a very young age he became familiar with and treasured concepts like socialism, freedom and equality. He followed the events of Vietnam and the Cuban revolution closely, as these were issues that concerned his generation. Zhoobin had an independent mother who worked as a teacher and lawyer, an authoritative grandmother who was in charge of the administration of a large hospital in Tehran, and aunts who were all educated and modern women. Naturally, in his family, traditional gender roles and gender diversities were modified and he grew up regarding women as equal human beings. This certainly left a positive mark on him and influenced his political ideas. According to him, in a society where women are degraded and humiliated, men cannot be freed either.

Giving up the prospect of becoming a football player, he entered the University of Shiraz to study economics and very soon found himself reading and getting to know the great thinkers of the world, such as Smith, Hegel and Marx. 'The university did not make me join in any political movement at the time, but it made me a Marxist. When I graduated, I considered myself a Marxist' (A close up interview with Mansoor Hekmat, by Ali Javadi in 2001). It was, however, in 1973, when he went to England for his postgraduate studies that Zhoobin started reading Marx in a more serious manner and went in search of answers to his fundamental questions. In Marx's work, he discovered a human-based ideology, which had been

forgotten by traditional left thinkers who were influenced mainly by the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, or China's Maoism that in his view had nothing to do with socialism and Marxism. Apart from its scientific and concise economic theories, it was Marx's revolutionary practice and its endeavour to change the unjust world and build a better one based on human interests that attracted Zhoobin's young, searching mind. For him Marxism was a way forward in emancipating humankind from exploitation and inequality in the form of wage slavery and at the same time from religion, superstition, nationalism and all other degrading ideas and rules. As he read on, he realised how Marxism has been misinterpreted, misrepresented and misunderstood by movements of classes other than working class.

Luckily, the 70s were still the years of rebelling and radical movements in Britain and Europe and the young generation was still enjoying the freedoms and achievements gained in the past two decades. Zhoobin joined discussion groups and explored most left-wing organisations. He listened to different versions of Marxism, thought about various interpretations of it and studied the national, radical movements that called themselves Marxist. Yet he was determined to refer to Marx directly. He insisted on reading Marx independently and learning from Marx himself.

He studied his postgraduate at the University of Canterbury in Kent, did his MA at Bath University and was half way through his PHD when the revolution broke out in Iran and he returned to the heart of events to test his findings and play his part in history. 'I was supposed to write about the 'Development of capitalism in Iran' for my PHD thesis. From Tehran I wrote to my tutor in London and told him:

I intended to stay in Iran, because what I wanted to write my thesis about was already happening at that time. He wrote back and wished me luck.'

There was of course more to Zhoobin's life than politics and reading rooms. He was a passionate, lively character, loved music, played the guitar and wrote songs. He enjoyed comedy and satire and read mystery books.

In 1979 at the time of revolution, he began his joint life with Azar Majedi. The pair had a lot in common. In addition to being a young, lovely and ambitious couple, they were both from educated, leftist families and had similar political interests. Azar Majedi was an activist in the women's movement and worked with anti-apartheid organisations when studying French Literature and International Relations abroad. According to Azar, this was 'a beautiful life' which lasted 24 years until the death of Zhoobin in July 2002.

In 1979 Zhoobin and his friend Hamid Taghvaie formed an organisation called the Union of Communist Militants (UCM), which published a journal called 'Towards Socialism' that discussed the most pressing issues of Revolutionary Marxism and the revolutionary society of that time. Thanks to the revolutionary environment between February 1979 and June 1981, there was a semi-democratic climate that allowed Revolutionary Marxism to spread throughout the country. Zhoobin's controversial ideas managed to attract a considerable amount of attention in no time. He wrote several essays, books and articles discussing the key subjects of revolution.

Populism was dominant among the Iranian left, the majority of which was legitimising its defence of the reactionary Islamic government as an anti-imperialist

tactic. Zhoobin wrote 'The myth of progressive national bourgeoisie' a brilliant adaptation of 'Das Capital', criticising Iranian capitalism and its counter-revolutionary regime.

In June 1981, the new Islamic government launched a savage onslaught and arrested, tortured and killed thousands of communists and opponents of the government. What happened on 20 June 1981 was unprecedented in Iran's contemporary history in its barbarism and cruelty. The days after that were dark and bloody. Young girls were raped in prison hours before their execution, bodies were buried in mass graves miles away from public cemeteries; even mourning for one's loved ones was forbidden and dangerous. Prisons were overcrowded and tortures were beyond comprehension.

Narrowly escaping prison and death, Zhoobin and his partner, Azar Majedi, along with the remaining UCM leadership, went to liberated areas of Kurdistan in 1982, where a revolutionary organisation, Komala, was involved in an armed struggle against the Islamic regime. It was there and then that he became Mansoor Hekmat and found the Communist Party of Iran (CPI), uniting different fractions and organisations of Revolutionary Marxist groups. In the draft of the CPI's programme, which he wrote in 1983, he specifically points to the eradication of discriminatory laws against women and advocates complete equal rights for women and men.

Mansoor Hekmat's party and ideas has had a great influence on the lives of Kurdish women. Thanks to the CPI's guerrilla organisation, the idea of equality was widely spread in Kurdish regions, where women were most oppressed under primitive, tribal and religious traditions. It was this

party under Hekmat's leadership that for the first time allowed women to join the armed resistance and equally take part in the fight against the central oppressive Islamic government. This was a new development for Kurdish society in which women had always played a marginal role in political life. Pursuing equality and women rights was not easy and took a long time to establish modern, civilised and progressive values and get women into the higher ranks of the party. Women had to fight inequality and anti-women traditions not only in the society and against the government, but also within the party and against its nationalist factions, for whom the guerrilla tradition was a male business.

Those who have worked closely with Mansoor Hekmat do remember how important the issues of equality were for him. He was sensitive and impatient about the patriarchal tendency among guerrillas and criticised it on every occasion. He encouraged women to participate in party discussions, write in party organs and take up important positions.

His down to earth character, his modest and approachable personality and his fun and witty manners made him loved by everyone. He was someone to turn to; no matter how young or old one was or what his position in the party was, Mansoor Hekmat (known also as Nader) treated everyone as his equal and with respect.

Mansoor Hekmat's writings are unique, both in style and originality. The majority of his writings have become classics of Marxism in Iran. Hamid Taghvaie, his lifelong comrade, describes his writings, as 'clear, sharp, down to earth and profound. His style of writing is lucid and lively. They remain intelligible even when his subject matter is the most abstract

theoretical issues. His prose like the content of his writings is unprecedented in Iran's political literature.' Among his most famous writings are 'The Myth of Progressive National Bourgeoisie', 'The peasant movement after the Imperialist solution of the agrarian question in Iran', 'The prospect of destitution and the Marxist theory of crises', 'Democracy: interpretations and realities', 'Nationalism and the Kurdish question', 'Our differences', 'Hejab-gate', 'The gory dawn of the new world order' and 'The world after 11 September'.

He went back to Europe in 1984, still leading the party. Despite his struggles to move the party forward and make it a strong front in representing the Iranian working class and revolutionary movement, the party proved unable to fulfil Hekmat's expectations. The nationalist faction inside the party which had kept quiet for many years found a good opportunity to make its voice heard in 1991 after the Gulf war, when the Iraqi Kurdish parties managed to take control in some parts of Iraqi Kurdistan. A heated debate started and articles were written to take forth the debate. Hekmat wrote 'Only two steps back', discussing the nature of Kurdish nationalism and the way it was a serious obstacle in the path towards a worker-communist movement.

Finally in 1991 he left the CPI and founded a new party called the Worker-communist Party of Iran. The majority of members and cadres of his old party followed in his footsteps and joined his new party. This was the most daring decision one could make, considering the period in which this took place. It was when the so-called new world order was taking the world by storm and celebrating the collapse of 'communism'. These were hard times to be a communist and

to defend Marxism, times in which most traditional left movements were finding ways to get rid of their Marxist backgrounds and adding democratic suffixes to their names. But Hekmat was far-sighted and knew the anti-communist celebration and parades would not take long. He strongly believed that while there is a class society, there would always be class struggle and Marxism would always be a way forward for humankind. 'They say socialism has been defeated so that they may defeat it; that communism has ended, so that they may end it. These are the bourgeoisie's war cries and bluster; the cruder their sound, the more they confirm communism's validity as a potential working class threat to bourgeois society' (Marxism and the World Today, February 1992). Although the Eastern bloc had nothing to do with communism and according to Mansoor Hekmat was only state capitalism, yet its defeat directly affected the communist movement in the world. Hekmat's newly formed party was only at the beginning of a long difficult path. It was his passionate belief in Marxism as the only way for the emancipation of humankind, his understanding of world politics and his accurate judgement that kept the party straight and strong during those years and brought it out stronger and healthier than ever.

In 1993, the International Campaign for the Defence of Women's Rights in Iran (ICDWRI) was founded by a number of party activists. This organisation aimed to raise awareness about women and mobilise international solidarity in order to fight against sexual apartheid in Iran. This campaign was based in Sweden and although it was an organisation specifically to defend women's rights in Iran, it soon got involved in activities

regarding the situation of women in so-called Islamic communities living in European countries. Honour killings, the Islamic veiling of young children, the degrading conditions of women in Islamist communities and most of all the inhumane and racist theory of cultural relativism, according to which all these discriminatory practices were legitimised, were criticised and attacked by the Marxist organisers of this campaign.

In 1995 Asrin Mohammadi a member of the ICDWRI who managed to launch a successful campaign against honour killings and Islamic veiling and started a hot debate on these topics, told Medusa about the warm and encouraging support she had received by Mansoor Hekmat, the party leader. 'In this campaign many people have supported me, but Mansoor Hekmat's warm, encouraging letter was most valuable to me.'

In 1994 Mansoor Hekmat wrote 'A Better World', the programme of the Worker-communist Party of Iran (WPI), which was approved by the WPI's First Congress. In this programme, Hekmat emphasises the equality between women and men. 'Communist equality is a concept much wider than mere equality before the law. Communist equality is the real equality of all people in the economic, social and political domains. Equality not only in political rights but also in the enjoyment of material resources and the products of humanity's collective effort; equality in social status and economic relations, equality not only before the law, but also in the relations of people with each other' (A Better World, p. 36).

Mansoor Hekmat's writings have tackled the question of inequality and advocated women's liberation as the barometer of the real emancipation of human beings.

He has criticised Iranian culture and patriarchal traditions in 'The Satellites and Plastic Al Ahmads'. In this piece of exceptionally brilliant writing he criticises Iranian literature as 'patriarchal, nationalist, Islam-stricken, anti-civilization, nostalgic, lamenting, anti-science, clerical and old fashioned'... 'In this literature, if they are generous enough to praise a woman, she is an old dear granny who sets the table and cooks traditional dishes' (The Satellites and Plastic Al Ahmads, 1997).

Over the years Hekmat managed to change the political environment and the attitudes of the Iranian opposition in exile and inside Iran towards women and their role in society. He is the first Iranian politician who used the term unconditional equality of women and men. In the WPI, for the first time, women found themselves equal to others, with no privileges or disadvantages as it was put by Mina Ahadi, member of the Political Bureau and co-ordinator of the International Committee against Stoning. 'In the Worker-communist Party, I have never felt being a woman might deprive me from anything or privilege me in anyway. This is the great thing that makes me love this party (Mina Ahadi, in an interview with Medusa, 2001).

In his work called 'Islam, children's rights and the Hejab-gate of Rah-e-Kargar', Hekmat criticised the Islamic veil and defended the prohibition of veiling of children under the legal age. According to him, children have no religion, or prejudices and they have not chosen to be born into a particular family with specific beliefs and ideas. It is the society's duty to protect children and provide fair and equal life conditions for them. 'No nine year old girl chooses to be married,

sexually mutilated, serve as housemaid and cook for the male members of the family and be deprived of exercise, education and play. The child grows up in the family and in society according to established customs, traditions and regulations and automatically learns to accept these ideas and customs as the norms of life. To speak of the choice of the Islamic veil by the child herself is a ridiculous joke.' This vivacity, ingenuity and originality are characteristic of Mansoor Hekmat's writings and thinking. Behind those few touching words, one can easily recognise the great heart of a human being who feels, understands and sees the pain caused by reactionary, primitive and discriminatory laws and traditions and see his determination to end it, dismissing the attempts of those who try to find a progressive side to religion and compromise with it.

Alongside what he wrote, it was what he did and what he encouraged others to do that made him a great leader. He did not need to be in authoritative positions or have titles to be able to lead the party. It was his sharp analyses, accurate predictions, the originality of his ideas, his passionate hopes, his patience and his kind and cheerful character that made people trust and follow him wholeheartedly. Even at times when he had no official leadership position in the party, he was considered its leader and the party would always unite around his words.

Mansoor Hekmat was a brilliant, witty father. He involved himself in every aspect of his children's upbringing. According to his partner Azar Majedi, 'he deeply believed both parents should be equally involved in bringing up children and if someone tried to say that he was a father and not

capable of looking after children the way a mother could, he would be offended' (A beautiful life, interview with Radio International, shortly after Mansoor Hekmat's death). As a friend, he was reliable and helpful. Despite his busy life, he would find time to listen to his friends, to help them with moving house and changing decorations or even solving financial crises.

After a year long battle with cancer, this remarkable man died on 4 July 2002 at the age of 51, among his family. He was at the height of his creativity and his accomplishments when his illness started. His three last eminent works, 'Is Communism possible in Iran?', 'Re-reading of Marx's Capital' and 'The World after September 11' demonstrates the highly rich and incomparable analyses of world politics and regional strategic leadership. In his wonderful short life, he has done a tremendous amount of work. He has influenced his society and his surroundings. He has managed to create a human-based Marxist movement that is unprecedented in the history of Iran and to some extent, the history of the world. He brought Marx back to society and kept the hope of a better life alive during the darkest times in history. As Hamid Taghvaie wrote, 'The impact of the immense legacy that he has left for us will not remain confined to our time or our generation. As long as there is injustice, inequality, poverty and exploitation in the world, Mansoor Hekmat and the Worker-communist movement, whose banner he raised, will live on' (A Short Biography).

As far as the women's movement and the struggle for equality is concerned, Mansoor Hekmat was and will be one of the greatest Marxist thinkers who influenced this movement immensely. In

Iran, he changed the old fashioned, backward thinking and patriarchal traditions of women's role in society. Mansoor Hekmat's work has not only brought out the humanitarian side of Marxism, but it has developed and expanded Marxism in many ways. On the question of women and inequality, Mansoor Hekmat has gone further than both Marx and Lenin. Unlike traditional left thinking, Hekmat never pushed women's issues aside to wait for socialism to be solved. In his view, women could gain much more even in the capitalist system and he tried to encourage his followers to be maximalist in that respect and fight for complete equality between the sexes. He encouraged, directed and helped establish some very successful and egalitarian women's organisations, including the International Campaign for Women's Rights in Iran, the International Committee Against Stoning, the Middle Eastern Centre for Women's Rights and the Centre of Women and Socialism, which publishes Medusa and has so far highlighted a huge number of issues relating to the women question.

It is his words that will lead our movement towards gaining complete equality and emancipation. 'Declaration of complete and absolute equality between the sexes is what we will do the moment we seize power. We will stand for equality at work and in the family, for equal opportunity in political and social life. We will abolish all discriminatory laws and change the culture. Women don't have to be victims of a backward, reactionary and discriminatory culture if their rights are protected by law'. (*The above was first published in Medusa's English Special, a journal of the Centre for Women and Socialism.*)