One Revolution or Two? The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic
REVOLUTION
TODAY
ASPIRATIONS
& REALITIES

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The bicentennial of the French Revolution happens to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Iranian Revolution. While the first has been widely regarded as the quintessential social and transformative revolution, the second is problematical both theoretically and politically. Whereas the October Revolution was in many ways the vanguard revolution par excellence, the Iranian Revolution appears retrograde. In the Marxist view, revolution is an essential part of the forward march of history, a progressive step creating new social-productive relations as well as a new political system, consciousness and values. In this context, how might events in Iran be termed ‘revolutionary’? Precisely what kind of a revolution transpired between 1977 and 1979 (and afterward)? Surely clerical rule cannot be regarded as progressive? In what sense, then, can we regard the Iranian Revolution as a step forward in the struggle for emancipation of the Iranian working classes? Clearly the Iranian Revolution presents itself as an anomaly.
The 1979 revolution was a characteristically Iranian revolution — a revolution by the whole society against the state in which various ideologies were represented, the most dominant being those with Islamic tendencies (Islamist, Marxist-Islamic and democratic-Islamic) and Marxist-Leninist tendencies (Fada'i, Tudeh, Maoist, Trotskyist, and others). The conflict within the groups with Islamic and Marxist-Leninist tendencies was probably no less intense than that between the two tendencies taken together. Yet they were all united in the overriding objective of bringing down the shah and overthrow.