

Trusting In Illusions

By Anthony Lewis

Several generals and others charged with resisting the revolution have been executed after secret trials, under circumstances unknown even to the new government. Religious courts, set up outside the framework of the civil law, have sentenced people to flagellation for such things as drinking liquor.

Ayatollah Khomeini has also directed a sweeping rollback of rights won by women in recent years, including the right to divorce. He has questioned a 1975 law restricting polygamy. He has ordered women to be "properly dressed," a phrase widely taken to mean the veil.

Women have been marching in protest against the turn of events. And according to an account by Youssef M. Ibrahim of *The New York Times*, other Iranians are alarmed — lawyers, civil libertarians, oil workers, the new white-collar class. An editor wrote: "The people did not rise and make supreme sacrifices in order to revert to another type of oppression."

Then there is the case of Khomeini's Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan. Professor Falk wrote last January that Mr. Bazargan, who had "a notable record of concern for human rights," also had "a strong, active sense of deference to the views and judgment of Ayatollah Khomeini." This was "not a matter of coercion,"

he said, but of natural "sensitivity to the values of Shiite Islam, including responsiveness to Ayatollah Khomeini's views."

Mr. Bazargan has in fact found his relationship with the Ayatollah so difficult that he has twice threatened to resign. He has been distressed at learning of executions only after the event. He has said of the "committee of aides" around Khomeini: "They persecute people, they arrest people, they issue orders, they oppose us, they are against our appointments. Our day has been turned into night."

None of this should have been any great surprise. Ayatollah Khomeini had put his views on the record with unusual forthrightness. He said he wanted Iran to be governed strictly by the laws of Islam, and he meant it.

Why, then, did Professor Falk expect anything different, or tell us to? I think he was carried away by opposition to the Shah. He had long argued, correctly, that the Shah was a tyrant who had lost the support of his people. In urging the end of U.S. backing for him, Professor Falk was led to picture the alternative — the Ayatollah — as congenial to American liberal opinion.

To think that way is to forget a lesson of Vietnam. We went wrong there in large part because we tried to apply American ideas, without understanding, to a very different culture. It was just as distorted to analyze the fundamentally Islamic revolution in Iran in Western terms.

Professor Falk was one of those who criticized American support of a corrupt regime in Vietnam. But the point was not that the alternative was a government of Western liberals. It was that American intervention was fruitless and destructive.

The illusion of American omnipotence did terrible damage before it ended in Vietnam. But illusions of all kinds are dangerous in world politics. No one should have expected Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini to be comfortably liberal — or stable.

BOSTON, March 11 — Shortly before Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran, he was visited in Paris by an American group that included Ramsey Clark, the former Attorney General, and Richard Falk, Professor of International Law at Princeton. The Americans came away from the meeting with reassuring words about the Ayatollah's moderation and fairness.

"The depiction of him as fanatical, reactionary and the bearer of crude prejudices seems certainly and happily false," Professor Falk wrote in *The New York Times*. He said that picture of Khomeini had been drawn in the United States in a calculated attempt to frighten people.

The American press had "defamed" Khomeini, Professor Falk wrote, attributing to him "efforts to turn the clock back 1,300 years," and to establish a "theocratic fascism." History did show the possibility of revolutionary zeal "degenerating into excess," Professor Falk said, but in Iran there were "hopeful signs" to the contrary, "including the character and role of Ayatollah Khomeini."

"What is also encouraging," he added, "is that his entourage of close advisers is uniformly composed of moderate, progressive individuals."

In this uncertain world any of us who makes firm predictions may be embarrassed: newspaper columnists included. But the description of Ayatollah Khomeini and the shadowy figures around him as "moderate" and "progressive," in the Western sense of those words, has turned out to be outstandingly silly.

Since taking power the Ayatollah has set out, without equivocation or disguise, to turn the clock back and give Iran a theocratic regime. He has called, for example, for the dismantling of "all European criteria built into the judicial system." Among other things, then, there should be no appeals in civil or criminal cases: "Every hearing must end in a final, absolute decision in a single phase."