

## **A Brief History of Kurdish People and Today's Apoist Movement in Eastern Kurdistan**

By Ebrahim Baghi

23rd Annual Conference of KNC-NA, April 30, 2011, Calgary, Canada

Mamosta Hemin, the pen name for Mohammad Amin Sheikholeslami (1921-1986), was a well-known Kurdish poet from Mahabad, Eastern of Kurdistan. He fled persecution in Iran to live out his life in exile in south Kurdistan. He once said:

*Even if dying of hunger or from poverty  
Still I will not serve strangers all my life long,  
I have no fear of chains, ropes, rods, or the prison  
Should they hack me into pieces, should they kill me?  
Still I will say: I am a Kurd!*

The Kurds are a distinct national group living in an area often referred to as Kurdistan. They make up the majority of the population of this area -- a region composed of eastern Anatolia, extreme north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, north-west Iran, and parts of southern and south-eastern Armenia. In area, Kurdistan is as large as France, and has a population of 35-40 million. In addition to having occupied these areas for centuries, Kurds from all the countries mentioned above share a common language that, although related to modern Persian, is a unique Indo-European tongue. Most of the Kurds speak one of many dialects: Kurmandji, Sorani, Zaza, Gurani, Kalhuri and Hevrami.

The Kurds were not originally Muslims; their ancestors believed in the Zoroastrian religion. The Treaty of Sevres, signed by the Turkish Empire and the United Kingdom in August 1920, dealt with Kurdish affairs in Articles 62-64. Article 64 in effect gave the Kurds the opportunity to form an independent state in Kurdistan, at least in those parts formerly belonging to the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately for the Kurds, the treaty was rendered inoperative by the action of Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk). The Kurds later took an opportunity in 1946 to form their own state under the name of the Republic of Kurdistan, but this venture lasted less than one year and the President, Qhazi Mohammed, and other leaders were hanged by the Iranian Royal family government as known as Shah. Since then, Kurds in all parts of Kurdistan have struggled for self-determination.

An estimated 12 million Kurds live in eastern Kurdistan, between 15-17 per cent of the population of geography that is called Iran. They live mainly in the provinces of West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah and Ilam in the west and south-west, although many have moved to the big cities such as Tehran. Sanandaj is the administrative centre of Kurdistan. There is also a community of Kurds in North Khorasan province in north eastern Iran. Eastern Kurdistan's economy is based on agriculture, livestock farming and handicrafts, which mainly employ women and girls. As in most other areas of Iran, Kurdistan's population is young – more than 42 per cent under the age of 15, according to 1998 UNICEF figures. Kurds in eastern Kurdistan have long suffered deep-rooted discrimination. Their social, political and cultural rights have been repressed, as have their economic aspirations.

Kurdish regions have been economically neglected, resulting in entrenched poverty. Forced evictions and destruction of homes have left Kurds with restricted access to adequate housing. Parents are banned from registering their babies with certain Kurdish names. The use of the Kurdish language in education is frequently thwarted. Religious minorities that are mainly or partially Kurdish are targeted by measures designed to stigmatize and isolate them. The discriminatory gozinesh system – a selection procedure that requires prospective state officials and employees to demonstrate allegiance to Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran - denies the Kurds equality in employment and political participation. Irrespective of their religion, Kurds are not allowed to give their children certain names, including for boys Soran (the name of the language), Khabat (struggle), Rizgar (Free) and Âla (flag); and for girls Ajin (equal) and Fermisk (tear). Every registry office has a list of permitted names; a birth certificate is not issued unless the family consents to using an authorized name.

The oldest Kurdish opposition group is the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). In 1946 it established the Republic of Kurdistan, generally called the Mahabad Republic, after the site of its capital. It collapsed after 11 months and its leadership was arrested, trialled and many were executed, including around 20 leaders who were hanged in public in Mahabad and in two smaller cities, Saqez and Boukan. The party was swiftly banned. After 1991 and the time following, due to the fall of the former Soviet Union and especially after the involvement of the USA in Iraq, the classical freedom struggle in eastern Kurdistan, was faced with a great crisis. For a period of almost ten years a vast vacuum in the political domain emerged in Eastern Kurdistan. As a result of this the Iranian regime could easily carry out its politics on the Kurdish people.

With the capture of Kurdish national leader Abdullah Ocalan, on February 16, 1999, massive uprisings began in all parts of eastern Kurdistan. These uprisings were a point of renewal of the on-going political struggle in the eastern Kurdistan and could lead people into a higher sense of awareness, determinativeness, and also helped to structure a new democratic mind. The will of Kurdish people for equality and freedom in eastern Kurdistan needed new measures and consequently these uprisings could gain it from the experiences of previous revolts in the entire Kurdistan, and especially from the drive force of the political, ideological and organizational uprisings of southern Kurdistan. This brought forth a new page in the Kurdish history of revolts and under the name of Democratic Union Movement and the new movement was able to make a landmark in this area. This movement moved beyond all the former ideas of political movement in this region. The new elements contained structuring with ideological awareness, educating members and raising the limit of intellect and political knowledge of the people of Eastern Kurdistan.

By presenting the motives and goals of the political movement, this resistance movement achieved positive outcomes and could also gain a significant reputation for itself. With all the above mentioned experiences, the movement could on April 04, 2004, put together the first congress under the name of The Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) whereby the struggle for freedom could continue. PJAK could, with a well-planned program for a

democratic solution for the issues in Iran and especially Kurds, bring their struggle even further ahead. In 2005 in an open and clear declaration, the democratic will of the Kurdish people and the unwillingness from their sides to legitimate the theocratic regime of Iran in the elections for president, showed an era of enlargement of the political struggle. This era, with the uprisings of the summer of 2005, a resistance movement never seen before, as well as the deaths of tens of people both members and civilians well exposed the power of this party.

They are in constant battle for the unity and freedom of their peoples, and to be able to change the functions and the power of the Iranian system, and getting it to a level of self-defence, and community nurture. They always continuing the work and struggle needed to achieve an increase in the level of intelligence, a democratic organization of people as well as practice of the democratic values, to achieve a radical type of democracy and to be able to launch a system of democratic confederacy in Eastern Kurdistan.

### **Brief Declaration of Apoist Movement:**

1. The governmental power in Iran is very strong and the government is not allowing it to spread to the different parts of society, which has become a great obstacle for development into a society of civil action. Theocracy is the very centre of the Iranian government. It is of great importance that the substance of ideology and the very essence of the government in Iran are forced to a foundational change. This change should come of the development of a radical form of democracy for the people. It is therefore important that the theocratic government of Iran changes the very contents of their governmental structure. To be able to achieve this, democratic beliefs should be introduced to the people of Iran. Furthermore the duties of the government ought to be changed from being what it is today to becoming a body which is simply there to perform the duties of a state which are to defence and maintain security and also to carry out social developments.

2. In Iran, there is on the one hand a firm belief in (Omet), which is a system of sects with roots in the Shia religion, and also on the other hand there is system of state which functions on the principles of a state-nation perspective. The mixture of these two systems of state is a vast obstacle for the natural development of new forms of society and also new forms of state. Any movement within a mono-coloured and single discourse structure brings to the growth of a closed unnatural system where conflicts of national identity and belonging as well as religious belonging are deepened. It is also here that a growing point for radical opinions starts and breeds. With this negligence of people's true identities, new groups are created in society. It is for this reason that reforms in the structure and form of the Islamic Omet as well as the achievement of a state must be connected to democracy. In the case of democracy building and increasing in this area, the potential of self-governance will also increase. Furthermore, the differences of religion, ethnicity and culture that are connected strongly to freedom and history are given an opportunity to grow larger and develop even further.

3. In the system of People's Radical Democracy, there is not any room for the abuse of people or for the undermining of their rights. Also, tribute of the higher classes and groups in power is considered an illness of old age with which democracy cannot live. It is therefore important that resistance for the achievement of a democratic society in which the mechanism that motivate individuals to join political and organizational associations are present. With the dynamism of change and development existing and progressing there is no need for a critical way.

4. Citizens of nation states where a one-discourse system in which ethnicity, culture, language, religion and sex are monotonous, exists. This is far away from what is right. In Iran the citizens that are of a different religion than Shia, and the different cultures, as well as women, are not part of macro politics or any kinds of leadership, neither do they participate in any other way. The right to hold the high position has only been given to the religious leaders, the mullahs and the leaders of a monotonous, male concentrated system. The regime has to stop describing citizenship on the basis of individual qualities and instead needs to re-describe the citizens of Iran by a new template which includes the capacity of acceptance of all different cultural, religious differences for all groups of society as well as the acceptance for women especially. The new standards should stand for acceptance and unity instead of prejudice and discrimination. The International templates must be taken as a foundation of decision-making whether it concerns economics, politics, culture or social issues.