

EVERYBODY TALKS ABOUT THE WEATHER (1969)

... we don't. It was unexpected, but didn't come totally out of the blue. Iran is really one of the most functional developing countries, and the Shah one of the most functional despots in the Third World, with Persian oil clasped tightly in his fist and in the fists of American, English, and French oil companies, and with the Persian opposition safely in the dungeons of the secret police. Ever since the fall of Mossadegh there have been no more complaints.¹ When Nirumand's book about Persia came onto the German book market, no one was interested—what could possibly be wrong with Persia?² The Shah was good-looking, his wife had just been on a diet; what could be the problem? And then came the unfortunate police-state visit.³ The façade came crashing down. In Berlin, the police used their truncheons like they hadn't in years. In Hamburg, Senator Ruhnau⁴ saw to it that preventive custody was brought in. The police had paid Persians to applaud, and then attack German and Persian student protesters. The truth about the Shah's regime of terror spilled out across the world, and at the same time an extra-governmental opposition formed here.

The realization that West German capital and the Iranian terror regime are closely allied was pounded into the students by the police. The same goes for the awareness that the opposition here—in the metropolitan centers—and the opposition in Third World countries must work together. Bahman Nirumand had supplied the

consciousness-raising materials with his book. His work within the Confederation of Iranian students and the German student movement is uniquely representative of the way anti-imperialist movements are going international.⁵ The attempt to get rid of him by refusing him a residence permit is also an attempt to intervene in the process to internationalize the socialist movement; it is an attempt to delay it, even crush it completely. Those who want to expel him may well be over-estimating the role one individual can play, but their purpose is absolutely clear, especially since Nirumand is an important person for the Confederation and the APO.⁶

Nirumand's expulsion order is the result of obvious machinations. In September 1968 after Lücke's visit, Professor Stein (CDÜ), the managing director of the Federation of German Industry, submitted a report in which he urgently warned that the Shah's irritation about the protests here should not be underestimated.⁷ He drew attention to the danger that the Shah, offended as he was, might intensify his economic dealings with the Eastern Bloc if he were not appeased. When Kiesinger made promises in Tehran in 1968 that objective reporting on Iran by the German mass media would be ensured, he was obviously indicating that the educational work being done by the Confederation of Iranian students would be discouraged.⁸ Nirumand's expulsion goes some way toward fulfilling this promise. German industry and commerce have caved in to the Shah's threats, and Bonn has caved in to German industry and commerce. It is painfully obvious. It is also painful to see politicians letting themselves be turned into henchman of the Shah, into enforcement officers for business interests, as it is painful to see that they don't have enough class to camouflage the inconsistencies of their system—the inconsistencies between the

interests of German capital in Iran and the strategy of the political establishment to isolate the SDS in the German student movement by offering reforms and separating so-called radicals from the so-called well-meaning groups. Nirumand's expulsion threatens to set off precisely the kind of mass solidarity and politicization effect they want to avoid—an inconsistency that is useful to the Left, since intelligent Senate policies would beg Nirumand to accept the residence permit we want for him.

Nirumand's case has a humanitarian side to it; yet, protesting against this is still considered apolitical. It is viewed as a mere moral issue that cannot trigger learning processes or damage the system. The fact is that Nirumand is married to a German woman and that his daughter Mariam started school in Berlin last fall. The fact is that this family that wants to stay together would be destroyed or turned into a family of refugees if the residence permit is denied. The fact is that his wife and child would be torn out of their social environment. Why are protests against this seen to address only what is being called an "unreasonable" fate? Why are protests against this politically irrelevant? Why do they mobilize nothing more than crocodile tears?

Because women in this society do not need to be expelled in order to be rendered politically impotent. The social work they do raising their children goes on in the isolation of their private lives, though not in response to their own needs or those of the children. It goes on behind closed doors and in response to the norms of an achievement-oriented society whose demands hit children at school. The experiences that women have in the process, and the difficulties they encounter, are never aired in public. If they are expelled, they can just take their children, for whom they are of vital

importance, with them, and their experiences and difficulties, too. They are interchangeable as workers—given what women's work is—and as consumers. In this society, women are not perceived as unique, irreplaceable beings. Things would be different if the Left had functioning women's organizations; such organizations could and probably would point out that the apolitical aspects of the protests about Bahman Nirumand's wife are in and of themselves an example of the oppression of women, based on the failure to recognize their needs, and on the difficulty for women to see their private trials and tribulations as social problems and to organize them accordingly. It is apolitical to protest about women, because women's issues are human, humanitarian issues. There! Everybody's talking about the weather again! What they view as apolitical is the almost completely internalized oppression of women, an oppression that is still quite beyond comprehension.

School policies that turn children into consumers of things see children as interchangeable. If Mariam Nirumand were enrolled in an anti-authoritarian kindergarten—she is already too old for projects in progress at the moment—then her expulsion would destroy the group structure of her group of children. The children and parents would be vigorously involved in trying to prevent this expulsion and the destruction of their socially relevant work in the kindergarten. This would be considered political protest. If the Nirumand family lived as part of an extended family, a Scandinavian example of which we were recently shown on TV, the protests about Nirumand's wife and child would not be apolitical because their biographies would no longer be only their personal business.

We understand the connections between consumer-terror and police-terror, and why German capital has an interest in the

exploitation of the Persian people. But we have hardly even begun to see the connections between the profits sought by German capital and the oppression of women and children. Only when the protests about Nirumand's wife and child stop appealing to fate and equal rights, and attack the class structures of capitalist society, one of whose features is the oppression of women and children, only then will the Senate never again dare to deny Bahman Nirumand his residence permit. We have to stop talking about the weather when we talk about women and children.

NOTES

1. Mohammed Mossadegh (1882–1967) was the democratically elected prime minister of Iran from 1951 to 1953. He was removed from power by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran, and pro-monarchy forces in a complex coup led by British and US intelligence agencies.
2. Bahman Nirumand (1936–) is an Iranian-German publicist and author. He studied in West Germany and Berlin and was active in the student movement. In 1967, he published *Persia: Model of a Developing Country*, a bitter critique of the Shah's policies. The book became important for the anti-imperialistic and international aspects of the revolt.
3. The police state visit refers to the official state visit of the Shah of Iran to West Berlin on July 2, 1967. There were protests in several German cities in response. During a clash between police and protesters in front of the German Opera in Berlin on the evening of July 2, the student Benno Ohnesorg was shot dead by police (see note 1, "Three friends of Israel").
4. Heinz Ruhnau (1929–) was Senator of the Interior from 1969 to 1973.
5. Founded in 1960, the Confederation of Iranian Students was the largest Iranian opposition group outside of Iran.
6. The Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO) was a political protest movement active in West Germany during the latter half of the 1960s and early 1970s. A central part of the German student movement, its membership consisted mostly of young people disillusioned with the Grand Coalition ruling the German Parliament (*Bundestag*).
7. Gustav Stein (1903–1979), a member of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), became director of the Federation of German Industry in 1957 and was a member of the German Parliament from 1961 to 1972. Paul

Lücke (1914–1976) was a founding member of the CDU and a member of the German Parliament from 1949 to 1972. From 1965 to 1968 he served as Minister of the Interior.

8. Kurt Georg Kiesinger (1904–1988) was Chancellor (CDU) of West Germany from 1966 to 1969, and had been a member of Hitler's National Socialist Party between 1933 and 1945, although Kiesinger later claimed he had become a member out of opportunism rather than conviction.