

Mojahedin supporters demonstrate in New York

*"Swear to martyr's blood, swear to orphan's tears,
swear to the widow's tears and pain
that we'll never rest till freedom."*

— Song of the Mojahedin

"Dad told me when I was little that if I wanted something bad enough I should fight for it to the end with all my will and determination, and one day, it would be mine." That is the philosophy of members of the Moslem Student Society, supporters of the People's Mojahedin Organization in Iran. Fight. To the end. Until it is yours. Until you win freedom.

The People's Mojahedin Organization, founded in 1965 as a vehicle against the Shah, is struggling now to expose the alleged crimes of Khomeini in its country and to promote "democracy, independence and obliteration of exploitation," according to a spokesman of the society.

The Moslem Students' Societies of the United States and Europe organized a world-wide demonstration campaign last week to call for human rights in Iran and the condemnation of "the atrocities of Khomeini that are carried out in the name of religion," according to a pamphlet.

Members of local chapters of the M.S.S. from all over the United States, including five UNL students — three Moslems and two Americans gathered last week to participate in national demonstrations, one Feb. 12 in San Francisco, Calif., the other Feb. 16 in New York City, N.Y.

Before the demonstrations the organization members collected 100,000 signatures to petition against Khomeini's refusal to allow a missionary into Iran to investigate prison conditions. Almost 900 signatures from the Lincoln-Omaha area, primarily those of students and teachers, were taken to the New York demonstration. They were to be given to an official from the United Nations who is headquartered in New York, along with other petitions.

Supporters embark

When the supporters gathered to leave Lincoln for New York, they greeted each other with a customary kiss on each cheek and embraced, and headed east toward New York for a demonstration.

They traveled 40 hours, stopping to pick up other supporters. They were unified. And in the chill of the wet mid-dawn they sat huddled together singing the songs of

their people: "We want to be free!"

They spent hours and miles discussing Islam, Khomeini, evolution, and the goals of the Mojahedin, and there was a pleading in their voices which said, "believe us; understand us."

They stopped to pick up 10 more in Iowa to join in the New York demonstration. At four in the morning they all filed into a tiny apartment and sat on the floor, lining the walls of a near-empty room searching for a radio station that would come in without static on a portable radio.

"They say Khomeini is dead," a woman traveler said. But the false rumor did not prompt celebration in their eyes or actions. Everything remained normal with only a slight air of tension.

Evening prayers

One by one the Lincoln travelers and their companions went to the bathroom to wash themselves before their prayers together. They gathered in a living room in rows, facing what they believed to be Mecca as the three Americans in the group sat crouched against the walls facing them, fidgeting, bowing their heads, not knowing if they should watch the praying or not.

One Mojahedin stepped forward to lead. "Allah-akbar" (God is Great), he chanted, raising his hands to the sky. Others echoed him, bowing, kneeling to the ground and standing again. And then they left, traveling eastward through Indiana and Pennsylvania.

As they traveled they explained Mojahedin philosophies. The key factors in their beliefs are revolution and evolution.

"It would be easy to kill Khomeini. We want to try him publicly to expose him and his wrongdoings," a spokesman said. After a revolution against Khomeini, a cultural revolution must take place in order to change the values of the people of Iran before the initiation of a new democratic government, he said. The government would be headed by a council of people which represented the society and were elected by the people.

In New York

"If you believe religiously that people shouldn't be exploited then you have to be political. Taking a political position isn't going away from your religion. We are fighting for the rights God demanded for us, politics get

mixed in," said a man who asked not to be identified.

The Lincoln group, plus some, arrived in New York just one hour before the 11 a.m. demonstration. An estimated 800 demonstrators, mostly Iranian males but also a surprising number of Iranian females and a few Americans, gathered in Washington Square. An old drunk stumbled through the mob, begging for quarters as he tipped his head back to take another swig from the bottle he carried.

The demonstrators organized themselves in rows of three each and stood in a circle around a large circular fountain where a junkie was sprawled in the middle, smoking a joint and soaking up the sun. Banners were passed out to the group; those who would participate in a hunger strike after the demonstration wore bright pink signs around their necks. The banner leading the entire procession proclaimed, "There is no God but one God" in Arabic. As they began to march in a circle around the fountain they chanted slogans in unison, "Long live freedom; down with Khomeini," and "The people united, will never be defeated."

The march

Leaving Washington Square they prepared for a three-hour police-guarded march downtown. New Yorkers were generally apathetic. They stopped to watch the line of demonstrators that swallowed two blocks of city streets and as they passed, many people cut through the demonstrators to get to the other side of the street. A passer-by, noting the banner, "30,000 political prisoners in Iran," mumbled, "It should have been 100,000," and kept walking.

Several people with the organization walked ahead of the demonstration line to pass out information sheets about Khomeini's crimes. The colored sheets lined the sidewalks, blowing through the crowds and across the streets. The demonstrators stopped in front of what they wrongly believed to be the building which contained the Iranian Embassy.

They then marched to Ralph Bunche Plaza, across from the United Nations building, and after a mass-prayer on the street corner, hunger strikers sitting on a long cement step in the cold with little more than a coat, a sleeping bag, a bright pink sign around their necks. They planned to stay there, striking, until their conditions were met: freedom of the 30,000 political prisoners in Iran; an end to torture and mass executions; international observation of missions to be in Iran; stopping Khomeini's actions by the United Nations; and condemnation by all governments of Khomeini's actions.

The night of the demonstration the Lincoln demonstrators ate in Harlem, then left New York, heading west.

Once inside the bus, they began again, softly at first and then louder, the songs they sang about their people and of the struggle they would battle until the win: "We want to be free!"

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