

A different viewpoint on the Iranian Crisis

by Sheila Fardy

"... I experienced the most integrity and mysterious calm here near his villa. However much he was vilified as a lunatic, as evil, as a medieval reactionary, no one could deny the absoluteness with which he carried out his principles."

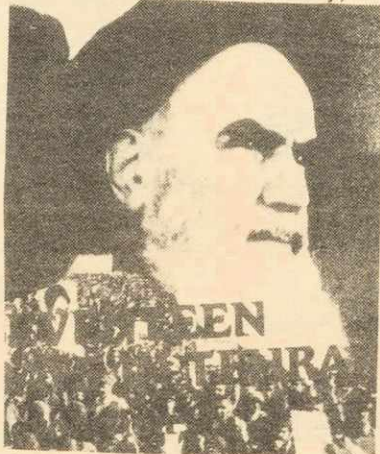
This is hardly the view of Ayatollah Khomeini that we are usually presented with in the west. It is the view of Robin W. Carlsen, a former English teacher from Victoria B.C., who visited Tehran in the spring of this year, and has written a book about his experiences called *Seventeen Days in Tehran: Revolution, Evolution and Ignorance*.

The book's strength lies in the fact that it presents a totally different viewpoint on the Iranian crisis. Carlsen argues that although the Iranian students committed a crime against international law, the United States ignored the basic laws of right and wrong by keeping an unwanted dictator in power in Iran for twenty-seven years. He attempted to examine the question from moral, political, psychological, spiritual, and aesthetic points of view, rather than the usual "hard news" approach we have been getting from the western media.

Carlsen digs beneath the bare facts found in NBC or Associated Press. He speaks of what he calls the western EGO vs the Iranian religious identity. Moslem faith is based partly on the idea of revenge: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." They believe that everything that happens is the will of Allah, and that Allah is on their side in the hostage incident. Carlsen thinks the Iranians are a

basically innocent people, who don't have the same concept of individuality that westerners do. Instead they follow their religious leader and do what they believe is the will of Allah.

From a sociological point of view, Carlsen says that it would have been better for the Iranians if they had been eased gradually into the twentieth century, in-



stead of being forced so quickly to change by the U.S.-backed Shah. Iranian society is very backward from our point of view, and forcing capitalist goods and values on the society left its people confused and aimless. Carlsen saw people living in small mud "houses" in the same area of town where Vogue magazines were for sale in the market. People are torn between their traditional values and those of the western world. Carlsen argues that it was natural for them to want to throw it all away and revert back to what they knew before. One almost humorous point Carlsen makes is that the Shah wanted every family to have a car, even if they didn't have enough to eat. Carlsen suggests

that possibly the Shah hoped that aimlessly driving around in these cars would divert the people from the crimes of the Shah!

The book has an admittedly personal and subjective point of view, but Carlsen reveals some little known facts throughout the book. For example, he speaks of the problems Iranian industry is undergoing since foreign owners have pulled out. Factories are left empty and useless because of the lack of technical knowledge and skill to keep them operating. The government however, is concentrating on keeping the oil industry alive.

Carlsen says that "the CIA was actively involved in the training and directing of SAVAK forces" (the Shah's secret police). He spoke to an Iranian man who said that his brother-in-law was a member of SAVAK, and that his immediate superior was a Texan named Butler. If this is true it certainly sheds a different light on the United States righteous indignation about the kidnapping of the hostages.

Carlsen is not, however, entirely in favour of the Iranian consciousness. One interesting point he makes is that while westerners move fast to get things done, the Iranians seem to be unable to focus their energy on a goal, and accomplish it. It takes people forever to do anything, which is frustrating to some accustomed to western ways. They seem to have gotten their act together pretty well for the embassy takeover, however.

In my view, the book has many weaknesses as well. It was slow reading, and often awkward and hard to understand. As a former English teacher, Carlsen certain-

ly seems to have forgotten how to construct a readable sentence; they tend to ramble on and on, and the point often gets lost in the rubble. The other problem I found could have been the fault of my "western consciousness", but I thought Carlsen carried the spiritual aspect of his experience a bit too far. I certainly couldn't relate to quotes such as: "the food itself tasted as if it was a victim of this dislocation and boredom." He is speaking of the food in the hotel where he stayed, which used to be very busy with western visitors, but now had more staff than guests. He goes on to say, "No life force was contained in the food, and even the more exotic dishes seemed but the expression of the purposelessness rising out of the whole hotel". This is just one small example of the kind of spiritual meaning he puts on insignificant (in my view) details. Another time he celebrates the fact that a passerby on the street directed him back to the hotel when he was lost, as though this was an almost unbelievable show of "tenderness and innocence that made me aware of the depths of gentle goodness in these people". I'm pretty sure he could have found someone in any city who would do the same.

Other than the weakness in style, this book is worth reading to get a different view on the Iranian crisis. Carlsen says his aim was "to present the dissonance which will challenge both the Iranians and ourselves". He could have done a better job in my view, but he nonetheless manages to make the reader's question their preconceptions about the problem.

'Twas the night before 'X'

'Twas the night before "X"
or
PUTTING A TIGER IN YOUR CHRISTMAS

by John Cairns

Some things are just naturally associated with December 25. One of them is the poem, "'Twas the Night Before Christmas". That particular work, however, sometimes adopts new versions for different situations. A *Gazette* of November, 1958 provides one example from a slightly less than happy occasion. In that instance, the poem was applied to varsity football. Turning back the clock, here is what we see.

"TRIBUTE TO THE DAL TIGERS

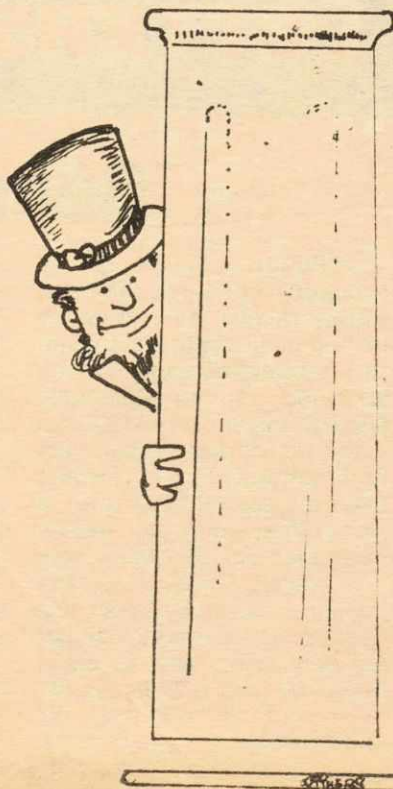
by Joan Hennessey

'Twas the night before the "X" game and all cross the campus
No Dalhousians were stirring, unaware 'X' would rout us!

Dalcom had sold tickets and kept the money with care
In hopes that a large crowd would turn out down there.
While down in the station the train it was waiting
To take us to 'X' and the team we were hating.

Swifter than eagles our players they came
The coach stomped and he whistled and he called them by name,

'On Thomas and Tomes, On Gardner and Goog,
On Corkum and Clark and Horrelt and Hoog
Run the length of the field for the good of us all
Now dash away, dash away, dash away all'.



And then in an instant the game was begun
Both teams had their hopes but St. F.X. won.
Each time I drew in my head and was turning around
Down the field came the 'X-men' for another touchdown.

Merv Shaw and Reg Cluney were ranting and roaring,
The score for the 'X-men' higher kept scoring
Our players were dominated as though they were elves,
And we laughed when we saw them in spite of ourselves.

Spectators with pipes clenched tight in their teeth
Were slowly but surely beginning to seeth.
'Our players aren't keen and to practice don't show
Now they're beginning to reap what they sow.'

The game ended at last with a lop-sided score
Our players were tired, disgusted and sore.
Spectators were angry and some even livid,
As everyone shouted, the language was vivid.

The Tigers have wakened themselves with a jerk,
And now every night you can see them at work.
At Saturday's game from the very first minute
All the fans were exclaiming, 'I know they will win it'.
The game in itself was not at all bad
And the Dalhousie Tigers walked all over Stad."

It is not immediately evident who Stad is, nor are we familiar with Thomas, Tomes, Gardiner, and company. The current value of the poem, if there is one, is its challenge to a person with the appropriate knowledge and ambition to update it. Are there any takers?

This year when someone recites "'Twas the Night Before Christmas", your ears may detect a tiger roaring in the background. Then again, perhaps what you will hear will be "Ho, ho, ho!" Either way, have a Merry Christmas.