

Imam, People and the Government

By: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works

■ Subject under discussion

Among the modern thinkers, His Holiness Imam Khomeini possesses this unique quality that in addition to presenting a clear, rational and detailed plan of the theory of administration of Islam, he succeeded in establishing and implementing it as well. What we intend to present in this article is to explain and to review the subject of religious democracy and to prove the point that this subject has arisen from the most significant political idea of the Imam on the subject of the standing of the people in the system of administration of Islam.

■ Necessity and historical record of the discussion

From the historical aspect, the question of involvement of the people in determining the destiny of their society in the form of declaration of public vote does not have a very long record. Although since long there have always existed models of sovereignty of the will of the majority or democracy, however, until the beginning of the twentieth century, this model has never been able to explain and to offer a complete paradigm of involvement and role of the entire population of a society in self-determination. Among Muslims too, this issue has never been approached the structural and institutionalized program. With the advent of the Islamic Revolution under the guidance of a great leader, His Holiness Imam Khomeini and presentation of the idea of an Islamic republic by him, it took on a more visible form.

■ Introduction Public participation in a historical review

In the research program, it was stated concisely that from the historical point of view, the question of intervention of the people in determining the destiny of their society in the form of announcement of public vote does not enjoy a very long track record. Even though the role model of sovereignty of the will of the majority (democracy) has been important since the time of Plato (around 427 B.C.) in the political philosophy of Greece, however, until the beginning of the twentieth century this model has been experienced with passing through different periods and has bred in stages, different forms of democratic systems. In the democratic model proposed by Plato, the extent of popular participation is limited and small to the extent that apart from a section of the social elites, the other strata of society such as women, the youth and even a large part of the military, laborers and employees do not possess the right to participate in the political arena.

The arrival of Christ and Christianity turned the model of government put forward by Greek philosophers totally upside down. With the forming of the church of Christianity, the subject of popular participation in the political process of the Christian society ceased to exist and basically, it lost its subjectivity. From the second century A.D. until the beginning of the Renaissance in the west, in a period spanning more than twelve centuries, the rulers of the church granted sovereignty to the thesis of doctrine of two authorities that recognized

the two distinct powers of the government and the church. In this period on many occasions, there were disputes between the Roman emperors and the cardinals of the church about the supremacy of the opinion and decision of the empire or the cardinal. In these disputes the role of the people was restricted to obeying, taking orders and keeping away from opposition and revolt based on the teachings of Christ.

History of Islamic societies on the subject of popular participation displays another route opposite that of the church societies because from the time it was established, the religion of Islam was founded on the pillars of uprising against injustice and oppression as well as its substitution with justice, equality and fraternity. Based on this premise, the role of people as a group who had a duty and responsibility in relation to their own destiny and that of the society is of special significance. The widespread and repeated revolt by Muslims in the course of the history of Islam against oppression and tyranny of the rulers that Islamic societies have constantly witnessed from the time of the Umayyad rule until now can be explained in this context.

Nevertheless, the political and social participation among Muslims, despite their perpetuation and even intensity, in certain periods in history, never culminated in a structural and institutionalized program at the growth and development stage; and never took on the form of a gathering of votes and presence in the form of a declaration of opinion. This continued until it was realized with the dawn of the Islamic Revolution and presentation of the idea of Islamic republic by the Imam.

Without hesitation, the Islamic rule of the Imam seeks the best path to take decision for resolving social issues in the external and internal aspects to lie in the sovereignty of the people over their own destiny. It is evident that this aspect of Islamic rule alongside the sovereignty of divine legislation of God always maintains its special position. Based on this premise, the Islamic rule must accept and be accompanied with permanent participation of the people. The Imam's emphasis on the role of the people for realization of the political system of Islam was quite evident to everyone. This

role of activation – and not granting legitimacy – holds a key role while it possesses a critical role in criticism, guidance and supervision for perpetuation of rule.

An examination of the opinions and views of the Imam proves that he reckons the standing of the people in the rule to be far higher than that of giving and taking advice and he stresses that: “It is the Islamic republic all of whose affairs at all stages, even leadership, is based on the franchise of the people. This role for the people is higher than an advisory one considering that advising is not in conflict with the independence of the leader and the Imam; however, in this theory, the people are of the same status as the leader and are his partner so that naturally, the permission and consent of both is valid.

In an Islamic system, the standing of the people as stated by Imam Ali (AS) that: “The rule should be with the consent and agreement of the people.” Imposition of affairs to the people contrary to their liking has no place in the thinking of the Imam. He states: “The Exalted and Almighty God has not given us the right; the prophet of Islam has not given us the right to impose a thing on the nation. Yes, it is possible that at times we may request them for something; a humble request; a request that the servant of a nation asks from a nation.”

■ A General Overview of the Administrative Model of Imam Khomeini^(RA)

His Holiness the Imam with his great theoretical and practical souvenir meaning the Islamic republic system based on the absolute authority of the religious jurisprudence founded his administrative model on the three foundation pillars of religion of Islam, people and leadership. By rejecting the theories circulating in that period including republic of Muslims (that was solely based on the Muslim population and without a social religion and religious leadership); democratic Islamic republic (based on religion, the people and without leadership) and Islamic administration (based on the pillars of religion and leadership but without the people). In this system, the three foundation

pillars of religion, leadership and people occupy a special position and are inseparable from one another. The theory of religious democracy of the Imam gave the people the maximum role within the framework of Islam and considers their opinion to be the criterion and yardstick in the sphere of action. This is a point that goes back to the foremost years of the advent of Islam because Imam Ali (AS) despite his appointment by God and the Messenger of Islam, at the same time at the beginning of his rule in the Shaqshaqiyah Sermon took the presence and wishes of the people as witnesses for his leadership and proclaimed them to be one of the reasons for his agreeing to become the leader of Muslims.

Similarly, in the opinion and thinking of the Imam, leadership of religion – the supreme religious jurisprudent – is placed as a firm foundation of religious basis of society and its political system. Thus he believed that the supreme religious jurisprudent guaranteed the perpetuation of religious following and for safeguarding the soundness of the Islamic society.

Intellectual pillars of administration

It is evident that according to the directives of the mind and logic on the need for establishing a rule, at every time and place, the administration is based firmly on the two pillars of power and canonical legality.

The intellectuals of the world would not recognize a rule without power to be a rule while a rule without canonical legality will also be injustice. As necessitated by this intellectual directive, the power of the government is necessary for establishing and perpetuation of discipline in society while canonical legality of the government is necessary for perpetuation of justice in society.

■ Source of power and administration

As mentioned earlier, the foundations of an administration from the point of view of the intellect is firmly based on the two pillars of power and canonical legality. Now the question is that by what means are these two pillars made available? In other words, from the point of view of the

mind and religion, what are the acceptable and deserving ways for securing and obtaining these two pillars of a government? Here we initially discuss the first pillar of government which is power especially the question that what is the source of power of a government? There are two answers to it as below:

1- Compulsion and reluctance: In this method, there is a power far above the will of the people. This method of attaining power and establishing rule is not acceptable from the point of view of the religion of Islam because in numerous verses of the glorious Quran, this point has been repeatedly emphasized that divine leaders are solely designated to summon the people towards supporting and following them in order to establish the rule of justice in society. They are not supposed to rule over the people using force and take away the rights from the people. In particular, God addresses His prophet that:

"If your God wanted that all those creatures living on earth should accept the faith, why then do you want to make the people to become believers out of reluctance?"

Or in the Surah 'Al-Baqarah' God the almighty says:

"There is no compulsion in religion, indeed truth has been made manifest distinct from error..."

Or addressing His prophet, He commands:

"Thou art only a reminder; Thou art not over them a compeller."

From the above verses and other verses of the glorious Quran we come to the conclusion that in Islam using method of reluctance of the people or a power far above the will and authority of the people in order to establish a rule and an Islamic society is null and void as well as being undesirable and Almighty God does not grant such a permission even to the prophets and saints. It is evident that this subject is in connection with establishment of a divine society and forming a rule of law and justice; however, after its formation with the will

and support of the people, it is the duty of the divine leaders to take steps towards establishing and safeguarding justice in the Islamic society. In addition to what has been mentioned in the canons, from the rational point of view too the establishing of social justice is subject to the will and demand of the people. This means that in case of lack of collective will, it is not possible to establish social justice. Thus, whether from the point of view of religion and whether from the point of view of the mind, establishing rule of justice in an Islamic society depends on the want and will of the people. On this subject, the Imam states:

"The rule of Islam which is not distinct from the people; it is of the people; it is from this people and from this population."

■ Similarly, he states that:

"Of the fundamental rights of every nation is that they must have the final word in their destiny and in determining the form and type of their government."

It appears that in these two texts, the Imam is referring to the two above mentioned points of view of religion and the mind. The first text points to the point of view of religion on the subject of popularity of the rule; while in the second text, it points to the command of the mind that according to the command of the practical mind, it is the right of the people to have a rule of justice. According to the command of the theoretical mind, establishing rule of justice among the people is not possible without their collective will. 2- Based on what has been mentioned earlier, the second answer to the question put forward about the source of power in an administration becomes clear because according to this theory, the power of the government whether from the point of view of the mind or whether from religion must originate from the collective will of the people. The Imam states:

"If the people support a government, this government will not collapse; if the people are the backers of a government, that government

shall not be demolished.”

The point whose mention seems to be necessary here is that the right to self-determination does not mean that people have no responsibility at all in determining the type of this destiny. Moreover, it is not as though whatever they elect is right, just and advisable; rather, according to the opinion of the mind and religion, the people are responsible to use this right towards justice and expedience and to choose that which because of rational or canonical reasons is advisable and just while abstaining from choosing that which is uncalled for and which is incompatible with justice according to the rational and canonical reasons.

For proximity of the mind, perhaps one can compare the right to self-determination to imply in a way the right to property. A person, who owns merchandise, has the right to possession of this wealth. This right to possession in a way implies the right to self-determination of that wealth. Having this right does not cause the proprietor to evade responsibility in exchange for selecting the type of destiny for the wealth. Despite possessing the right to possession of the wealth, the proprietor has the responsibility to exercise this right towards justice and righteousness and to abstain from improper and inadvisable usage of this right. The right to self-determination is a right that the intellectuals acknowledge for human beings in the same way that they acknowledge the right of possession of property for human beings. This rational right does in no way imply that there is no yardstick and responsibility for exercising this right.

■ Source of religious legitimacy in administration

Now the question that arises here is that where is the fountainhead and source of the religious legality? The religious legality that in fact implies warranting is equal to justice. Justice and injustice are two religious and legal terms that mean the same as both religious legality and religious illegality or merited and demerited. By religious legality of the government or the ruler is meant the acceptance of both of them by a source who

must endorse either the government or the ruler. In other words, only the ruler who possesses the necessary competence for being appointed to the position will be lawful and this competence will only be realized in case where the power of the government or the ruler is based on the principles of justice and that it absolves itself of injustice and oppression.

What is under discussion here is that what are the impartial yardstick and source as well as the qualification and competency of the government? For an investigation and explanation of this question, it is necessary to refer to three preliminaries as follows:

■ First preliminary

It is evident that a thing can become the measure for the religious legality and competence that is itself essentially religiously legal and competent so that there is no need for it to prove its legitimacy and competence.

■ Second preliminary

What can take on the description of justice, oppression, competence and incompetence and likewise, religious legitimacy or lack of religious legitimacy is an action, that is willful and voluntary while involuntary actions are not qualified to possess those qualities. For example, performance of the organs of vision and hearing of human beings that are involuntary actions cannot be described either in terms of justice or oppression or religious legality and competence or lack of religious legitimacy and incompetence; however, voluntary words and actions of human beings that take place with awareness and willingly, can be described in terms of the above mentioned qualities.

■ Third preliminary

From the above mentioned discussion one can conclude that what is the criterion for qualification of a voluntary action as possessing the above mentioned features is willpower and authority meaning that willpower and authority which is the source of a voluntary action can become the yardstick of the cause of its qualification to possess



the above mentioned qualities. From these three preliminaries we come to the conclusion that the measure for religious legitimacy, justice and competence must be appropriate and essentially religiously lawful willpower or a will power that is essentially just – willpower that itself is inseparable from justice, competence and religious legitimacy. On this basis, the only thing that can become the criterion for justice, competence and religious legitimacy is the will of God that is the only will which is essentially just, competent and religiously legitimate. Thus any other willpower whether of human being or non-human being cannot be the criterion for religious legitimacy, competence and justice because it is essentially not in possession of justice, competence and religious legality. Only in case where it follows the divine will can it possess the qualification of justice, competence and religious legitimacy otherwise it is religiously unlawful, oppressive and incompetent. In conclusion, only the will of God is the yardstick for religious legitimacy of an administration on the subject of legitimacy or implementation or justice and nothing else can be the essential criteria

– even if it is the will of the entire humanity – of religious legitimacy of a government. This conclusion is quite noticeable from the below statement of Imam Khomeini:

“The rule of Islam is the rule of law. In this type of rule, the sovereignty belongs solely to God while the law is the commandment and rule of God. The law of Islam or the commandment of God has absolute authority and presides over all individuals and over the Islamic government. All individuals right from the Honorable Prophet of Islam (SA) to the appointees of his holiness and the rest of the people are bound by the law until eternity – the same law that was sent down by the Exalted and Supreme God and was expressed in the language of the Quran and the Honorable prophet of Islam (SA). If the honorable prophet of Islam (SA) became the caliph, it was on the command of God. The Exalted and Supreme God appointed his holiness as the caliph.”

From the rational point of view too it is solely the will of God that can become the yardstick

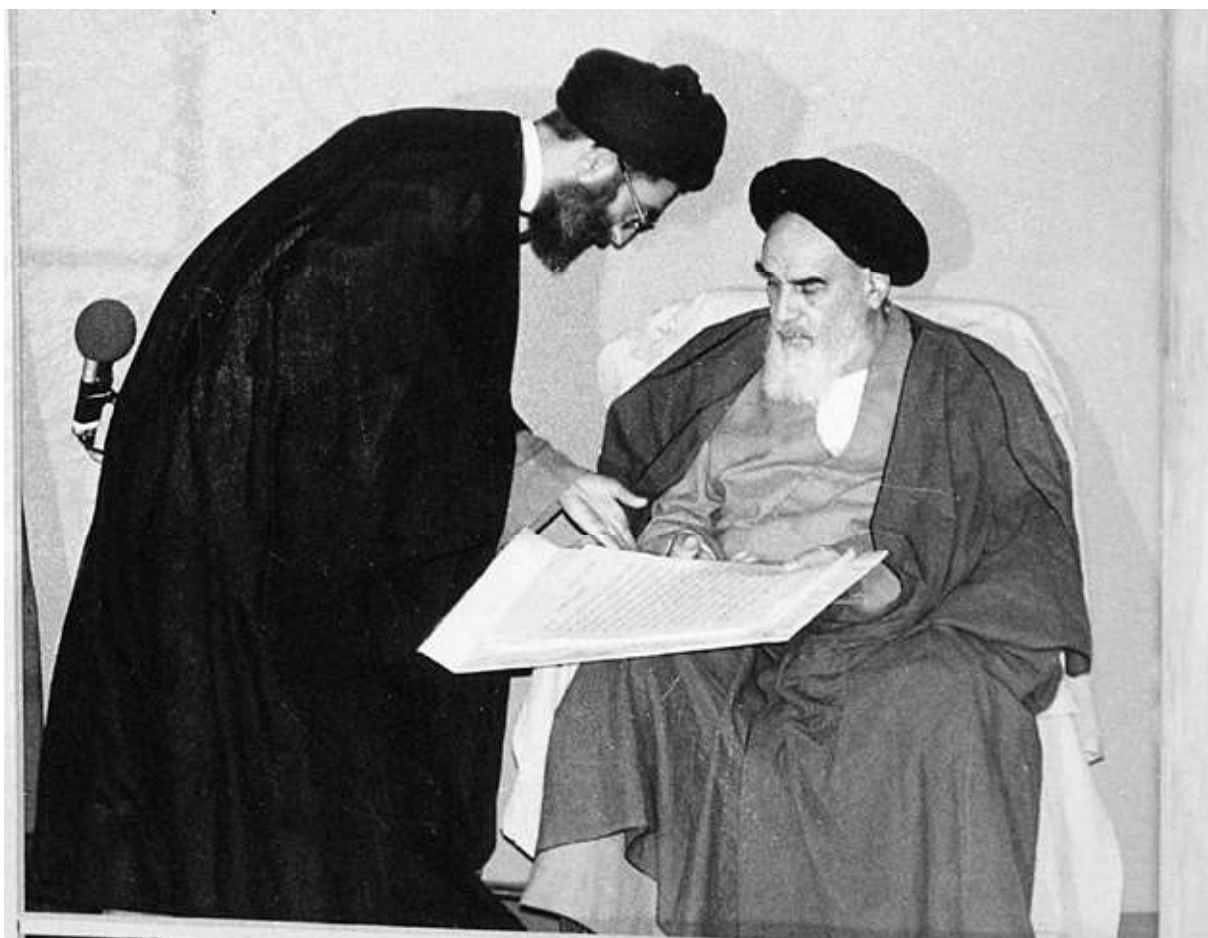
of religious legitimacy because in addition to what has been said, it is only the will of God that precedes all willpowers as well as voluntary actions and statements; and thus only He can be the basis and criterion of religious legitimacy for voluntary actions of all undertakers possessing authority and will power. In addition to the mind, religion too testifies to this point; in particular in many verses in the glorious Quran, it has been categorically asserted that the administration of the world and the hereafter is solely undertaken by God and considers selection to be His exclusively. In another instance it describes other than God's rule to be ignorance. It has been categorically emphasized in these verses that the religiously legitimate government alone is the Divine Rule; and His commandment and decree alone is the measure of superiority, merit and development. The conclusion that is arrived at from this subject is that it is solely the will of God that can be the yardstick for the religious legitimacy of willful and voluntary action because is an essence in His case and His Will takes precedence over all other voluntary actions. Consequently, the circumstance of all voluntary actions of human beings is such that the willpower of human beings is the source of creation of voluntary action; while the will of God is the source of its religious legitimacy. Therefore, on the question of administration too which is one of the voluntary human actions and for this reason it come into existence with their will and power, the measure and criterion of religious legitimacy is the Will of God. Thus every rule that conforms to divine will, because it conforms to the yardstick of religious legitimacy shall be religiously legitimate and competent. Therefore, in the same way that the will of the people is the source and fountainhead of power of the government, the Will of God too is the fountainhead of religious legitimacy and rightfulness of the government such that any government that is not derived from the Will of God does not have the religious legitimacy and rightfulness even though it has been established by the will of the people. On this subject, Imam Khomeini addressing the Guardian Council whose responsibility was to ensure that rules and regulations conformed with Divine

Commandments and religious tenets, states thus:

"Basically, what must be taken into consideration is God and not people. If a hundred million people; if all the inhabitants of the world were on one side and you would observe that all of them would speak against the commandments of the Quran, you must stand up and speak the word of God even if all of them mutiny. This is how the prophets operated. For example did His Holiness Moses operate other than in this way when confronting the pharaoh? Did he have any supporters?"

■ The Essence of Islamic Rule

From what has been mentioned so far, the essence of an Islamic government and its difference with other forms of administration becomes clear. The main difference of Islamic rule with a dictatorship is that in an Islamic administration, the will of the people is the source of power while the will of God is the source of religious legitimacy. Thus an Islamic government is in possession of both the rational pillars of administration namely, popular power and divine legitimacy whereas a dictatorial government neither relies for power on the will of the people nor relies for legitimacy on Divine Will. The difference between an Islamic government and a democracy is in that a democracy suffers from crises of religious legitimacy and does not have a source from which it can secure religious legitimacy. This is because the will of the people that forms the infrastructure of a rule of democracy although it grants entity to a democratic government, however, it is not able to secure religious legitimacy for the democracy because in the manner explained earlier, the will of the people itself is in need of a yardstick to testify to its religious legitimacy. This is because justice and competence are not the inseparable requirements of the people's will. In an Islamic system of administration the will of the people is the source of power while the Will of God is the source of its religious legitimacy. Thus it is in the Islamic system of administration alone that the two rational pillars of administration meaning power and religious legitimacy each occupy a rational and logical standing of their own. His Holiness the Imam states:



"An Islamic government is neither oppressive nor totalitarian; rather, it is "constitutional". Of course it does not mean 'constitutional' in the usual sense of the term, in which ratification of laws depends on the franchise of persons and the majority. It is constitutional in the sense that the administrators believe in a set of conditions for implementation and administration that have been determined in the honorable Quran and the tradition of the Prophet of Islam (SA). The set of conditions are the commandments and tenets of Islam that must be observed and implemented. In this respect, the Islamic government is "rule of the Divine law over the people." The fundamental difference between an Islamic government and 'constitutional monarchy' and 'republic' lies in the fact that representatives of the people or the king in these types of governments frame the legislations whereas the power of legislation and

authority to legislate in Islam rests solely with the Almighty God. The sacred legislator of Islam is the sole legislative power. No one has the right to pass legislation and no law except the verdict of the religious legislator is open to implementation."

Therefore, each of the oppressive systems of demonstration and democratic rule suffer from lack of religious legitimacy and just there is no guarantee for justice in oppressive systems of administration, likewise, systems of democracy also suffer from this problem because even in the best of circumstances of implementation of democratic rule, there is no guarantee that the government would be just. The only strong point of democracy is that it revolves around the axis of people's will; however – as mentioned earlier – the role of people's will in demonstration is only a creative and establishing role and is not that of a value-enhancing and determining one of justice and com-

petence. Whereas for securing competence and justice in a system of administration, there is need for a source that precedes the will of the people so that it guides the people's will towards justice and competence and places the will of the people on the path of justice, piety and purity. The advantage enjoyed by an Islamic government over democratic system is that in addition to incorporating the strong point of the democratic system being centered round the will of the people, it is also absolved of its weak point which is that of the source of religious legitimacy. In addition, by leaning on the divine canons, discipline, principles and commandments of God, it incorporates the guidance of Divine will and through this, justice and religious legitimacy is blended with the essence of the system of government of Islam.

Status of the people in administration from the point of view of Imam Khomeini

As stated earlier on, Imam Khomeini strongly emphasized on the role of people in the government and their right over the authorities and would always warn the officials about preserving the rights of the nation. Here, we briefly deal with some of the topics pertaining to this issue as follows:

1- Giving importance to the people both in the period of victory and after it

While at the same believing that grounds for rising and transcending the thinking of the people must be made available, the Imam would give a lot of importance to the franchise of the people. He repeatedly reminded the authorities of according respect and being humble with the people. According to his point of view, in the same way that for being appointed to an office is sourced with the people, likewise for removing an individual or individuals from office also the same is applicable. As an example, he states:

"When the people do not want a civil servant, he must be removed."

In another instance, he states:

"In any case, we must make it our objective to

maintain the people...one cannot work without the support of the people."

About the subject of presence of the people in the arena, he states:

"You all know that the thing which is necessary for all of us is that we think about having the people in the arena. One end of this is tied to the government, the president and the legislative assembly, while the other end is tied to the people themselves. If you maintain this side, then we are confident that the vast majority of our nation will maintain the other side.

2- Deeming people's presence in the political arena to be essential

The Imam would constantly reiterate that one must not behave with the people in such a manner that it earns their dissatisfaction; thus he states:

"You will not succeed if you do not make a partnership with the people concerning, trade, concerning industry, concerning these matters."

■ Or he would state that:

"They must now think of this objective of keeping the people satisfied; and one of the ways is that the ministries and government offices should operate in such a way that they don't create discontent."

Imam Khomeini considered the Revolution to belong to the people; and he believed that the people were the most powerful support for the Revolution. He would permanently emphasize the presence of the people in the political arena.

3- He reckoned that the consent of God lay in the consent of the masses

On this subject the Imam states thus:

"That which incorporates everything is earning the consent of God - and that is in earning the consent of the masses."

On the importance of earning the consent of the people, he would state:

"Earning the consent of the people is a necessary affair. The Prophet of Islam would earn the consent of the people. He was after earning the consent of the people; he endeavored to draw the attention of the people to the truth. You too must pursue this objective."

■ Or he would state:

"You must strive to earn the love of the people. In this too there is the consent of God."

From the statements of the Imam on the subject of the people and their place in an Islamic government, one can conclude that his yardstick was performance of Islamic commandments together with the wishes of the people. Once he categorically referred to this point stating:

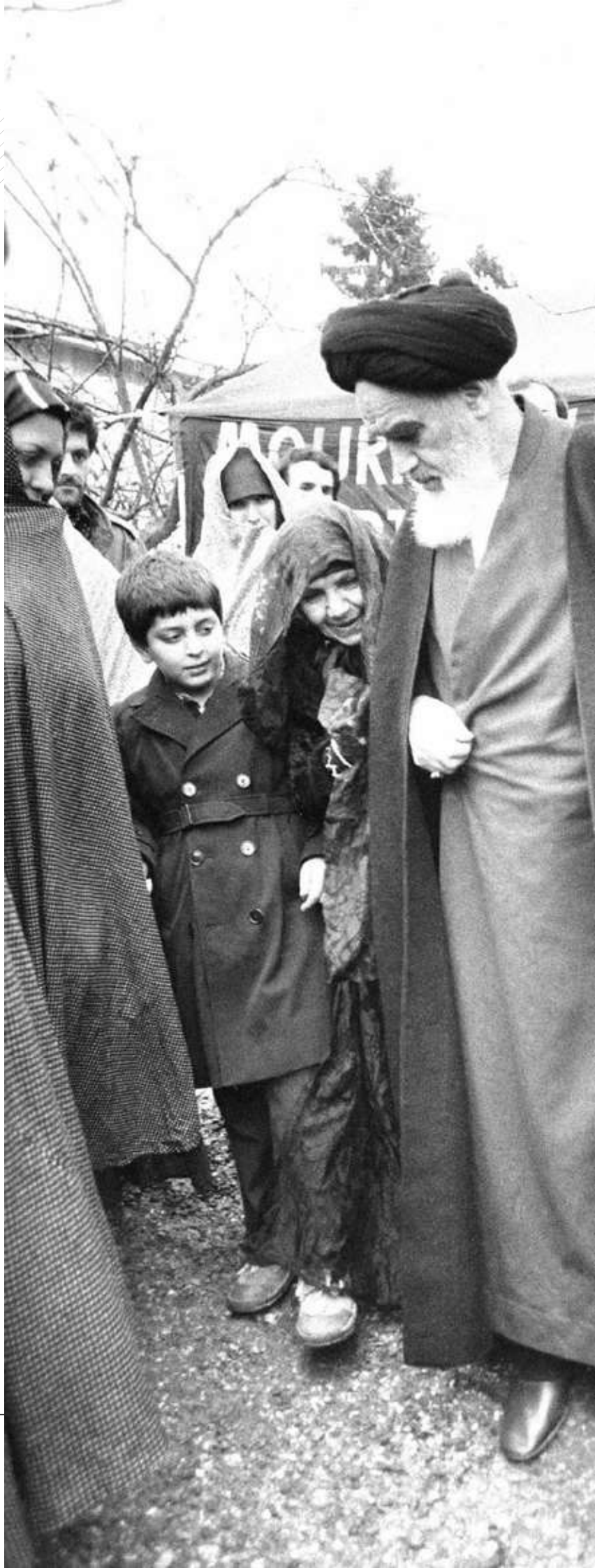
"Islamic republic means a government of the people; and its decrees are the decrees of Islam."

4- The principle of respect for the people's opinion

What can be inferred from the messages and oral and written works of the Imam is that in certain instances, although he knew that the people might possibly make a mistake in their choice, yet he would not intervene directly. Instead he would attempt to motivate them towards growth, maturity, gaining experience and applied political understanding.

He would state categorically that the people were the ultimate decision-makers on all issues and considered his policy to be based on freedom, independence and safeguarding the interests of the people. He would not sacrifice anything at the altar of that principle. From the very beginning of the formation of the nucleus of the government, the Imam gave importance to public franchise in the creation of the Islamic republic and stated:

"We want the creation of an Islamic republic which is a government that relies on public bal-



loting. The ultimate form of the government shall be determined by the people themselves taking into consideration the present conditions and exigencies of our society.”

5-Emphasis on establishment of councils as a manifestation of democracy

If we consider the establishment of various councils as manifestations of democracy and participation of the people in administration of the country, years before the idea of establishing councils could occur to the representatives in the Islamic Consultative Assembly, precisely two months after the victory of the Revolution when there were still many plots and conspiracies, Imam Khomeini not only proposed the establishment of councils even in the remotest and most far-flung regions and territories of the country, rather, he declared it to be among the essentials of an Islamic republic system. He would stress on the need to compile and pass an Islamic law for establishing councils. “Towards establishment of a popular government in Iran and sovereignty of the people over their destiny which is among the essentials of the Islamic Republic, I deem it necessary to act on the spur of the moment for writing a charter of implementation of councils for administration of the local affairs of towns and villages throughout Iran; and after its approval, notify it to the government so that the government will implement it immediately.”

The Imam permanently emphasized on the need for friendly and close relations between the people and the authorities and had stated to them that:

“Be among the people, speak with the people so that the mutual horror of the past is eliminated; and God forbid, the authorities do not fall into the trap of ambition and captivity of seeking positions and postings; and that they come to the conclusion that so and so position is not their paternal inheritance.”

While at the same time as emphasizing the presence and active participation of the people in various political arenas, however, whenever he felt

that one must put an end to deviation and block conspiracies, he would express his views firmly and give his guidance. When for determining the system and government various proposals such as ‘government of the masses’, ‘democratic republic of Islamic nation’ and so forth...were mentioned, with a categorical and firm message, the Imam put an end to these differences and stated:

“The government of an Islamic republic, neither one word more nor one word less.”

Prior to the victory of the Revolution, in response to a journalist who asked him whether after the departure of the Shah and his return to Iran, he would become the leader of the Islamic Republic, the Imam replied:

“I myself do not want to hold the reins of administration in my hands; however, we will guide the people for selection of the government and shall announce its conditions to the people.”

■ Conclusion

In general, from the statements of the Imam on the subject of the role of the people and the will of the religious majority, we can arrive at the following conclusions:

- A) The Islamic government is established on the fundamentals of justice.
- B) Governments and including Islamic governments must defer to the wishes of the people.
- C) Governments must be for the people and not that the people be for the governments.
- D) An Islamic government is a government that is in the service of the people and it is the duty of the government to render service to the people.
- E) The bond and the chain connecting these principles are based on Theocentrism because it is in a divine government that justice finds meaning. The consent of the people is an accepted principle while serving the people is both a principle and a pivot. The fundamental nature of the government finds legitimacy in the sense that the will of the people is the source of power of the government while the will of God is the source of religious legitimacy and rightfulness of the government.