

# Ebdulrehman Qasimlo

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(Redirected from Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou)

**Ebdulrehman Qasimlo**, (1930-1989), was an Iranian-Kurdish politician from Eastern Kurdistan (*Kurdistana Rojhilat* - also known as Iranian Kurdistan). He was born on December 22nd, 1930 in Ürmiyeh, Kurdistan, from father Mihemed Qasimlo and Assyrian christian mother Nana Jan Timsar. He was the leader of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (*Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê Îranê* - PDKÎ) from 1973 to 1989. He was assassinated on July 13th, 1989 by the Iranian authorities.

## Contents

- 1 Early and private life
- 2 Political life
- 3 Assassination and funerals
- 4 The investigation
- 5 External links

## Early and private life

Born in a relatively wealthy family of the Kurdish countryside, Ebdulrehman Qasimlo is instructed in a Quranic school. He starts his university studies in France, and pursues them in Czechoslovakia, where he meets his wife Helen Krulich. They have two daughters together, Mina (1953) and Hewa (1955).

## Political life

Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the Secretary-General of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), was born on 22 December 1930 in Ourmiah, Kurdistan. He went to university in Paris and later Czechoslovakia, had a Doctorate in economics and was an associate professor, having taught in Prague and Paris.

In 1941, the Allies invaded Iran in a 'bridge of victory' operation that inevitably brought about the downfall of Reza Shah because of his relations with the Axis powers. A major political change was to take shape in the country. In Iranian Kurdistan the national movement came back to life and the PDKI founded on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1945, attracted young people in its masses. One of them was Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou - not yet 15 years old. On 22 January 1946 the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad came into existence by proclamation, but in December of the same year the imperial army with the help of the Western forces entered the city, and the killing and arrests that followed were as cruel as they were indiscriminate. The Republic had fallen; its President, Qazi Mohammad, and his close followers were taken prisoner, and then put to death on 30 March 1947.

Little by little the Kurdish people re-gathered their strength. The Republic of Mahabad may have been short-lived but in the collective memory it did not die. Running unlimited risks, the Kurdish leaders set about the vast task of protecting, educating and organising the population. Back from Europe in 1952, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou devoted his energies to these clandestine activities for several years. In the next decade, he split his time between Europe and Kurdistan working in double harness: his university career and his repeated missions to Kurdistan.

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In 1959, the regional context appeared to be more hopeful; in neighbouring Iraq, the monarchy had been overthrown, and Molla Mostafa Barzani (leader of the Democratic Party of Iraqi Kurdistan) had returned to his country after eleven years of exile in former USSR. The government in Baghdad accepted the principle of autonomy for the Kurdish population of Iraq.

On the other side of the frontier, the PDKI steeled itself to renew the struggle. In 1968-69, the armed conflict was rife in Iranian Kurdistan and the period ended in a bath of blood with the massacre of the Kurdish leaders - and yet, even then, Kurdish resistance managed to raise its head again. The vice-like grip in which the Shah's armies were trying to hold it had to be broken. At the third Congress of the PDKI (1973), Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was elected Secretary-general and at those that followed he was invariably returned to office.

During the years that followed, the prestige of the Pahlavi monarchy continued to wane. The White Revolution was questioned by experts in international affairs; the greedy demands and extravagant behaviour of the court were criticised in the press, and the SAVAK was active throughout the country with no social class being spared its baneful attentions. Clearly, the regime was doomed. If that happened, what should be the position of PDKI ? In view of the complex nature of the problems in the region that position had to be clear-cut. The Party had to reply unambiguously to a number of questions about its identity, its allegiances, its aspirations and its options. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and his aides drew up as coherent and realistic a programme as they could which may be summarised, in essence, as follows :

- We are Kurds, we belong to a people that the vicissitudes of history have scattered over five states. A bond of brotherhood binds us, and will continue to bind us, to all other Kurds, wherever they live. - We are the descendants of one of the oldest Indo-European civilisations. Our identity is defined by the fact that we have our own language and our own culture. - We are the citizens of a country called Iran - on the same basis of the other peoples living on the Iranian territory : the Baluchs, Persians, Azeris, Arabs, Turkmens and so on. - We are ardent defenders of the Declaration of Human Rights and the right of peoples as defined by the United Nations. - We are for the freedom of worship and we respect all religions practiced by our co-citizens. Faith is an inviolable right. However, being resolutely modern in our outlook, we feel that a separation between the religious institutions and the state is desirable. A lay state is not, on that account, opposed to the faith or to those that serve it. - For the living conditions of all to be improved, and customs from long ages past condemning women to a state of inferiority to be ended. - To accelerate development in our country, it is necessary to establish a system providing free education of uniform quality throughout the country. A special effort should be made in the peripheral areas (Kurdistan, for example) that are clearly a long way behind. - No attempt to leave poverty behind will succeed without the active participation of the people themselves. To feel concerned - so we believe - they have to feel free. Freedom of movement for goods and persons, freedom of association and freedom to form political parties or unions and to belong to such organisations are the indispensable preconditions for economic and cultural development. - For there to be trust between the population and the central authority, large-scale decentralisation is necessary. - In Kurdistan's case, that decentralisation has to comprise a charter of autonomy for the region whose boundaries would need to be precisely defined. Within this Kurdish space, the administrative languages should be Kurdish and Farsi, which would both be official languages of the regional and local authorities. Primary education should be in Kurdish whereas the two official languages should be routine practice in secondary school. Lastly, after so many years of violence, the Kurdish people could not accept a police force that was not manned by Kurds. It is only on these conditions that there would be any chance of lasting peace in Iranian Kurdistan. - Lastly, the "kurdification" of the administrative and production structures would demand major investment in the training of senior officials and staff and also - it goes without saying - a multidisciplinary university on Kurdish land. In other words, what the leaders of the PDKI demand is genuine and effective autonomy. Unfortunately, as everyone knows, dictatorships hide behind pyramid-shape structures excluding all horizontal

communication. Feeling themselves perpetually threatened (as indeed they are), they seek the support of foreign powers which, in the end, become their masters. Dictators are not free and they abuse the freedom of others. So the autonomy of Iranian Kurdistan would be utopian unless Iran made the change to democracy. Without democracy in Iran there could be no guarantee for autonomy in Kurdistan. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou saw that these two concepts were inseparable and so they became the watchword of the PDKI: Democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan.

This policy statement in which chauvinism and sectarianism had no part won the PDKI the firm friendship of Third World countries and modern democracies alike. During his many trips abroad, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was always sure of a warm welcome. Many humanitarian organisations offered him help, eminent figures on the world stage in political and university life thought highly of him and human rights and religious militants encouraged him throughout his life. It was thanks to him that the Iranian Kurds were able to emerge from their isolation and make their voice heard in the international fora. Some of these sympathisers were surprised that the Iranian Kurds had "such modest" demands after such a bitter struggle. "It is really autonomy you want - nothing more?" was a not uncommon reaction.

No secret clause was ever planned or hidden in this blueprint for autonomy because it was the fruit of long and profound thought about the world political context following World War II. The Kurdish leaders took the view that major changes to frontiers were ruled out and that the general trend was towards the formation of large groupings rather than the fragmentation of existing units. In any case, once peace was restored, it would surely be natural for countries with common borders to seek to develop trade and cultural exchange. Therefore, in the long term, the existence of big Kurdish communities in various parts of the Middle East could be a positive factor in inter-regional relations. Everyone would stand to gain. It is well known that the big exporting countries pay considerable attention to the ethnic minorities, which often act as bridgeheads or relay stations in campaigns to win a foothold in new markets. In short, the Kurdish thinkers concluded that only the short-sighted could see ethnic, linguistic or religious diversity as an obstacle to development. In the future the big middle-eastern house would derive its energy from the many different elements of which it was built. This pattern was particularly true of Iran itself with its 45 million inhabitants of which only 40 % were of Persian origin. (Today Iran has over sixty million inhabitants). At that time, towards 1975, this type of thinking sounded at least advanced, not to say fanciful. The Kurds were still under the heel of the Shah, but nothing is eternal, dictators included.

One day in February 1979 Mohammed Reza Pahlavi finally gave up the throne. At that time the PDKI had a solid base and a real impact in Iranian Kurdistan. However, to run the territory properly and control its administration the police had to be removed and the army thrown out down to the very last man. This was the task of the "peshmergas" or partisans, who attacked army barracks and seized large stocks of arms and ammunition. Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was then able to claim that, in a large part of Kurdistan, the Kurds were their own masters.

It was reasonable to hope that the Iranian revolution would have brought men to power able to realise that the interests of the central authority and those of the Kurds were compatible. Elections were planned and a new constitution was being written for the country.

Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was elected to the Assembly of experts and made ready to carry to the capital the message of the Kurds - a simple message: there is room for all in this country where everything needs doing or re-doing. Imam Khomeini, unfortunately, saw things differently, he labelled the newly elected representative of the Kurds an "enemy-of-God" and declared a "holy war" on Kurdistan. This was in 1979. Sudden though it was, this call to arms was, in retrospect, not surprising. How, after all, could this grim gerontocrat with the cruelty of another age be prepared to give his attention to the history and wants of the Kurds? How could Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou be expected to stay silent at the hostage-taking, occupation of foreign embassies and other terrorist activities launched in 1979 by an Imam who had recently returned from Neauphle-le-Château to sow the seeds of hate and insanity.

The Gulf War broke out the following September. Perhaps these unsubdued Kurds would be forgotten during this conflict between Iran and Iraq (1980-88). On the contrary, in fact, it cost them dearly, for their villages lay on either side of the frontier where the fighting was at its fiercest. They were accused, too, of being anti-patriotic : their settlements were destroyed and the people living there reduced to a wandering existence. The ultimate purpose of these crimes against humanity was obvious : to use the war as an excuse for exterminating a people whose authenticity was denied as strongly as it was proclaimed by the Kurds.

Iran came out of the war with Iraq exhausted and the Imam at death's door. The facts had to be faced and Tehran had to find a compromise in Kurdistan. For his part, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou had been saying for years that the fighting had been imposed on him, that neither side would ever lose or win and that, sooner or later, the Kurdish problem would have to be solved across the negotiating table. After flying a few kites, Tehran issued a concrete proposal for a meeting in Vienna on 28 December 1988 and the PDKI accepted. The talks lasted two days, 28 and 30 December and the results must have been promising because it was agreed to hold another meeting the following January. On 20 January, at the end of the first round of negotiations, the representatives of Tehran were fully acquainted with the Kurdish demands. The principle of autonomy seemed to have been agreed. The details of how it was to be put into effect had yet to be defined.

Six months later, Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou returned to Europe to attend a congress of the Socialist International. Tehran tried to contact him again in order, he was told, to pursue the negotiations that had begun the previous winter. The PDKI accepted the offer sent to it. The meeting took place on 12 July 1989 in Vienna. The Tehran delegation was as before, namely Mohammed Jafar Sahraroudi and Hadji Moustafawi, except that this time there was also a third member: Amir Mansur Bozorgian whose function was that of bodyguard. The Kurds also had a three-man delegation : Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, his aide Abdullah Ghaderi-Azar (member of the PDKI Central Committee) and Fadhil Rassoul, an Iraqi university professor who had acted as a mediator.

The next day, 13 July 1989, in the very room where the negotiation took place Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou was killed by three bullets fired at very close range. His assistant Abdullah Ghaderi-Azar was hit by eleven bullets and Fadhil Rassoul by five. Hadji Moustafawi succeeded in escaping. Mohammad Jafar Sahraroudi received minor injuries and was taken to hospital, questioned and allowed to go. Amir Mansur Bozorgian was released after 24 hours in police custody and took refuge in the Iranian Embassy.

Indignation was at its height. How, in this age, in the heart of Europe, could it happen for the representatives of a member country of the United Nations to open fire at point blank range on the representatives of a country with whom it was at war and had entered into peace negotiations? On 19 July two representatives of the political bureau of PDKI came to Paris to attend the funeral. At a press conference they announced, among other things, that the higher authorities of the PDKI had appointed Sadegh Charafkandi to perform the duties of Secretary-general. Sadegh Sharafkandi (who was also assassinated on 17 September 1992 by the Iranian terrorists) was in his fifties and had a doctorate in industrial chemistry from Paris University. He was Deputy Secretary-general of the Party up to the death of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou .

The two murdered men of the PDKI were buried on 20 July in Paris in the presence of a throng of some two thousand people from all parts : Kurds and Armenians, Azeris and Turks, Persians and Europeans, poets and doctors, ministers and workpeople, representatives of humanitarian organisations and members of parliament. Leading the funeral procession, the peshmergas in their Kurdish resistance fighters' uniform advanced with difficulty in the torrid heat of the Parisian summer. They were all there, all that had been able to travel on their crutches and in their wheelchairs, having come from the various capitals of Europe where they were recovering, as best they could, from the wounds received in the conflict. Tehran denied all connection with this triple murder and told Austria to look for clues in other directions than Iran. But the findings of the ballistics experts were conclusive.

In late November 1989 the Austrian courts issued a warrant for the arrest of the three Iranian representatives and the Austrian Government expressly accused the Iranian Government as having instigated the attack on Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou and the two other Kurds.

Thus died this man who was no warmonger but a man of letters, master of several languages and persuasive speaker. Overflowing with enthusiasm and energy, he was an intellectual of his time, this end of the twentieth century when the triumph of democracy seems really within reach.

<http://www.pdkî.se/english.php?id=301>

## Assassination and funerals

Three men make up the Iranian delegation that day : Mohamed Jafar Sahraroudi, Hadji Mustafawi and Amir Mansur Bozorgian. The Kurdish delegation comprise also three persons : Abdullah Ghaderi Azar, Fadhil Rassul and Dr.Qasimlo. All three of them are killed that day. The three Iranian perpetrators are allowed to walk free. On July 19th the PDKÎ announces that then Deputy Secretary General, Sadegh Sharafkandi, becomes the new Secretary General (he will be assassinated too on September 17th, 1992). Abdullah Ghaderi Azar and Ebdulrehman Qasimlo are buried on July 20th in Paris.

## The investigation

The Austrian government has denounced Islamic Republic as the responsible for this crime. The three Iranian representatives of that day are under a warrant for their arrest. So far they haven't been arrested. It has also been in rumor that current President of the Islamic republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was involved in the assassinations.

## External links

- PDKÎ (<http://www.pdk-iran.org>)
- Kurdish Media (<http://www.kurdmedia.com>)

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