

# LETTERS.

## IRANIAN BAHAIS

N.E. Vienna, Va.

Mansour Farhang writes in his article on Iran ["Khomeini's Reign of Terror," *The Nation*, Jan. 30] that "human liberation in one part of the world is ultimately inseparable from liberation in other parts." Farhang's interview on *The MacNeil-Lehrer Report* three years ago gave the impression that he did not believe in liberation for Bahais. Has he changed his mind? Has he the courage to denounce the persecution of the Bahais in Iran, including the recent execution of the members of the Bahai National Assembly and the Bahai assembly of Teheran? Does he advocate amending the Iranian Constitution so that it protects Bahais as well as Moslems, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians? Does he believe that Bahais should be left in peace and given freedom like everyone else? If Farhang fails to respond, many of us will know what to think about the fine words of his article

John Huddleston

## FARHANG REPLIES

Princeton, N.J.

I have never made an extensive study of the treatment of Bahais in Iran, nor have I written about it. My unfortunately phrased remarks to which Huddleston alludes have been interpreted to mean something other than what I believe. The execution of more than 4,000 Iranians during the past seven months demonstrates beyond doubt that Khomeini has set out to eliminate anyone he arbitrarily defines as a threat to his rule. Among the victims of this shocking assault, the Iranian Bahais are the only people whose persecution, which includes confiscation and destruction of property, as well as summary arrests and executions, is motivated solely by fascistic aggression without any provocation whatsoever. For the Bahais in Iran pose no threat at all to the regime.

The truth is that not only have the Bahais been persecuted for more than a century but they have also been the most vulnerable of all the religious minorities in the country. This has been the case regardless of what ideological or political orientation happens to be in power.

Shaykh Mohammed Taghi Falsafi, an anti-Bahai preacher and a passionate supporter of the 1953 coup, is currently one of Khomeini's favorite mullahs and a very important person in his ruling circles. Furthermore, the present government in Iran is heavily influenced by Anjoman-e Hojjati'yeh, an anti-Bahai organization that was founded in the mid-1950s. Even though Anjoman-e Hojjati'yeh never took part in prerevolutionary opposition politics, after the revolutionary victory of 1979, its members joined the elements that formed the Islamic Republican Party. President Said-Ali Kham-

enei and Foreign Minister Ali-Akbar Valayati have been active in Anjoman-e Hojjati'yeh for years.

Since the early months of the revolutionary victory and particularly since the forced resignation of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan in November 1979, the Khomeini regime, just like the Shah's regime during the 1955-56 period of state-led persecution of the Bahais, has increasingly repressed its progressive political opponents and used the Bahais as scapegoats. However, there is no comparison between the brutality inflicted on dissidents and Bahais in 1955-56 and the present period. Khomeini is far more brutal than the Shah ever was.

The Bahais and other religious minorities in Iran are not, as in the past, merely faced with intolerance and opportunistic exploitation of their vulnerability. They are, rather, confronted with a fascist totalitarian system whose ideology rejects diversity and coexistence. No protection could be gained by amending the Constitution, a fascist document that should be abolished rather than altered. Therefore, the struggle for religious freedom in Iran is inseparable from the struggle for the complete destruction of the regime itself. And it is imperative that the crimes and the repressive policies of the regime be exposed as widely as possible. Such a campaign should make a special effort to reach the Islamic world and focus on the violation of the human and democratic rights of all Iranians.

Mansour Farhang

## FEMINISTS AND PLATH

New York City

I am disappointed that Katha Pollitt, in her otherwise thoughtful and judicious consideration, and deserved celebration, of Sylvia Plath's *Collected Poems* ["A Note of Triumph," *The Nation*, Jan. 16] should have chosen to joust, however glancingly, with a homemade scarecrow called "the feminists."

There is no feminist party line on Plath, on motherhood or on any other issue, except the full participation of women in human endeavors. Pollitt writes that "... the feminists, too, will have to come to terms with the tenderness and purity of Plath's maternal feelings. . . ." I don't see what "coming to terms" is necessary. The redemption of motherhood as valid adult experience and valid subject matter for poetry and fiction has long been a primary feminist concern, reflected in the work of Audre Lorde, Susan Griffin, Alta, Alice Walker, Marie Ponsot, Robin Morgan, Sharon Olds and myself, to name just a few self-identified feminists who have written as mothers. Although if Plath's "maternal feelings" as evinced in her work were limited to "tenderness and purity," we would be deal-

ing with a very different and less important poet. It is precisely the complexity of observation and insight, the by-no-means pure emotional depth, of Plath's poems, on mothering and on her children, that make them of more than sentimental value to readers, feminists included.

I know of no feminist critic who thinks, or would "like to think," that Plath was unknown at the time of her death. And I wonder how Pollitt knows what "many feminists would like to think." Even critics who are not feminists have noted that Plath's career, though not her work, was subsumed by that of Ted Hughes during their marriage.

I have the impression that Pollitt, in an effort to be balanced and fair, felt obliged to take feminist critics to task because she had so aptly pointed out those male critics who diminish or sensationalize Plath's achievement because of her gender. But if Pollitt had seen fit to quote specific feminist critics, as she quotes Alvarez, Steiner, Spender, Howe et al., I might know at whom her rebuttal was directed; and a reader not familiar with feminist writing would not get the impression such writing was done by a Central Committee.

Marilyn Hacker

## POLLITT REPLIES

New York City

Good point.

Katha Pollitt

## TASSAWAYS NOT RECOMMENDED

Washington, D.C.

The article on tampons [Kathleen A. Wanda, "Tampons Can Be Harmful to Health," Jan. 2-9] was well done, and we are happy to see *The Nation* publicize this very important issue. However, there was one misstatement, which we ask you to correct.

Woman Health International 'did' not "recommend" Tassaways as an alternative to tampons (we do not recommend any specific product or device) but merely reported what several doctors had said about it.

What W.H.I. does recommend, first of all, is that all tampon boxes have warning labels on them to advise women of the danger of toxic shock syndrome. Other recommendations are:

(1) Further labeling that would list fibers and additives present in tampons, and medical contraindications.

(2) Immediate removal of superabsorbent additives, deodorants and any known toxic substance from tampons.

(3) A research program to develop a safe, effective tampon or substitute device and a parallel investigation of the synergistic long-term effects of exposure to chemicals and fibers that have been used in tampons for more than forty-seven years.

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