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REFORMERS AND REVOLUTIONARIES IN MODERN IRAN

New Perceptions of the Iranian Left

Stephanie Cronin

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REFORMERS AND REVOLUTIONARIES IN MODERN IRAN

The Iranian Left is a trend of great historical significance and of immediate contemporary relevance to the unfolding political struggles in Iran. Although the Left has never held power in Iran, even for a brief historical moment, its impact on the political, intellectual and cultural development of modern Iran has been profound. This volume brings together, for the first time, the best and most recent work on the Iranian Left. Interpreting the trend in the broadest possible sense, the contributors to this collection undertake a fundamental re-examination and re-appraisal of leftist activism in Iran throughout the entire period of its existence, up to and including the present. *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran* brings together a range of views about the balance sheet of a century of leftism in Iran, and offers both a critique of and a tribute to generations of Iranian activists.

Stephanie Cronin is Iran Heritage Foundation Fellow at University College, Northampton and Senior Research Associate in the History Department, SOAS, University of London. She is the author of *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910–1926* (I. B. Tauris, 1997) and editor of *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921–1941* (RoutledgeCurzon, 2003). Her current work focuses on subaltern responses to modernity in Iran.

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CONTENTS

<i>List of illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Notes on contributors</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xi
<i>Note on transliteration</i>	xii
 Introduction	 1
STEPHANIE CRONIN	
 PART I	
The Iranian Left: overviews and balance sheets	17
 1 The Iranian Left in international perspective	 19
FRED HALLIDAY	
 2 From social democracy to social democracy: the twentieth-century odyssey of the Iranian Left	 37
AFSHIN MATIN-ASGARI	
 PART II	
The Iranian Left: historical dimensions	65
 3 Armenian social democrats, the Democrat Party of Iran, and <i>Iran-i naw</i>: a secret camaraderie	 67
JANET AFARY	
 4 The First Congress of Peoples of the East and the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan, 1920–21	 85
PEZHMANN DAILAMI	

CONTENTS

5	Iran's forgotten revolutionary: Abulqasim Lahuti and the Tabriz insurrection of 1922	118
	STEPHANIE CRONIN	
6	Incommodious hosts, invidious guests: the life and times of Iranian revolutionaries in the Soviet Union, 1921–39	147
	TOURAJ ATABAKI	
7	The strange politics of Khalil Maleki	165
	HOMA KATOUIAN	
8	The Iranian revolution and the legacy of the guerrilla movement	189
	MAZIAR BEHROOZ	
 Part III		
	The Iranian Left and the Islamic Republic: contemporary critiques	207
9	Troubled relationships: women, nationalism and the Left movement in Iran	209
	HAIDEH MOGHISSI	
10	The tragedy of the Iranian Left	229
	ALI MIRSEPASSI	
11	The Left and the struggle for democracy in Iran	250
	SAEED RAHNEMA	
12	The Islamic Left: from radicalism to liberalism	268
	ERVAND ABRAHAMIAN	
13	The working class and the Islamic state in Iran	280
	HAIDEH MOGHISSI AND SAEED RAHNEMA	
	<i>Index</i>	302

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

11.1	Genealogy of Iranian Left organizations	255
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Tables

10.1	Iranian secular radical organizations	232
10.2	Characteristics of principal secular left-wing organizations, 1979–83	236
10.3	Selected leftist candidates in the Tehran elections for the Assembly of Experts	237
10.4	Summary characteristics of Iranian communists	242
10.5	Fallen Tudeh Party members, 1983–84	244
13.1	Configuration of working population (aged 10+) by employment category, 1996	284
13.2	Configuration of working population (aged 10+) by occupational category, 1996	285
13.3	Configuration of female working population, 1976–96	287

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NOTE ON transliteration

There has been no attempt to impose a uniform system of transliteration on the contributions to this volume. Since spellings derived from non-Roman scripts are often compromises and may always be disputed, and no system is without its anomalies, decisions about transliteration have been left to the discretion of individual authors.

INTRODUCTION

Stephanie Cronin

The Left has never held power in Iran, has never come close to holding power, even for a brief historical moment. Yet its impact on the political and intellectual history of the country has been profound. From the constitutional period, through the oil nationalization crisis, to the Islamic revolution, leftist forces have played a significant and even, sometimes, a determining role. Their influence, in both organizational and ideological terms, on the evolution of Islamist trends, including on Khomeini himself, has been profound. The leftist forces in Iran, furthermore, have been historically among the most advanced in the non-European world. At the very beginning of the twentieth century social democratic ideas made rapid headway, first among Iranians in emigration in the Caucasus of the late Russian empire and then in Iran itself, and the first social democratic organization in the Middle East was established in Tabriz in 1905–06. In 1920 the Iranian Communist Party, the first communist party in Asia, was founded and local communists joined with the Jangali movement to produce in Gilan the first declaration of a Soviet republic in the Middle East, while, in pre-revolutionary 1978, an extraordinary wave of working-class action swept the country, the massive economic and political strikes erupting between June and December of that year constituting a phenomenon rare, if not unique, in the experience of the Middle East.

The Left in Iran, then, has a history which is both long and of central importance, is indeed coterminous with modernity itself. Yet, until recently, it had received little scholarly attention and there has still, as yet, been no attempt to provide a comprehensive and integrated account of its historical, political and cultural role. Not only has the scholarly study of the Iranian Left been largely neglected, but leftist forces have been the subject of a great deal of ideologically motivated vilification, their history obscured and distorted by the language and preoccupations of the Cold War.

Only in the last few years has the Iranian Left begun to receive the close and sympathetic interest necessary for a proper appreciation of its actual historical role, and several monographs have been published on aspects of the Left's history and politics, the best and most recent by contributors to

this volume. The renewed interest in the history of the Iranian Left may partly be explained by the space for reflection created by the elapse of time since the catastrophic defeats of the early 1980s; by an ongoing need for leftist forces themselves to understand and explain their own displacement as a leadership for the oppressed, throughout the Middle East and beyond, by various forms of Islamism; and by Iranian leftists' participation in the general reappraisals which have taken place around the world as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. But this new interest may also, most importantly, be consequent upon the increasingly apparent survival, reproduction and reinvention of leftist thinking inside Iran itself, as expressed particularly by elements of the reform movement supporting President Khatami.

This volume brings together, for the first time, some of the best and most recent work on the Iranian Left. Looking at both its historical and contemporary dimensions, the volume hopes to provide an overview of the Iranian Left throughout the period of its active presence on the political stage. The collection is unique in its thematic scope and chronological depth, and in its attempt to bring together in one volume a range of views about the balance sheet of a century of the Left in Iran. The Iranian Left is a rubric beneath which may be found great, and often violently conflicting, diversity. Interpreting the Iranian Left in the broadest possible sense, as a phenomenon which embraces approaches derived from both revolutionary and reformist perspectives, communist and social democratic, secular and religious, the papers presented here together undertake a fundamental re-examination and reappraisal of the experience of leftist thought and activity in Iran, from its earliest beginnings up to and including the present, concluding with reflections on its future prospects.

Each of the articles in the collection has its own focus and concerns, viewpoint, context, and preoccupation; nonetheless, certain themes recur throughout the volume. For much of the period under review, the pro-Soviet communism of the Tudeh was the dominant trend within the Iranian Left. One major theme therefore concerns the role played by the Soviet state in advancing or hampering the activities of the Left, and the precise impact on the Left of Iran's geopolitics and its physical proximity to the Soviet Union. Another theme recurring throughout the collection is the need to find a satisfactory explanation for the successive defeats suffered by the Left at different times during the twentieth century: the collapse of the Gilan Republic; the overthrow of Musaddiq; and, most disastrously, its repression after the revolution at the hands of the new Islamic regime. Still under the shadow of the trauma of the 1980s, many contributors return repeatedly to a third and related theme: an effort to understand the weaknesses and failures internal to the Left itself, particularly its inability to comprehend the importance of defending democratic freedoms, especially in the post-revolutionary period, freedoms so essential to the political development of

the Iranian working class and to its own political and, in the end, even physical survival. A fourth, more positive and optimistic, theme concerns the continuing relevance to Iranian politics and society of leftist ideas, both as these are being developed and refined within current debates and movements, and as drawn from historical experience.

As several contributions to this collection make clear, the proximity of Iran to the Russian empire and subsequently the Soviet Union has always been a crucial component in the development of the Iranian Left. Contact with the Russian social democratic milieu provided inspiration during the constitutional years, while radicals on the left wing of the constitutional movement, such as the poet Abulqasim Lahuti, received their first education in Marxism from the soldiers' committees set up within the disintegrating tsarist armies in Iran in 1917. The impact of the Bolshevik revolution in Iran was universal and profound, and, from that point on, it was no longer the revolutionary movement but the Soviet state itself which constituted the new magnetic pole for the Left internationally as well as in Iran. Yet for the Iranian Left, the power of their Soviet neighbour was a double-edged sword. Although the Left derived huge initial impetus from the prestige of the new state, much of the leadership of early Iranian communism, in exile in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, perished in Stalin's purges. It was under the umbrella of Soviet power, after 1941, that the Tudeh made such great strides. Nonetheless, the Tudeh was soon to discover, as communist parties elsewhere had already found to their cost, that it was all too easy for the fraternal solidarity of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to slip into a menacing quasi-imperial domination and for the interests of the Iranian communist movement to become identified with the needs of the Soviet state.

Most recent writers, including and perhaps especially those with leftist sympathies, have judged the Tudeh's subservience to Moscow extremely harshly, condemning both the unprincipled political line and the alienation of nationalist opinion resulting from this subservience. Yet, however unpalatable, it is nonetheless unavoidably clear that the Tudeh's spectacular success in its early years owed much to Soviet protection and its ability to flourish unhampered under the umbrella of the Soviet occupation. After the shah's crackdown after 1953, its very survival, both organizationally and even physically, was largely due to its leadership finding sanctuary in the Soviet Union and the GDR. Although scholarly understanding of the Iranian Left in general has undergone much revision, and there have been calls, including in this collection, for more balanced reappraisals of the Tudeh Party's record, assessments of the Soviet role have been consistently and bitterly negative. Those working on the Iranian Left have, as yet, hardly considered the role of the Soviet Union not in terms of domestic politics, but in terms of the global balance of forces. Although many writers acknowledge the part played by, for example, the Vietnamese victory in

boosting the morale of the new generation of Iranian radicals of the 1960s and 1970s, this has not led to any recognition of the significance in global terms, and therefore indirectly to the Iranian Left itself, of the existence of a counterweight to the United States. Broad and profound revisions in our understanding of the character of Iranian historical development in general, as well as of the specific role played by leftist elements, have been brought about by momentous changes in actual political realities. Whether the unfolding of history in the unipolar world in which we now live will produce revisions of the historical role of the Soviet state remains to be seen.

Most of the contributors to this volume have focused on the failings of the Left itself, and there is surprisingly little about the enormous objective difficulties which it faced. However, it is clear that the single most important factor in the defeat of the Left was the relentless repression of the state, whether under the Pahlavis or the Islamic Republic. The objective difficulties were, furthermore, not merely those relating to the domestic Iranian environment, but also arose from the often spectacularly unfavourable regional and international context. After 1945, its geostrategic location and its oil reserves made Iran a crucible for the Cold War. After the revolution, the Iraqi invasion aggravated tensions inside the country and contributed to a climate in which internal repression was more likely, while the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had also heightened fears and further discredited the pro-Soviet Left.

The contributors to this volume, with the exceptions of Fred Halliday and Touraj Atabaki, confine their discussion of the Left entirely to its Iranian context. Nonetheless, what emerges most strikingly is the extent to which the Iranian Left was a product of a particular historical period, its key features often determined as much by the international as by the national environment. The Iranian Left clearly shared in, and both benefited and suffered from, developments taking place elsewhere in the international communist movement, both in the non-European world and in Europe, during the twentieth century. These developments include the early inspiration of the Bolshevik revolution; the decimation of the Iranian leadership in the Stalinist purges; the renewed prestige and political space accruing from the Soviet Union's alliance with the Allies and from the Red Army's defeat of Nazism in Europe; the slavish adherence of the Tudeh to the dictates of the Soviet Union and its consequent discrediting; the emergence of splinter communist groups, especially a vogue for Maoism; the appearance of a diverse new Left; and the radicalization, especially among the youth, of the 1960s. Maziar Behrooz's account of the guerrilla movement of the 1960s and 1970s has, in particular, powerful echoes of the turn to armed struggle elsewhere around the world. The youth of the Iranian guerrillas, their relatively high levels of education, their frustration with the apparently futile and discredited policies of the older generation, their harsh criticisms of orthodox communist parties, their general impatience – all recall the emer-

gence of armed groups in Europe, for example in Germany and Italy, and in the Third World, especially in Latin America, after the disappointments and retreat following the peak of radical activity in the late 1960s.

Several of the chapters which follow address the impossible contradictions contained within the sociology of the Iranian Left. With the partial exception of the Tudeh in the years 1941–53, leftist forces comprehensively failed to make any real inroads into the working class. Not only did the various leftist groups never establish any real ties to the Iranian working class but the majority of their memberships were not themselves working class by origin. Here, again, they showed a remarkable resemblance to the experience of far leftist groups elsewhere, all of whom, like their Iranian counterparts, paid homage to the centrality of the working class as the agent of historical change, yet themselves remained marginal to that class. Indeed, as several contributors note, it was not leftist forces of any hue but rather the Islamists and Khomeini himself who most effectively spoke to and mobilized the huge numbers of urban poor in the revolutionary period.

Even in its inability to grasp accurately and immediately the essential character of the new Islamic state, the Iranian Left was hardly alone. Leftists in Iran were guilty only of sharing the almost universal bafflement at the phenomenon of the Islamic Republic. Indeed, the Left internationally was as confused as the Iranian Left itself about how to respond to the new state, given the latter's many peculiar, not to say unique, features. The contributors to this volume return repeatedly to the Iranian Left's mistaken evaluation of the Islamist forces and the new state, but the temptation to allow euphoria at the sudden overthrow of the shah by a genuinely popular movement to overshadow a cool assessment of the nature of the new regime was not resisted very strongly in many leftist quarters, and not just in Iran. The 1979 revolution presented Iranian leftists with an extraordinary number of dilemmas for which nothing in their experience, or in the experience of the Left internationally, had prepared them. Even in their failure to capture power, the Iranian revolutionaries may be more typical of the experience of the Left in the twentieth century than the Chinese and the Vietnamese who made such an impact on the young radicals of the 1960s. Were the Iranian experience to be measured, not against successes in vastly different circumstances but against other defeats suffered by far stronger leftist movements, for example in Indonesia in 1965 or in Chile in 1973, the balance sheet would perhaps look slightly different. Indeed, an analysis of the Iranian experience provides an almost textbook account of the vicissitudes of the Left internationally in the twentieth century.

Much recent writing on the Iranian Left, sometimes drawing on a background of personal involvement, has tended to be dominated by a catastrophist perspective deriving from the experiences of the 1980s. Yet several contributors to this volume challenge this perspective, raising questions concerning the way in which a balance sheet may be drawn up and the

criteria that should be used. Rejecting the notion that the Left should be judged by its failure to seize power, they stress instead the centrality of a broadly leftist discourse to political and cultural life, both historically and in the contemporary period, and assert its continuing relevance and vitality. It is in this context that the Left's historic commitment to democratic freedoms is emphasized, its failure to defend these freedoms in the past so heavily criticized, and its future prospects made so absolutely dependent on their continued existence and extension.

The collection of articles which follows is divided into three sections. The first section provides wide-ranging overviews and assessments of the general historical and political experience of the Left in Iran during the twentieth century, with attempts to draw lessons for the future; the second section discusses the meaning and significance of particular historical episodes from the constitutional and Pahlavi periods; while the final section examines the experience of the Left under the Islamic Republic.

The collection opens with two attempts to make general assessments of the historical experience of the Left in Iran, each concluding with a discussion of its future prospects. Fred Halliday looks at the history and political praxis of the Left, not only in its domestic, Iranian context, but also, and crucially, in its regional and international environments. He stresses, in an important corrective to those writers who dwell exclusively on the weaknesses and mistakes of the leftist forces themselves, that much of the explanation for the ultimate fate of the Iranian Left may be found in the very real and difficult international context within which it was obliged to operate. Declaring it the task of the historian of the Left to write without recourse to the myths, of justification or denigration, associated with the communist period and with the Cold War, he analyzes the three major conjunctures when the Left played a role within Iranian political life: the years 1917–21, which saw the establishment and demise of the Gilan Republic; the years of intense political and trade union activity between 1941 and 1953; and the periods immediately before and after the revolution of 1979, attempting to explain why each of these opportunities ended in a defeat for the Left. Although Halliday gives full weight to factors such as the unfavourable international situation and domestic constraints arising from the political sociology of the Left, he does not spare the Leftist forces themselves from criticism, concluding that the undoubted objective difficulties they faced were nonetheless fatally compounded by the political and ideological choices made by the Left organizations and their leaderships.

Afshin Matin-asgari also surveys the historical trajectory of the Iranian Left, beginning with its social democratic origins at the beginning of the twentieth century and concluding with a reflection on its current fortunes, seeing its present configuration as representing a partial return to its original creed of democratic socialism. He argues strongly that the Left has survived into the twenty-first century not only in exile or underground but

in the very midst of the Islamic Republic, where an influential part of the reform movement has adopted the leftist mantle. Insisting on a definition of the Left that goes beyond communists, Matin-asgari highlights the diversity of leftist forces in Iran throughout the period under review. He emphasizes that even during the high point of Tudeh influence in the 1940s, an important section of the Iranian Left, including left-leaning intellectuals and organizations such as Khalil Maleki's Third Force, resisted the Tudeh's capitulation to Stalinism and continued on an independent path. He describes also the great heterogeneity of the Left in the 1960s and 1970s, both the Islamic and the secular wings containing a great variety of tendencies, each with its own political and ideological orientation. Continuing with the application of his argument to the period of the Islamic Republic, Matin-asgari points out that although a large segment of the Left followed the Tudeh to support Khomeini's "anti-imperialist" line, a substantial part of the secular Left remained in active opposition. In his discussion, Matin-asgari is concerned above all to rehabilitate the record of the Left, to defend it against right-wing myths, and to arrive at a more balanced assessment of its role, unhampered by conservative, nationalist or Islamist biases. He concludes with a discussion of the re-emergence in the 1990s of currents identified as leftist, paying especial attention to analyzing the appearance of dissent within the ranks of the regime's supporters, but still stressing the overall diversity of leftist ideas and politics and their continuing vitality and relevance.

The second section of the volume looks in more detail at the significance of specific episodes within the historical narrative of the Iranian Left. As is well known, the Left first appeared in Iran in the form of the social democratic organizations during the Constitutional Revolution, a period of intense intellectual vibrancy and vitality. In her account of the extraordinarily rich debates over revolutionary and democratic ideas that took place in the second constitutional period between 1909 and 1911, Janet Afary focuses on the contribution of Armenian social democrats, arguing that the democratic order of the Constitutional Revolution stemmed in part from the multicultural and multi-ethnic leadership of the revolutionary movement, which included religious dissidents, non-Persians and non-Muslims. In a close analysis of the private correspondence between two Armenian-Iranian social democrats, Vram Pilossian and Tigran Ter Hacobian, and the leader of the Democrat Party, Sayyid Hasan Taqizadah, Afary demonstrates that Armenian social democrats were involved at every stage in the formation of the Democrat Party, Iran's first modern political party, and made important organizational and intellectual contributions to it, and that they also helped shape the journal *Iran-i naw*, which introduced European-style journalism to the country, and which remains one of the most sophisticated socialist newspapers of twentieth-century Iran. She further reveals how they possessed a close affinity with and provided

constant support and advice to Muslim social democrats such as Taqizadah, Mehmet Emin Resulzade and Haydar Khan Amu Ughli. In an analysis of Ter Hacobian's writings, Afary traces the development of sophisticated and modern political ideas, including the elaboration of a new concept of nationality, transcending ethnic and religious affiliations, and also of a critique of political terrorism, to which some social democrats had turned in their efforts to defeat the conservative opposition.

Pezhmann Dailami considers the development of the Left in the next historical period, under the impact of the Bolshevik revolution, focusing in particular on the Congress of Peoples of the East and the Soviet Republic of Gilan. He begins with a discussion of the socio-economic circumstances surrounding the birth of the first Iranian social democratic organization in Baku, a context essential to any understanding of political and ideological developments. He describes the formation of an Iranian migrant proletariat from peasants and artisans attracted to the booming industrial capitalist, oil-based economy of Baku. Then a centre of Bolshevik activity, Baku was home to the Azeri intellectuals of the Hemmat Party who provided the inspiration for the first Iranian social democrats, and Dailami locates the genesis of Iranian social democracy precisely within the context of the Russian and Transcaucasian revolutionary movements. Not only was the Russian empire the birthplace of the first Iranian social democrat organization, it also saw the foundation of the Adalat Party, the forerunner of the Iranian Communist Party. Dailami describes the early days of the Adalat in the revolutionary Baku of 1917, its struggle for survival within the shifting political landscape of revolutionary Transcaucasia, and its relations with Russian and Azerbaijani Bolsheviks. Dailami also looks at the activities of Iranian revolutionaries, particularly Haydar Khan Amu Ughli, in Turkestan, and, in a discussion of the debates taking place within the nascent Iranian Communist Party, particularly as expressed at the Congress of Peoples of the East and regarding the correct attitude for Iranian communists to adopt towards the Jangalis, Dailami polemically contrasts the figures of Haydar Khan and Avetis Sultanzadah.

Dailami situates Haydar Khan within the radicalized left wing of the Democrat Party. A similar trajectory may be discerned in the early development of Abulqasim Lahuti, Iran's most famous communist poet and the leader of an insurrection in Tabriz in early 1922, at the very beginning of the Pahlavi period. Stephanie Cronin argues that Lahuti's progression from militant populist nationalism to committed communism under the impact of his experiences during the Constitutional Revolution and the First World War was shared by many Iranians, and he may be seen as typical of the leftward evolution of the Democrat wing of the constitutional movement. Although his major literary success came after he had established himself in the Soviet Union, the intellectual and political formation which cradled his poetry took place within the context of Iranian social democracy as it was devel-

oping during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Lahuti's formative political experiences were, in certain respects, different to those of other Iranian social democrats and proto-communists of whom we have knowledge. His early years were spent in a heterodox religious environment, replete with Sufi and Babi influences. He was never part of the émigré milieu in Baku and he had no direct experience of social democracy in tsarist Russia and Transcaucasia. His own exile, during and after the Great War, was rather in Ottoman territory, and he had, apparently, very little contact with those who were to become the leadership of early Iranian communism. As is clear from his public declarations, Lahuti, in January 1922, still expressed himself in typical constitutionalist and left-wing Democrat terms. However, although there was little Bolshevik content in the declared objectives of the rebellion, the forms which the movement took, most notably Lahuti's own description of himself as leader of the soldiers' committee, clearly derived their inspiration from, and imitated, the Russian revolutionary example. Cronin's account highlights the diffuse nature of the radical environment in the Iran of these years, the immense appeal of the Soviet example to layers who were not themselves communist, and the ready ability of Iranian revolutionaries to pick and choose elements of Marxist ideology to suit the needs of the moment. Cronin directs attention to the role played by revolutionary Russian soldiers in the remnants of the tsarist armies in Iran in giving encouragement and advice to the Democrats and in agitating against the White Russian officers commanding the Iranian Cossack Division. She also makes some effort to look beyond the intelligentsia, and to discuss the participation of wider social layers in the upheavals of these years, including the methods typically employed in popular assertions of power: the mass boycott, the demonstration and the strategically targeted threat of violence.

Returning to the Caucasian context, Touraj Atabaki provides a highly original account, based on newly available archival sources in the former Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, of the experiences of Iranians in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. Although his focus is on the politically engaged émigrés, he also discusses the circumstances of the wider community of Iranian migrants, and the contours of Soviet policy towards them. Beginning with a survey of the character and historical development of the very large Iranian presence in the southern regions of the tsarist Empire, he describes the political and cultural organizations it produced, culminating in the Communist Party of Iran. In the context of the growing stabilization both in Iran, under the new regime of Riza Shah, and in the Soviet Union, with the ascendancy of the policy of "Socialism in One Country", the programmes and activities of Iranian revolutionaries based in the Caucasus became gradually subordinated to the needs of Soviet foreign policy and the growing internal repression. Atabaki notes the shift in official attitudes whereby the Iranian revolutionaries were no longer perceived as temporary

residents, waiting to return home, but as more or less permanent emigrants. By the late 1920s, all foreign bureaux of the Communist Party of Iran had been closed down and all its properties handed over to the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, while Iranians themselves were coming under intense pressure to adopt Soviet citizenship, a step they were extremely reluctant to take. Atabaki also discusses the arrival in Baku of the Jangali leader Ehsanollah Khan with some sixty of his comrades, and their subsequent political interventions, including Ehsanollah's illusions in Riza Khan, as expressed in letters in 1922, and his subsequent denunciations of the new shah, denunciations which were of great annoyance to the Soviet authorities and which quickly attracted the attentions of the secret police, the NKVD. The final section of Atabaki's chapter looks at the impact of the Great Terror on the Iranians in the Soviet Union, and details the devastation wrought on both the communists and the wider community of workers, with mass deportations and waves of arrests and executions.

Homa Katouzian, in his account of the life and work of Khalil Maleki, takes the collection into a new historical period, that of the second Pahlavi shah, Muhammad Riza, and the Cold War. Katouzian offers a comprehensive reassessment of Maleki's significance as an independent thinker and analyst, describing him as the first and most effective critic of Stalinism and Soviet communism, and founder of a parliamentary socialist movement in Iran. After a short political biography, Katouzian discusses Maleki's theory of "the Third Force", and then analyzes those aspects of his ideas and methods which alienated him from other political groups and tendencies during his life but which have recently, in retrospect, begun to receive greater attention and acclaim. Convicted as one of the 'Group of Fifty-three' in 1937, Maleki became a Marxist in prison. Joining the Tudeh and reinforcing the internal opposition which criticized the leadership for its bureaucratic attitude and its submissiveness to Soviet needs, in January 1948 he led a split. He then formed the Toilers' Party with Muzaffar Baqai, and after the latter went into opposition to Dr Musaddiq in 1952, Maleki continued to support Musaddiq with his Third Force Party. After the 1953 coup, he was jailed. Resuming political activity and forming the Socialist League in 1960, he was again sentenced to imprisonment in 1965. Katouzian offers a full analysis of Maleki's theory of the Third Force, describing it as highly original and the basic model for Maleki's approach to domestic and international politics. But Katouzian argues that what he calls the "strangeness" of Maleki's politics was due more to his method and approach, his attitude, understanding and use of politics. Katouzian highlights two aspects of this approach: Maleki's rejection of the conspiracy theory of politics, and his advocacy of the need for dialogue, democracy and reform. Katouzian concludes that Maleki's programme for women's rights, land reform, parliamentary democracy, personal liberties and social welfare, and the arguments which underpinned them, which were too advanced to be

understood in the 1950s and 1960s, and which then smacked of collaborationism and opportunism and even betrayal, are of central relevance to the politics of Iran in the twenty-first century and are increasingly coming into vogue among Iranian reformers.

The focus of the next contribution, by Maziar Behrooz, is on the last decade of the Pahlavi monarchy, and examines the guerrilla movement which erupted in 1971. Describing 1970–71 as a turning point in the internal development of the imperial regime and its relationship with the opposition, Behrooz shows how the Siyahkal attack in February 1971 heralded the opening of a new chapter in oppositional activities and the beginning of an intense, eight-year period of armed activity against the imperial regime. In his account, Behrooz undertakes a reassessment of the guerrilla movement's contribution to the anti-shah opposition, to the revolutionary overthrow of the imperial regime, and to the re-emergence of radical leftist politics, both communist and otherwise, in post-revolutionary Iran. Behrooz raises many questions about the motives of these mostly young and educated men and women who took up arms against a well-organized repressive state, the extent of their accomplishments, and the nature of their flaws and failures. He argues that while the movement was unsuccessful in its ultimate goal of leading the revolution in the overthrow of the shah, it played an important role in challenging the imperial regime, in keeping the spirit of resistance high, and was a determining factor in popularizing and redefining the politics of the radical Left after the revolution.

The final section of the book is devoted to an examination of the experience of the Left under the Islamic Republic. The chapters included here concentrate on two major themes: an attempt to construct an explanation for the Left's failure to prevent the catastrophic defeats inflicted on it in the early 1980s, and the transformation in political culture which has permitted the re-emergence of a broadly defined, left-oriented element within the reform movement.

Haideh Moghissi points out that many writers have identified the Left's failure to defend women's rights in the post-revolutionary period as a key indicator of a wider failure to defend the democratic gains of the revolution and grasp the nature of the new regime. She describes how women were the subject of the first major post-revolutionary conflict in Iran. With the anti-veil protest marches, begun a day after Khomeini's pronouncement on hijab on 7 March 1979, women emerged as the first open, progressive opposition to the fundamentalists' political project, and posed a major challenge to Khomeini's personal authority. However, Moghissi observes that although a handful of left-inclined men supported the women, the community of secular intellectuals as a group did not endorse their protest. For them, the issues raised by women were peripheral to the goals of the national and anti-imperialist struggles. Soon, the clerical leadership was using unveiled women as "symbolic representatives" of an imperialist plot against Iran.

Moghissi argues strongly against the fatalistic or defeatist argument which states that Khomeini's position was so strong that nothing could have been done to prevent clerical hegemony. On the contrary, she insists that a determined and united front of secular and non-fundamentalist religious forces could have defended the democratic achievements of the 1979 revolution. Moghissi concludes that despite the formidable and systematic suppression of the women's movement by the new regime, the women's cause was fatally damaged also by the Left's unconditional support for Khomeini's anti-imperialism, and by the incorporation and subordination of women's interests in a male-defined anti-imperialist movement which contributed to the silencing of Iranian feminists and other progressive forces. She concludes that the betrayal by democratic forces of women's struggle against the new state's Islamization policies signalled, early on, the impending abandonment of all the major goals of the democratic revolution. The regime's success in discrediting and silencing women paved the way for silencing all other secular voices which supported the revolution, and thus furthered the consolidation of the Islamic regime and its clerical leadership. Once consolidating their power, the Islamists quickly wiped out all effective dissenting voices, including of course those voices on the Left which had consented, perhaps unknowingly, to the assault on women's rights.

Ali Mirsepassi calls the story of the Iranian Left "a tragic modernist failure". Contrasting the dogmatism of the Left with the pragmatism of Islamic radicalism, he argues that the Left's dismissal of religious politics not only overlooked a hugely important source of revolutionary force, but also resulted in the actual support of Islamic politics by many leftist organizations and intellectuals. The Left's overconfidence in theories of modernity and secularization mirrored, and perhaps exceeded, the Pahlavi state's own "dogmatic and unrelenting attachment to predigested and hegemonic conceptions of modernity".¹ Observing that significant portions of society participated in the revolution from a secular Left perspective, Mirsepassi insists that the failure of the Left in the Islamic revolution sprang from its own "self-induced and ultimately suicidal limitations", not from any innate Iranian hostility to these ideas.² Contrary to the conventional view of the impact of Pahlavi rule, he argues that the shah's political war against the Left and the liberals resulted in a diminution of secular political discourse, left-wing organizational resources and democratic institutions, concluding that, by 1979, the clerics were in a far more advantageous position to assume power and command popular allegiance. Nonetheless, he argues that the consolidation of Islamist rule was by no means predetermined but followed protracted political conflict and ideological contention between Islamists, socialists and liberals. Although critical of the Left for its misunderstanding of the nature of political Islam, for its disunity and its sectarianism, he rejects the charges advanced by conservative and liberal opponents of the

Left, as well as by advocates of cultural authenticity. An important element of Mirsepassi's critique is his discussion of the social bases and composition of the Left in post-revolutionary Iran. A detailed statistical analysis bears out his conclusion that Iranians attracted to left-wing organizations were primarily from the non-religious, highly educated, modern and urban middle classes, and he identifies as a key weakness the failure of the Left organizations to generate programmes which reflected their own social bases and addressed the needs, problems and aspirations of the modern, educated, professional middle class, including its youth and women.

Many writers on post-revolutionary Iran have criticized the Left for its failure to grasp the importance of democratic rights to its own advancement and to internalize democratic norms in its own organizations. Saeed Rahnema offers a critique of the Iranian Left and the struggle for democracy, pointing out that, under both Pahlavi shahs as well as under the Islamic Republic, the Left, more than any other political force, suffered from the lack of democracy. Yet, he argues, the Left never succeeded in clearly defining and developing its own notion of democracy. Although the Left has rightly pointed to the obstacles presented by the lack of democracy, it has failed to look critically at its own theories and practices and to consider the possibility of itself also being part of the problem. The focus of Rahnema's chapter is on that trend within the Left movement which historically favoured an electoral road to socialism, and he traces its lineage from the constitutional period, through 1941–53, to pre- and post-1979. Describing the array of Left organizations, with diverse platforms, which mushroomed after the revolution, he groups them into two broad categories: those, like the Tudeh and the Fedayin, who sought an alliance with the "progressive" factions of the regime, and those who hoped to overthrow it and usher in a socialist revolution. He then surveys the development of socialist reformism in exile. He describes how, after more than a decade since the 1979 revolution and along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iranian Left, in exile and engulfed in a deep crisis, began to review its past. For a number of Left leaders and activists, their failure had deep strategic, theoretical and ideological origins. They embarked upon a discourse rejecting Leninist policies, and instead favouring gradual reforms for attaining socialism, emphasizing democracy. Rahnema concludes that although the socialist reformist tendency subsided organizationally, its ideas and logic continued and have gained support both in exile and inside Iran. Yet it has still, he argues, to find its proper place within the Left political spectrum, in the context of the continuing prevalence of the two approaches of the revolutionary period – that which seeks an alliance with the regime, and that which seeks its complete overthrow. Rahnema ends with a critique of both the liberal Left and the radical Left, arguing that a socialist social democratic platform has the potential to attract a significant amount of support inside

Iran, but that neither the organizational nor the theoretical means of such an alternative are yet in place.

Ervand Abrahamian was the first writer to direct attention towards the Islamist Left and to discuss its character and the extent and nature of its influence. In his contribution to this collection, he discusses the manner in which, since the 1979 revolution, religious intellectuals in Iran have reinvented themselves. First describing the ways in which, prior to 1979, they championed revolution and drastic socio-economic transformation, he goes on to show how, in recent decades, they have lowered their expectations to calling for piecemeal reforms, particularly liberalization. He then offers some intellectual reasons for this change of focus, language and priorities, illustrating the larger intellectual metamorphosis by contrasting Ali Shariati, the paramount figure of the 1960s, with Abdulkarim Soroush, an equivalent figure for the 1990s.

Beginning with a discussion of the “seismic shift” in the language of modern Iran caused by Al-e Ahmad’s *Gharbzadegi*, Abrahamian goes on to look at the appeal of Ali Shariati, noting that an earlier generation of reformers had avoided making overt appeals to religion. He then discusses the profound ideological crisis among young Muslims caused by the outcome of the clerical victory in the post-revolutionary contest for power and describes how, with the landslide election victory of Khatami in the presidential elections of 1997, younger intellectuals, almost all former admirers of Shariati initiated into politics by the revolution and the hostage crisis, re-entered the political arena with a brand new and liberal reinterpretation of Islam, representing another “seismic shift” in intellectual discussion. Abrahamian concludes that political thought in twentieth-century Iran has been characterized by gross discontinuities. While the first generation was secular, the second Islamized everything, especially political culture. A third generation now argues that Islam represents not total ideology but personal piety, and, in favouring a political system that would be pluralistic, democratic, representative, republican, secular and liberal, has readopted the core concepts of their grandparents.

Many contributors to this volume have commented on the adverse consequences for the Left of its disjunction from the Iranian working class. Not only did the Left organizations have little active presence within the industrial struggles which broke out in 1978, but during the revolution itself, the mass of the urban poor were largely mobilized and led by, as well as under the ideological hegemony of, the Islamist forces. In the final article in this collection, Haideh Moghissi and Saeed Rahnema look at the workers’ movement in Iran, the conditions it faces, and the factors affecting its ability to engage in political and industrial activity.

They begin with a brief survey of the history of workers’ efforts to organize, from the formation of the first unions in the constitutional period, through the repression of the Riza Shah period, which, however, also

marked the emergence of modern industries and a significant increase in the size of the industrial working class, to the second major period of labour activism between 1941 and 1953. Pointing out that for the next twenty-five years, until 1978, the working class remained effectively unorganized, without the right to independent trade unions and under the close supervision of SAVAK, they go on to examine the experience of the workers' councils of the revolutionary period and their eventual replacement by Islamic *showras*. In their analysis of the situation prevailing under the Islamic Republic, Moghissi and Rahnama identify three major political and organizational weaknesses of the Iranian working class: the configuration of the working population, the mechanisms of Islamic state control, and the troubled relationship between workers and Left political groups and organizations. They conclude that the progress of the working-class movement has been and continues to be directly linked to the movement for democracy and social change. They argue that removing the political obstacles standing in the way of independent trade unions and other forms of labour organization remains the working-class movement's most immediate task, but that this cannot be achieved in the absence of other democratic advances, including full freedom of expression and association and a free press. Without these preconditions, they conclude that the Left intelligentsia will be unable to develop effective links with the labour and workers' movement, and that this movement will, in turn, be confined to sparse sporadic actions at the factory level, as it is today.

The Left in Iran has a history which is both long and complex, possessing its full share of tragedy and drama. The articles which follow, many of them written by engaged scholars with personal histories of political activism, are intensely critical of the Left's record. In these circumstances, it is perhaps all too easy to lose sight of the idealism, self-sacrifice and heroism which has often been displayed by leftist elements in Iran. This collection represents an attempt at revisionist history. It aims to offer a new interpretation, rejecting the prescriptions of the Cold War, in which the importance of leftist ideas and activities, and their centrality to Iranian political and social development, both historical and contemporary, is emphasized. Its purpose is not only to critique the Left's record, but also to recognize the contribution of, and pay tribute to, generations of Iranian leftists whose ultimate goal was to build a better life for the mass of ordinary Iranians.

Notes

- 1 Ali Mirsepassi, "The tragedy of the Iranian Left", this volume, p. 229.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Part I

THE IRANIAN LEFT

Overviews and balance sheets

THE IRANIAN LEFT IN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Fred Halliday

Contexts: national, regional, international

From its origins in the 1900s, the Iranian Left was prominent in opposition to the authoritarian Iranian state, of shah as much as of imam, and to the various forms of external intervention to which Iran has been subjected. This sustained record was marked by many a division and twist of policy and, in all but one case, that of 1908–09, ended in defeat. The cost in human life and suffering, and the commitment demonstrated across these decades, were immense. Despite continued repression, the Left did much to shape the course of Iranian politics and intellectual life. No history of twentieth-century Iran can, indeed, be written without a discussion of the role within it of the Left, be it of the current that dominated for much of this period, pro-Soviet communism, or of the many other more autonomous groups, from the constitutionalist social democrats of the Constitutional Revolution through to the Third Force of the 1940s and on to the components of the independent Marxist Left in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the attempts of their enemies, monarchical and clerical, to do this, no measured history of Iran in the twentieth century can, therefore, suppress this record.¹

The first context for any such discussion of the Left is Iranian history and society itself: this permits discussion of the impact, in political and intellectual terms, of this Left on Iranian society as a whole but also of the causes of this sustained opposition record. As recent historiography has made clear, radicalism, in ideas and in practical protest, long predates the advent of the socialist movement to Iran.² At four periods in the twentieth century, in the defence of the constitution of 1908–09, the years after the First World War, the period 1941–53, and the years immediately preceding and following the revolution of 1979, the Left had a significant role, as much on its opponents as on its own followers: while in 1908–09 the Left helped successfully

to defend the constitutional political order, each of the later three periods is associated with an opportunity for taking power that ended in defeat.

No history of the Left, in any country, can, however, be written within a purely national context. The assessment of the Iranian Left needs to be seen in a broader context, of proximity to Russia, and that of the Middle East and Asia, of which it was a part. The history of the Iranian Left is bound up, as few others are, with that of the socialist movement to its north, in Russia. This, rather than any strong connections to the Arab world, Turkey, Afghanistan or South Asia, was the formative context. Its most successful moment, the 1908–09 defence of the constitution, involved active support from Russia – but *not* the Russian state. Yet, from 1917, that guiding, when not controlling, influence from the Soviet state was to distort the Left in Iran until the USSR foundered in 1991. As much as the Left parties of eastern Europe, those of Iran were influenced, and deformed, by their relation to Russia, not just because of the ideological influence felt by communists around the world, but because of the way in which it split the Left from nationalism.

At the same time, the fate of the parties in the two states on either side of Iran can underline the importance of any regional comparison. To the west, in Iraq, the communist movement played a significant role in the opposition to the Hashemite monarchy in the 1940s and 1950s, and was a participant in the radical government that emerged after the revolution of 1958; it was, however, despite formal alliances with the Ba‘th, to succumb to the latter’s repression from 1963 onwards.³ To the east, in Afghanistan, communism had an even more dramatic record – a marginal current until the late 1960s, the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan seized power through a military coup in April 1978, was rescued from collapse by Soviet forces in December 1979, and remained in power until 1992, when a coalition of counter-revolutionary Islamist forces overthrew it. All three parties, therefore, Iraqi, Iranian and Afghan, ended the 1990s in defeat and disarray.

The broader, continental, context of Iranian communism is equally striking. The Iranian Communist Party was founded in June 1920 before any other in Asia, months earlier than China, India, Vietnam or Japan. In the 1940s and 1950s, it was as influential as any in the Middle East. During the revolution of 1978–79, the Iranian Left, in its various forms, was to play a distinctive role, and was, in considerable measure, to influence the discourse of the Islamist forces themselves. After its defeat in Iran, in the early 1980s, the Tudeh was to acquire a substitute role, as ideological mentor to the ruling Communist Party in neighbouring Afghanistan. Yet within Iran itself it was, unlike the other major parties of Asia, never to come to power and to spend much of its history on the defensive.

The history of the Iranian Left poses, therefore, as much as that of any other country, the challenge of combining analysis of internal and external dimensions. The history of any Left movement is at once national

and international – national in the sources of its emergence, development and impact, but, equally, international in terms of the global political and strategic context in which it developed, and in terms of the ideological forces acting up it. Any analysis of the dogmatism and sectarianism of the Iranian Left has to take internal, Iranian, political culture and Soviet influence into account. This is not peculiar to Iran: the whole history of the socialist movement, from the French Revolution through to the collapse of Soviet communism in 1991, is one inscribed within a context of global conflict and social change on the one hand, and of internationally stimulated ideological militancy, and division, within specific countries on the other.

However, while all left-wing movements partake of the influence, the ‘world-historical’ context, in which they grow, that of Iran was particularly affected by external ideological context, that of the international socialist and communist movements. The importance of this global context is often recognised, but too often in a polemical way: the Left is cast as being an agent or client of the USSR, those opposed to it as agents of the West, Britain or the US. A similar simplification applies to the Right, seen as ‘clients’, ‘tools’, ‘lackeys’ of imperialism. The issue of external context, and the forms of influence it produced, goes much further than questions of direct control, be it of the USSR over the Tudeh in the 1940s or of the CIA over the shah in 1953. If this external influence was self-evidently true of the pro-Soviet forces, who followed Moscow in every turn, it was also to a large extent true of the other components of the Left, for whom the external context, and the ideas derived from it, was to play such an important role. The independent Left of the 1970s, of writers such as Pouyan, Jazan, Farahani and Ahmadzadeh, was shaped by the Third World enthusiasm for guerrilla struggle. To deny this external context, and the forms of influence, some very direct, which this occasioned, would be unfounded. But this has to be accompanied by analysis of the internal social and political forces on which the Left drew.⁴

International context also provides much of the explanation for the ultimate fate of the Iranian Left, in that it was the combination of geostrategic position, on the borders of the USSR, and ideological subservience to external models, that was to do much to ensure the defeat of the Left within Iran itself. Iranian writers make much of the internal failings of the Left, be this its mistaken evaluation of the political and social balance within the country, sectarian divisions or its unduly trusting attitude to the Islamist revolution. These choices were, however, compounded by the very real and difficult international context in which Iran found itself, one which led to a particularly strong external counter-revolutionary support for the state on the one hand, and to a constriction of the Left’s ideological and political choices on the other, above all the fact that the USSR was also a target of Iranian nationalism. It was not

only what these movements aspired to, and the patrons they chose, but also the enemies they opposed, that were defined in terms of a global conflict. The political context, of conflict between colonial and colonised peoples, of world war, and of Cold War, of relations between Third World states and Western patrons, of the whole seventy years of conflict surrounding the Bolshevik revolution, was an international one, as much in the forces that were thrown up to fight the Left as in the forces that developed in support of it.

All three contexts – international, regional, national – are, therefore, essential to an understanding of the Iranian Left. Any retrospective on the history of the Left is, however, made all the more challenging by another aspect of international perspective, that of the end of the Cold War, and with it the collapse of the USSR. For the Left in every country, the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s have occasioned a major rethinking of their history, both because of the availability of new materials and because of the light which these events cast on the very goal of the Left itself. Recent research has indeed thrown up new material pertinent to the history of the Iranian Left and of relevant episodes in Iranian history, be this material on the early history of the Tudeh, the text of Stalin's 1946 letter to Ja'far Pishevari or the text of the CIA internal report on the coup of 1953.⁵ At the same time there has been a marked shift in the very historical perspective within which the Left is viewed. Those opposed to the Left have tended to stress the degree of Soviet control: yet research since 1991 has shown to what degree the Iranian Left, like so many others, evaded or sought to evade such direction. On the other hand, if, up to 1991, the Left critique had revolved around a supposed failure to achieve a realistic goal, of building a socialist Iran, the very general discrediting of this goal, for Iran or any other country, casts the history of the Left in a different light. No retrospective on the Iranian Left, and on what might have occurred, can avoid the question of what such a Left, with its authoritarian and sectarian culture, would have done if it had come to power.

One of the tasks facing the historian of the Left in any region of the world has been to match these two changes, of greater historical detail and insight, with a shift in perspective, to write of the history of these movements without recourse to the myths, of justification or denigration, associated with the communist period and with the Cold War. Beyond conspiracy theory or counter-factual piety, there is the challenge of a political sociology of these movements. In what follows, four aspects of the Left in Iran, pertinent to its overall history, will be examined, bringing to bear both the international and the retrospective perspectives suggested here. These will not resolve all, or indeed any, of the controversies associated with the Iranian Left: they may contribute, however, to reorienting a discussion that is too often beset with polemic.⁶

Three great opportunities: myths and realities

The retrospective history of the Iranian Left revolves, above all, around the three major periods, after 1908, in which it played a role within Iranian political life. The first was in the period 1917–21, when a revolutionary republic was established in the northern province of Gilan, formed by an alliance of nationalists and communists. The second was in the period between the Anglo-Russian invasion of 1941, which opened up the political situation within Iran to nationalist and communist forces, and the coup of August 1953. The third was the period preceding and following the revolution of 1979. In each case the Left appeared to have established itself as an important component of the Iranian political scene, only to find itself defeated by a more powerful Iranian state, in the first two cases with the support of external, imperial, powers. Out of each period has also come a counter-factual narrative, according to which the defeat of the Left was the result of political choices, by the Iranian Left and by their international ally, the USSR, which could have facilitated a different conclusion.

The rise *and* fall of the Gilan republic has to be seen in international context. If the first Iranian socialists had emerged during the twin crises of the tsarist and Qajar states in the 1900s, the Gilan movement was the product of the dissolution of empires brought on by the First World War: Gilan formed part of the broader crisis of established regimes after 1918 that was evident across Europe, in Hungary, Bavaria, northern Italy, and which stretched through Turkey to northern Iran and on to Afghanistan, Mongolia and China. While the nationalist guerrillas of Kuchik Khan had been active in the region since 1911, it was the intervention of Bolshevik naval forces operating in the Caspian, who took the port of Enzeli in May 1920, which led to the establishment of the Gilan republic on 5 June. Yet if international conflict had facilitated the establishment of the republic, it also played a part in its downfall: by early 1921, the Bolsheviks were so weakened that they were forced to sign a commercial agreement with Britain, and to come to terms with the nationalist regimes along their southern frontiers, in Turkey and Iran. Bolshevik support was, therefore, withdrawn and the Gilan region occupied by the central army. We need not accept literally the story told by the Comintern envoy Yakov Blumkin, to grasp how far Soviet policy changed: ‘My “Persian tale”? There were a few hundred of us ragged Russians down there. One day we had a telegram from the Central Committee: “Cut your losses, revolution in Iran now off.” But for that we would have got to Tehran.’⁷

To ascribe the fate of the Gilan movement solely to external factors is mistaken. The movement, in both its communist and nationalist forms, had substantial following in the Gilan area, but what it lacked was sufficient support in the rest of the country: an attempted march on Tehran in August 1920 had failed. At the same time, it was divided within itself, and as time wore on the strains between communist and more nationalist elements

developed. In these circumstances, and with a reconsolidation of the central government following the military coup by Reza Khan in March 1921, the Gilan movement could rely for survival only on external, i.e. Soviet, support, which, in the given international circumstances, could not be sustained. The Gilan movement raised many of the problems that were to concern not only the Iranian Left in subsequent decades but also the Left in other Asian and Third World countries: the forms of political and class alliance appropriate to semi-colonial countries; the relation between regionally based and national opposition movements (exemplified in the 1990s by the Zapatista movement in Mexico); the alliance of secular forces with Islamic and clerical groups; the place of the agrarian question in the anti-imperialist movement; the relation to the strategic priorities of the USSR. If none of these were resolved by Gilan, two important legacies were to have a longer-run resonance: on the one hand, a belief, widespread among later independent Iranian socialists, that the failure of Gilan was a result of Soviet betrayal; on the other, a belief, propagated by Islamists during and after the revolution, that the secular and communist Left had betrayed the true revolutionary, Kuchik Khan.⁸

A similar process, on a more extensive and protracted scale, took place in the period 1941–53. The defeat of Gilan in 1921 had been followed by twenty years of dictatorship under Reza Khan. In 1931 he had banned all organisations espousing ‘collectivist’ ideologies. The invasion of Iran in 1941 opened up a new context, in which the Pahlavi state was weakened, by foreign occupation and the problems it occasioned, and in which opposition movements emerged, the nationalists who came to rally behind the National Front of Dr Mosadeq, and the newly reformed pro-Soviet communist party, the Tudeh: much effort, on behalf of its apologists and critics, has gone into arguing that the Tudeh was not a continuation of the earlier Communist Party, and there was little continuity of personnel between them. But, in effect, this is what it was.⁹

This period marked the high point of left-wing influence in Iran. On the one hand, the Tudeh had up to 25,000 members: it was not only the first, and indeed only, national party to have emerged in modern Iranian history, but it had by far the largest following of any communist party ever seen in the Middle East. At the same time, autonomous republics, under Soviet protection, were established in the Azerbaijan and Kurdish regions of the country. All of this presupposed, however, a political space within Iran provided by the Allied occupation: once Soviet forces had withdrawn in the spring of 1946, in 1946 as in 1921 under international pressure, the autonomous republics were subject to counter-attack by the central government, repeating the fate of Gilan in 1921, while the Tudeh itself was driven further into the defensive, repression firstly following an attack on the shah in February 1949 and then again in August 1953. *Tudeh* isolation was, however, compounded by its own sectarianism, itself a reflection of the anti-

nationalist line being propounded by the USSR at that time. Here the Tudeh made two major mistakes: first, the issue of *naft-i shamal*, the oil of the north: on what was the most sensitive political issue in Iran, that of foreign control of oil, it discredited itself in the eyes of nationalist opinion by supporting the Soviet demand for an oil concession in the north to match that of the British in the south; secondly, when the nationalist movement came into government in 1951 the Tudeh initially opposed it, on the grounds that Mosadeq was an American agent (*noukar-i amrika*), challenging the British control of oil and only later, and half-heartedly, supported the National Front government. The end result was the coup of 1953 in which the covert operation by the UK and US ousted Mosadeq and restored the Pahlavi monarchy to absolute power.

This second period of left-wing influence was far more protracted, and the extent of left-wing influence far more widespread across the country, than in the earlier period of 1917–21.¹⁰ Yet 1941–53 exemplified many of the same features as that earlier phase. In the first place, the opportunity for the emergence of the Left was given by an international conjuncture, in this case the Second World War and the Allied invasion of Iran. This was something it shared, but with contrasted outcomes, with other communist movements that had been marginal prior to the global crisis – a Chinese Red Army isolated in Yenan before the Japanese invasion of 1937, a Vietnamese party that had almost no organised following within the country before 1945, let alone the small, repressed, parties of Germany and of eastern Europe. It was the Second World War which, in Iran as elsewhere, created the opportunities for left-wing, and specifically communist, advance. In Iran, however, global politics precluded a revolutionary outcome: far from mobilising *against* invasion, the Iranian Left had to support it. This geostrategic reality above all sealed its fate compared to its Asian counterparts. Secondly, the activities of the communist Left were to a large measure controlled by Soviet policy requirements, in regard to *naft-i shamal*, the Caspian oil question, the withdrawal of Soviet forces in 1946 and the Left sectarian approach to Mosadeq. There were those within Iran who resisted Soviet policy, be it the very leaders of the Azeri and Kurdish republics abandoned to their fates, or those, notably Khalil Maleki of the Third Force, *niru-yi sevvom*, who broke with the Tudeh to form independent left-wing organisations.¹¹ Thirdly, the opposition to the shah and to Western influence was seriously weakened by the divisions within the opposition itself. Left sectarianism, dividing nationalist and communist forces, had opened the door to fascism in Germany in the 1930s. It facilitated the Pahlavi restoration in 1953 as it did the triumph of the forces of Islamism in 1979–83. The Iranian Left, orthodox and dissident, adopted all of the fractional, sectarian, language of the international Left and mixed it with a hefty dose of indigenous Iranian vilification as well.

Of equal importance for later developments were, however, the myths which 1953 itself generated.¹² One myth, propounded later by the independent Left and by many nationalists, was that it was the Tudeh failure to act in support of Mosadeq, and in particular the failure to use their secret military apparatus to defeat the 19 August 1953 coup, that accounted for the defeat of the Left. This argument rests, as does the earlier counter-factual position on Gilan, upon a rather one-sided analysis of the forces at play in Iran at the time. Mosadeq did not have an organised following in the country, and, by August 1953, many of his own National Front supporters had deserted him: there was widespread discontent as a result of the impact of the embargo by the West; and the Iranian army, with its powerful friends, was determined to seize power. There is a notable similarity between the underestimation of the power and determination of those seizing power, and of the divisions within the elected government, in the case of the Iranian coup of 1953 and in the case of another counter-revolutionary coup, that of Chile in 1973. Imperialism can promote coups, and regime change, but only where there is significant support for this. A second myth, which was to become central to the formation of the radical Marxist Left in the ensuing decades, was that the defeat of 1953 reflected a lack of commitment to armed struggle: this entailed that an alternative strategy, as was to develop in the 1970s with the autonomous guerrilla groups the Fedayin and the Mujahidin, would bring victory. The Islamists and opponents of the Left were not, however, without their own lessons, as they had been with regard to Gilan: the Islamic establishment had first supported Mosadeq and then, in the figure of Ayatollah Kashani, turned against him. To a considerable extent, they collaborated in the coup of 1953. Subsequent Islamist mythology, propounded among others by Khomeini, was that Mosadeq had failed because he had abandoned Islam (which would imply that the CIA was doing the will of Allah): here too a retrospective counter-factual served to legitimate an alternative strategy that was to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s. The record of these earlier periods provided, therefore, not only historical context but also ideological justification for later opposition movements.

The revolution of 1978–79 was one in which the Left played a distinct part, in preparation and development, but in which it never held the initiative. After 1953 three distinct left-wing currents could be identified: the Tudeh continued in opposition, making use of its historical reputation and of the support of the USSR; in opposition to it, there emerged within Iran the guerrilla movements, most notably the Fedayin-i Khalq, who, influenced by the militant guerrilla climate of the times, sought from 1971 to promote armed struggle within Iran;¹³ and at the same time in exile the Confederation of Iranian Students, including many strands of Marxists and Islamic radicals, acted as a loose forum for a radicalised intelligentsia. Separate from this Left there developed, however, the Islamist opposition symbolised by Khomeini, which was in the course of 1978 to emerge as the driving force of the revolution.

Three questions above all arise with regard to the role of the Left in the 1978–9 revolution. First, there is the issue of how far the activities of the Left prior to the revolution itself contributed to the radicalisation of Iran. The Left itself, and particularly the armed groups, claimed that their actions had, in the form of ‘armed propaganda’ practised by urban guerrillas, weakened the Pahlavi state: in terms of a following among educated youth, the guerrilla Left had success, but as to weakening the state or mass mobilisation, this is a hard argument to sustain. Where, however, the Left did have an influence was in radicalising sections of the Islamist milieu itself, and in providing Islamist thinkers, including Khomeini, with radical themes with which to mobilise support. The second major question concerns the role of the Left in the revolution itself: this was a mass movement, involving millions of people, and including a substantial activity by workers. A Left presence was, however, spasmodic, compared to Islamist and spontaneous groups.¹⁴ In some areas, such as the oil fields, left-wing influence was significant. In certain moments too, notably in the short, final armed uprising that toppled the Bakhtiar government in February 1979, the guerrillas played their part. A broader claim, as to organisational strength in the months from September 1978 to February 1979, is, on the evidence, harder to make: the Islamists deployed their own organisation, which, in an impressive act of political mobilisation and a sustained general strike, demobilised the imperial state and swept them to power.

This leads to the third, and most difficult, question of all concerning the Left and the revolution: whether after the departure of the shah in January 1979, with a different strategy and a different understanding of the political forces involved, the Left could have prevented the triumph of Khomeini, and the consolidation of a socially reactionary Islamic republic. Here there are many reasons to answer in the affirmative: the Left, like almost everyone else, underestimated Khomeini and had a naïve view of the social and political strategy of the Islamists; the Left was divided by its own sectarian indulgences, and failed to unite at key moments; on certain crucial issues, which emerged early on as indices of the Islamist project, notably women, press freedom and the rights of minorities, the majority of the Left was evasive; and far too much credence was given to the importance of struggling against ‘imperialism’, far too little to the danger of indigenous, Islamist, dictatorship. Yet, taking all that into account, it is too easy, as it was too easy in relation to 1921 and 1953, to assert a counter-factual, since this ignores the overall balance of forces prevailing in the country. In the case of 1979 there was not, as was the case in the earlier two defeats, a significant *external* factor in the Iranian process; but there were powerful political and social forces, embodied in the Islamist movement and then in a repressive state, that outweighed the ability of the Left to defend, let alone promote, its interests. The result was, over the period 1979–83, the gradual, salami-style, isolation and repression of the Left, the consolidation of the clerical republic, and the sealing of the Iranian Left into its third, and most catastrophic, defeat.¹⁵

Political forces: domestic and international

Beyond its record of policies and struggles, there is a need to take account of the political sociology of the Left. A history of the Left may, in the first instance, be understood in terms of the context of Iranian society during the twentieth century. Socialist movements in Iran, in their variant forms, certainly had a social base within the country as the slow, but inexorable, incorporation of the country into the world economy proceeded: from the radical constitutionalists in Tabriz in 1906–11 through the Gilan republic and on to the mass mobilisations of the 1940s, the Left found, among intellectuals, state employees, the middle class and sections of the working class, a significant support.¹⁶ At the same time, however, the domestic character of Iranian society imposed its limits on the impact of the Left, in three respects in particular: first, the Iranian state itself, for all its weaknesses, retained the ability, on its own and reinforced by external powers, to contain and defeat the Left; secondly, the appeal of the Left was limited by its failure, over many decades, in contrast to many other Asian movements, to make inroads into the most substantial oppressed section of Iranian society as a whole, the peasantry; and thirdly, the particular social formation of Iran contained within it another social base, and associated leadership and ideological structure, that served to mobilise against the state and against external influence, in the form of the Islamist institutions and the bazaar. These three factors, recurrent from the time of the Constitutional Revolution through to the 1979 revolution and beyond, were to mark the constraints on the Left from within Iranian society itself.

This domestic structure was compounded by Iran's external situation and by the world-historical context in which it found itself. There were certainly elements of Iran's international situation that favoured the Left and its potential nationalist allies. One of the most salient features of Iranian politics, from the Tobacco Protest of 1891 onwards, was nationalism, a sense of hostility to external influence that was associated in particular with the issue of oil, but which was compounded by foreign invasion in both world wars and, after 1945, by the extent of British, and later American, influence over the Pahlavi state. That there was often a reinforcing interaction of nationalism and left-wing politics is evident from a range of other Third World countries, of which China, Vietnam, Egypt and Cuba are striking examples. This was, indeed, the strategic hope which was expressed at the 1920 Baku Congress of Peoples of the East, at which Iranian delegates played an important role. Yet this centrality of nationalism contained, in general, the risk that the very same ideological appeals that were available to the Left were also available to their enemies, be they secular nationalists, Islamists or the state itself. This is clear from the fate of the Left in the Arab world, where a range of communist parties (Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Sudan) were both enhanced and then crushed by nationalist forces.

This nationalist trap was compounded by the contradictory character of Iran's semi-colonial status, in the sense that although Iran remained formally independent, it was to a very great degree under the influence, direct and indirect, of external powers. The encroachment of Russian and British economic influence, through trade and oil, was compounded by the 1907 partition into 'spheres of influence', invasion in two world wars and a close external role in the formation of the state, culminating in the Cold War. The consequences of this half-measure domination were many, among the most important being the promotion of a culture of conspiracy theory. It was not, however, just the fact of this semi-colonial status that shaped Iranian politics, but, above all, the competitive context that precluded full colonial control, the fact that external domination came *from both east and west*. In the case of Iran, however, there was an added, strategic and enduring, factor, namely the very geographical and political proximity to the USSR, which entailed the Iranian left-wing movement's very close interrelation with that of Russia. In common with that of another state bordering Russia, Poland, the Iranian Left was at once enabled but also inhibited by this association: the purging by Stalin of Iranian communist exiles in the 1930s, like that of their Polish counterparts, was one brutal instance of this.

What was perhaps most unique about Iran was this particular external context, one shared, and with some of the same consequences, by another semi-colonial state, China: Russia on the one side, Britain/the US on the other, were *both* the objects of Iranian nationalism. In most of the rest of the world this did not apply: nationalism was *either* directed primarily against the Western colonial powers, and the US, and hence sympathetic to the USSR, *or*, in the reverse situation of eastern European countries and Turkey, hostile to Russia and hence sympathetic to the West. The association of the Iranian Left with the USSR was, therefore, two-edged. In this way the proximity to the USSR operated to reinforce the limits imposed by the domestic structure of Iranian society: from the repression of Reza Khan and of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi through to the Islamic Republic, a combination of the resilience of the Iranian state and, in the case of Khomeini's regime, the mass mobilisation of popular sentiment against the Left was reinforced by the two-sided impact of Iran's relation to the Soviet Union.¹⁷

Theoretical orientations

These factors of context and constraint were, however, compounded by the very political and ideological choices made by the Iranian Left itself. A comprehensive overview of the different positions taken by the Iranian Left is beyond the scope of this paper: what is possible are some observations on general issues that recurred as questions of importance for the Left in its engagement with Iranian society. The general picture that emerges is of an

Iranian Left that was, throughout its history, repetitive of international Left analyses of its time, often without critical reflex or engagement with the society it was located within.

The first issue was the nature of Iran's incorporation into the world capitalist system. In its most evident form this related to the question of how far capitalism had transformed Iran, and what the nature of Iranian society was. From the 1960s onwards, as the shah pursued his White Revolution, the Left was placed in a position of denying the degree to which Iranian society had been transformed: whether in orthodox communist analyses, which denied the possibility of capitalist development in the Third World, or in the growing influence of dependency theory, the Iranian Left tended to stress the limits on capitalist development within the country. Some even persisted in applying the mistaken Marxist category according to which Iran was still 'semi-feudal': a stress on the political and military links between the Pahlavi state and the West was too easily developed into an argument that the state itself was simply a client, or dependency, of the US. At the same time, the fact that Iran's development was driven by oil revenues, a form of rent that did not necessarily affect the economy or the labour force, and a recognition that many of the Pahlavi claims were questionable, compounded this stress.

Yet here the Iranian Left fell victim to the illusion which was more widely diffused in the 1960s and 1970s and which beset all arguments based on dependency theory: some forms of capitalist economic and social development *were* possible under the conditions then prevailing in the world economy, as the examples of East Asia and parts of Latin America, let alone of the less industrialised parts of Europe, showed. The record of Iran during the White Revolution was certainly not that which the shah himself and his apologists claimed: yet important changes in the social and economic structure of the country did occur, as figures on land tenure, industrialisation, literacy and urbanisation demonstrate. Khomeini's own income from bazaar supporters increased as oil revenues rose. It would, indeed, be impossible to explain the revolution of 1979 without setting this upheaval in the context of an Iran transformed in the previous two decades.¹⁸

As much as in the model of guerrilla struggle, the analyses and conclusions of the Left with regard to the Pahlavi regime's economic and social policies were, therefore, those prevalent on much of the international Left at that time. This dissident conformity applied to another element in Left thinking that came to prevail in the 1960s and 1970s, cultural nationalism.¹⁹ This cultural approach and dependency theory do not necessarily correlate, yet in much of the Third World in the 1960s and 1970s they did: imperialist aggression at the level of the economy was, it was argued, matched by that at the level of culture. Here the 'culture' being discussed was much more that of the elite, the intelligentsia, than that of the population as a whole, and the debate was at first confined to this milieu: but in the conditions of popular mobilisation before and after the fall of the shah these cultural nationalist

themes enjoyed a much broader diffusion. The conventional themes of cultural nationalism, discrediting those who were influenced by Western ideas, and propagating the cult of an indigenous or nativist system of values, were taken up by the Islamists as much as by the Left and used to prosecute their goals: two of the most prominent exponents of this approach, Jalal Aï-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati, mediocrities in any comparative intellectual context, were to have, in their different registers, widespread influence on the younger generation in Iran. The term *gharbzadegi*, 'West-struckness', epitomised this approach. They diffused a hostility to Western ideas and political values that served, equally, the purposes of the dogmatic Left on the one hand, and the Islamist forces on the other. The culmination of this was the Iranian 'cultural revolution', which launched in August 1980 a purge of universities and more generally of the intelligentsia, under the banner of fighting cultural imperialism. Two decades later, the opponents of change within Iran were still inveighing against *bombardiman-i tablighati* and *tahajum-i farhangi*, 'media bombardment' and 'cultural aggression', in the context of globalisation.

It was, however, above all in politics that the modular answers of the international milieu were to take their greatest toll on the Iranian Left. For much of its history, the Iranian Left was dominated by orthodox Soviet Marxism, be this in regard to the USSR and international rivalry with the West, the class character of Iranian society, or the nature of imperialism. Behrooz has commented, rightly, on the Tudeh adoption of the theory of 'non-capitalist' development at a time when it was widely questioned by the Left elsewhere.²⁰ The limits of this analysis were evident in Iran, as elsewhere: a formalised analysis of society and of global forces, an uncritical depiction of the Soviet Union itself. The impact of this dogmatism was, moreover, to extend far beyond the Tudeh itself: on the one hand, it encompassed much of the independent Left that emerged before 1979, notably the Fedayin-i Khalq, and several other groups of that period, while on the other, and with greater consequence, it provided a set of dogmatic ideas and slogans that were adopted by the Islamists. The one Left group that was resolutely critical of Khomeini from the start, *Paykar*, a left-wing breakaway from the Mujahidin, was also an example of virulent sectarianism. The analysis of imperialism and its relation to Iran propounded by Islamists was in many ways derivative of orthodox pro-Soviet positions and fed on the factionalism and conspiracy theory associated with the Left. So, with dire consequences for the internal politics of Iran after February 1979, there was an almost universal embrace of a spirit of sectarianism that cast all who dissented from it, notably independent democratic and socialist trends, as somehow linked to, or dependent on, imperialism.²¹ As for liberalism, this was always beyond the horizon.

This political dogmatism was most evident with regard to four issues that emerged in the course of the revolution: the women's movement, freedom of

speech and what was loosely and polemically termed 'liberalism', the nationalists, and secularism. The first became an issue during the revolution, with the insistence of the Islamist forces on the covering of women's heads, and, immediately afterwards, in the protest meetings called by the women's groups on 8 March, International Women's Day. The Left opposed these protests, indulged in the conventional sectarianism of ascribing feminist influence to imperialism, a position obviously helped by the resort to cultural nationalism, and left the women protesters to face the Islamic state on their own.

A similar sectarianism was in evidence in August 1979, when, following the closure of the independent newspaper *Ayandegan*, the Left refused to support the demonstrations organised by the National Democratic Front, the legatees of Mosadeq, against censorship. In response to the call of the pro-*Ayandegan* demonstrators, '*marg bar irtija*', 'death to reaction', the much larger demonstrations supporting the regime, and backed by much of the Left, shouted '*marg bar liberalism*', 'death to liberalism'.²² In this way pro-Soviet dogmatism, and the now consolidating authoritarianism of the Islamic republic, combined to rally much of the Left to its side, while dividing those resisting its new repressive project. The four years that followed were to lead to a similar isolation and miscalculation, as the IRI turned first on one and then on another of the Left groups, finally crushing the Tudeh in 1983 in a vice to which it had contributed. The hope of the pro-Soviet Left was that somehow the IRI would take to the 'non-capitalist' path, that 'the mullahs will come to their senses'. This was not to be.

The third issue was that of ethnic minorities. The nationalities issue had always beset the communist Left in Iran, which had veered from calculated use of it, as in regard to Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in 1945–46, to unqualified support for central government against supposed 'imperialist' agents in 1979. A hope prior to 1979 that Azeri nationalism would resurface was not realised in the revolutionary period. While some of the far Left groups did back the Kurds, the only significant left-wing force to emerge from the revolution with a commitment to democracy and national rights was the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI). International factors, notably the policies of Iraq, were both to promote and ultimately to suppress this evolution.

The limited analysis of Iranian society on the one hand, and the adoption of a facile anti-imperialism on the other, was to find its greatest realisation, however, in regard to the phenomenon that was to consume the Iranian Left in the revolution itself, namely the Islamist forces. No one can argue that the Left could have predicted, or successfully resisted, the onslaught of the Islamic forces. What can be argued is that a more circumspect attitude, from the start, towards forces with a reactionary social and political project, and a more united, and critical, stand by the Left, were both possible and desirable. The existing categories of Marxist analysis were not to any great extent

of use when faced with the Islamist movement: class character seemed opaque; 'anti-imperialism' seemed and proved to be a hollow category, since it was directed against the USSR *and* the West; and the social project appeared to be, but was not designated as being, more conservative than that of the shah. But this weakness of analytic categories was compounded by two fatal, and avoidable, flaws, one with regard to democracy, and to what was broadly termed 'liberalism', the other with regard to the issue that underlay many of the political, and ethical, miscalculations of the Left, namely secularism. Here again the orientations of the Iranian Left, for all that they expressed values in the political culture of the society, at the same time reproduced the modular approach of the international Left. A disparagement of democracy, and of associated values such as human rights, women's equality and freedom of speech, plus a deep distrust of the ethnic minorities, was linked to a failure to see that a regime that sought to apply religious authority and text to modern problems was an inherently reactionary one. This indulgence of Islamist thinking and programme was, of course, made all the easier by the cultural nationalist, nativist, orientation of much of the Iranian intelligentsia: whatever else, it could be argued, Khomeini was not influenced by 'Western' ideas. Such equivocation on religion is, of course, a confusion still prevalent in much of the critical discourse in Iran to this day, where an intelligentsia formed within the revolution is still, in the form of thinkers such as Abdel Karim Soroush, seeking to reorder the intellectual jail of Islamic thinking rather than to make a clear, and calm, break with it. That some Left sectarians opposed to the IRI did still try to locate the imam and his associates in some 'dependency' on imperialism was only a further extension, a *reductio ad absurdum*, of the whole anti-imperialist position.

It is through these ideological orientations, as much as in the political and international contexts, that the development and fate of the Iranian Left can be understood. Many of these ideas, while originating in a pro-Soviet Marxism, had much wider resonance. It is, therefore, one of the most cruel paradoxes of the Iranian Left that the movement on which they had perhaps the greatest impact was the Islamist movement itself. That the Left's major intellectual achievement should have been to strengthen those who were determined to destroy them is but one of the many contradictory outcomes of this story.

The Iranian Left and the future

No one studying the history of the Iranian Left can fail to be impressed by the impact, commitment and heroism which it displayed throughout the twentieth century. At the same time its place within the overall course of Iranian history, and its impact on the cultural and intellectual life of the country, are immense.²³ The first step in any discussion of the relevance of

this history to contemporary Iran, and to its future, must start from this recognition. The Left itself may write a history that is sectarian, and self-justifying. Its opponents, particularly those associated with the Pahlavi or Islamic Republican states, may seek to downplay this impact, or relate all to some foreign, in this case Soviet, conspiracy. As a corrective to all these narratives, apologetic and denunciatory, a measured and comprehensive history of the Left, such as some Iranian writers are now themselves producing, is essential.

Yet the history of the Iranian Left has a broader relevance than this, for Iran and for the world as a whole. For Iran itself, the history of the Left testifies to the depths of social and political conflict that have characterised modern Iran, as much against internal enemies, the state and conservative social groups, as against those seeking to dominate from outside. Much is made, rightly, of the illusory and utopian character of Left aspirations. It is important, however, at a time when the history of twentieth-century socialism and of revolutionary movements is downplayed, to record the very real and enduring causes of this great challenge to the modern political and international order. The rise of the Iranian Left was not a result of Soviet manipulation, mistaken ideas or delusive leaders: just as the spread of communist and radical movements across the world in modern times reflected deep and global conflicts, so the repeated upheavals of modern Iranian history expressed something very real, the depth of the tensions within that society and between Iran and the outside world. Mistaken and dogmatic they may have been, but the different constituents of the Iranian Left challenged a very real system of domination.

At the same time, there are some other lessons to be drawn from this history which the Iranian Left, and indeed the Left elsewhere, might debate. The first, widely recognised since 1991, was the folly of an idealisation of, and identification with, the USSR. The particular problems this created for Iran, on the borders of the USSR, are evident, but they go to the heart of the political language, and hence political project, of much of the Left: this was designed not to create an independent, democratic, Iran, but to exchange one form of subjugation and repression for another, on the model of the eastern European 'peoples' democracies'. That so many sincere and courageous people believed in, and struggled for, this goal is as much a tragedy as is the fate of the movement itself. Secondly, there is a need to recognise the sectarianism of the Left, towards each other, but also towards a free discussion of ideas and policies. Iranian political life, but also in some measure intellectual life, was marked by a high degree of denunciation, excommunication and labelling, a feature which the Islamist police were able to put to good use in the insidious 'confessions' of the 1980s.²⁴ The success of such staged humiliations rested on a culture of disavowal among those watching. Thirdly, and at the core of all of these attitudes, lay the attitude to liberalism: the contraposition of liberalism and socialism, a product of the

First World War, was across the world one of the most costly sectarian legacies of the Leninist period, and one which in many countries, from Germany to Iran, cost the opposition movements dear. In Iran, as elsewhere, it reinforced the costs of that other poisoned legacy of Leninism, an uncritical 'anti-imperialism'. It may be that two decades and more of Islamist dictatorship in Iran will have lessened the easy repetition of these attitudes.

Finally, there is the issue of secularism itself: a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of democracy, this is the issue which, above all, the Iranian Left got wrong and which is now at the forefront of debates within Iran itself on the future of the Islamic Republic. There were those who, in 1906, during the Constitutional Revolution, voiced clear opposition to the role of the mullahs: they need, more than ever, to be heard. In the past, the great test of the Iranian Left concerned its ability to win support and challenge the state, at both internal and international levels. The great test in the future will be whether, within a recognition of what the Left contributed for better and worse to the making of modern Iranian history, the lessons of that history can themselves be recognised and put into practice.²⁵

Notes

- 1 In what follows, I draw extensively on the excellent study by Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran*, London: IB Tauris, 1999, and on Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982. See also the judicious evaluation of Behrooz and Abrahamian's later work on confessions (see note 22 below), Stephanie Cronin, 'The Left in Iran: illusion and disillusion', *Middle East Studies* 36(3), July 2000.
- 2 For historical context, see John Foran, *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformations in Iran from 1500 to the Revolution*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1993.
- 3 Hannah Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- 4 My overall approach here is an attempt to apply, to the Iranian case, the argument I develop in my *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power*, London: Macmillan, 1999.
- 5 Cosroe Chaqueri, 'Did the Soviets play a role in founding the Tudeh Party in Iran?', *Cahiers des Mondes Russes* 40(3), July–September 1999.
- 6 A fine example of how to do this, generous in tone but free of revolutionary myth, is Jorge Castañeda, *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994.
- 7 Yakov Blumkin, Comintern envoy, quoted in Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, London, 1963, p. 256.
- 8 For the Soviet betrayal thesis, see Shapour Ravasani, *Sowjetrepublik Gilan: Die Sozialistische Bewegung im Iran seit Ende des 19. Jh. Bis 1922*, Berlin: Basis-Verlag, 1973. For my own discussion, see 'Revolution in Iran: was it possible in 1921?', *Khamsin* 7, 1980, on which the above section is partially based. For general analysis, see Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, and Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921*, Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1995.
- 9 Chaqueri, 'Did the Soviets play a role in founding the Tudeh Party in Iran?'.

- 10 On this the authoritative work is Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*.
- 11 Louise Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: The Azerbaijan Crisis of 1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- 12 Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, London: I.B.Tauris, pp. 105–7, and 166 n. 67.
- 13 See Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, Ch. 2, and Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, London: Penguin, 1978, Ch. 8.
- 14 Asef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, London: Zed Books, 1987; Chris Goodey, 'Workers' councils in Iranian factories', *MERIP Reports* 86, June 1980. Goodey notes the low presence of the organised Left and Tudeh hostility to the whole idea of workers' councils.
- 15 Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, Ch. 4, is cogent on this point.
- 16 On the working class and wider support for the Tudeh in the 1940s, see Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Ch. 7.
- 17 For engagements with the Tudeh record, affirmative and critical, respectively, see interviews by the author with Ehsan Tabari, *MERIP Reports* 86, March–April 1980, and Fereidun Keshavarz, *MERIP Reports* 98, July–August 1981. The Tabari interview was published in anonymous form as a condition of it being given.
- 18 For a cogent development of this point, see Val Moghaddam, 'Socialism or anti-imperialism? The Left and revolution in Iran', *New Left Review* 166, November–December 1987. It was an argument along these lines, critical of dependency theory in general, and of its Iranian variants in particular, which I sought to develop in my *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, published in 1978, prior to the revolution, and issued in Persian translation in 1979 as *Iran: diktaturi va tuseye'yi sarmayidari* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1979). My emphasis on the role of indigenous political forces, and on the changes produced by capitalist development, were widely attacked by proponents of the dependency school. For later reflection, see Fred Halliday, 'The Iranian revolution and its implications', *New Left Review* 166.
- 19 Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West. The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996.
- 20 Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 126–7.
- 21 Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, London: University of California Press, 1999, provides graphic and chilling analysis of this.
- 22 I have described these events as I saw them at first-hand in *Nation and Religion in the Middle East*, London: Saqi Books, 2000, Ch. 8, 'Tehran 1979: the revolution turns to repression'.
- 23 For the impact on the literary intelligentsia, see Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000.
- 24 Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*.
- 25 For a discussion of the varied responses of the Iranian Left to the Islamic revolution and to the collapse of the USSR, see Morad Saghafi, 'Crossing the desert: Iranian intellectuals after the Islamic Republic', *Critique* 18, Spring 2001, esp. pp. 39–45.

FROM SOCIAL DEMOCRACY TO SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The twentieth-century odyssey of the Iranian Left

Afshin Matin-asgari

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Iranian Left holds a centennial balance sheet of great contributions, tragic flaws, tortuous transformations and surprising resilience. Despite relentless political repression, and contrary to the recurrent predications of its detractors, the Left has survived into the twenty-first century not only in exile or underground but in the very midst of the Islamic Republic, where an influential part of the reform movement has adopted the leftist mantle.

The following article will briefly trace the historical trajectory of the Iranian Left, concluding with a reflection on its current fortunes, seen as a major breakthrough, as well as a partial 'return', to democratic socialism, the original creed of the Left when it first emerged in Iran about a century ago.

The Left in studies of Iranian history

While its significance is often acknowledged, the Left remains a challenging, contentious and understudied subject in modern Iranian historiography. In the US, mainstream Iran scholarship has either ignored the Left or viewed it through the Cold War lenses of suspicion and hostility.¹ During the early 1980s, when the Left seemed a contender in post-revolutionary power struggles, it received more attention from academics, some of whom even gravitated to its views. But this changed as the Islamic Republic consolidated in Iran and the international intellectual climate became more conservative in the 1980s and 1990s.²

Thus the destruction of Iran's vibrant leftist movement by the Islamic Republic in the early 1980s was followed by its demise as a subject of academic interest.³ Among the small minority who continued to study the Left, the works of Ervand Abrahamian stand out. Abrahamian made two

significant departures: first, he brought a more sympathetic study of the communist Left to mainstream scholarship; and secondly, he widened the definition of the Left to include Islamic trends and hence showed its deep impact on the revolution and the Islamic Republic.⁴ A few other scholars have also produced important studies of the Left.⁵ But some of the best of these still tend to perpetuate aspects of old narratives on the Left's 'failure and defeat' and/or its non-democratic record.⁶ Briefly, the problem with such studies is twofold. First, they identify the Left with communists, or Marxist–Leninists, whose failure in seizing state power is then related to their anti-democratic character. Secondly, even if the Left were reduced to communism, historians still need to understand its record beyond the question of failure in coming to power; nor could such failure be explained by the communist Left's non-democratic performance, since the latter was defeated by regimes that were even less democratic.

Beyond ideological biases and methodological obstacles, the difficulties in studying the Left begin with the question of its exact definition and identification. The Persian word '*chap*' denotes a modern concept emerging in twentieth-century Iranian political culture. It is a direct translation of the English word 'Left', and/or the French '*la Gauche*', and carries the same imprecise connotations, referring to a wide political spectrum encompassing liberals and social democrats to democratic socialists and hardcore Stalinists. But in Iran, as elsewhere, Cold War political axioms first equated the Left with communism and then used stereotypical anti-communist labels of 'treason', 'fanaticism' and 'totalitarianism' to implicate and discredit the Left in general.⁷

In what follows, I will try to show how twentieth-century Iranian history might look different if we adopt a view of the Left that goes beyond communists. To do so, one must first find a common denominator that unifies the broad spectrum of the Left. This is necessary also in response to the old but recurrent cliché that the Left label has been applied to so many different entities that it no longer has any meaning. From the most general point of view, the common thread that runs through the manifold intellectual, political and social movements of the Left is a primary concern with human equality in all its dimensions. More specifically, the Iranian Left is part of the post-Enlightenment movement to achieve a modern ideal society, conforming to the universal norms of human rationality and egalitarianism.

While its historical antecedents may be found in various times and locales, the modern Left appeared first in nineteenth-century Europe in the wake of the Industrial and French Revolutions. A great worldwide transformation was then ushered in by the rapid spread of industrial capitalism, while the French Revolution, and its aftershocks in 1830, 1848 and 1871, inspired radical new concepts of citizenship rights, political democracy and popular sovereignty.⁸ Originally, during the French Revolution, the Left was an

amalgam of various sorts of republicans, including those who had more socially egalitarian ideas. But in the course of the nineteenth century, the European Left bifurcated into two main branches. First, there was the liberal democratic movement that rejected absolute monarchy and the privileges of nobility and clergy, and advocated government based on social contract, the market economy, and individual and property rights. The second, or social democratic movement, differed mainly in its argument that democracy and social equality were not generated by capitalism but were goals that had to be achieved by a conscious political movement, i.e. socialism.⁹

Liberal democracy appealed to the new propertied middle classes, while social democracy was tied to the modern industrial working classes. As these classes overlapped, so did social democratic and liberal politics. Moreover, both trends were intellectually grounded in the secular, universal values of the Enlightenment. And while both agreed that capitalism was a 'progressive' development in human history, socialists hoped to accomplish a social order more egalitarian and democratic beyond capitalism. Marx, and especially Engels, who lived longer, came to accept that socialism might be reached through the parliamentary road, an idea that was institutionalized by the powerful German Social Democratic Party in the late nineteenth century. In this tradition, revolution and class struggle were not the goals of social democracy, but measures that became unavoidable if the ruling classes refused to yield to the legally and democratically expressed demands of the majority.¹⁰

Social democracy: pioneer of Iran's progressive modernism (1905–20)

In Iran, social democratic ideas burst into the political arena during the Constitutional Revolution (1906–11).¹¹ Formed around 1905, the Iranian Social Democratic Party played an important role in revolutionary agitation, civil war and post-revolutionary contentions.¹² Iranian social democrats had branched off mainly from the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party and appealed to the modern-educated intelligentsia, progressive merchants and the newly emerging industrial working class. Their internationalist perspective is reflected in a 1908 correspondence with European socialist leaders Karl Kautsky and Georgi Plekhanov, over the class character of the Constitutional Revolution. Iranian social democrats agreed that the revolution was bourgeois, but – like their Russian counterparts – disagreed as to their own role in it. One faction saw this role as helping a nascent bourgeoisie to push its revolution forward and promote capitalist relations. The other called for revolutionary activity with a socialist agenda.¹³

The two factions, however, held together and put forward the revolution's most progressive political demands. Presented to Iran's new majles (parliament) in 1909, as the programme of the Democrat Party, it called for

freedom of the press, of speech and of organization, legal due process, the workers' right to organize and strike, universal male suffrage, and land reform.¹⁴ But the social democrats were marginalized when constitutional government effectively ended due to strife in the revolutionary coalition, tsarist intervention and foreign occupation during the First World War.¹⁵

Meanwhile, during the short period of its run, *Iran-e no* (1909–11), organ of the Democrat Party, had for the first time widely publicized the reform measures that were later picked up by the influential journals of the 1920s, *Iranshahahr* and *Farangestan*. However, the social democrats, joined by communists in the early 1920s, were the radical spearhead of a larger bloc of secular reformers and modernizers. This coalition also included groups like the Revival Party that later implemented parts of the common reformist platform under Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925–41).

The two main trends of Iran's right-wing politics also emerged in the wake of the Constitutional Revolution. The first was the traditional or Islamic Right, upholding monarchist and clerical authority to guard against change, equated with secularization and the loss of 'authentic' Iranian-Islamic identity. The second trend was the secular Right that combined monarchism with modern nationalism, being more favourable to foreign models, especially authoritarian ones implemented by national 'saviours' such as Reza Shah. Mainly appealing to privileged urban strata, neither strand of rightist ideology gained mass following until the 1970s, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89) led the Islamist Right to make common cause with the Left in a populist united front opposed to the monarchy (see below).

The Iranian Left, however, underwent a major transformation with the dual impact of the Bolshevik revolution and the rise of Reza Shah's autocratic modernizing state during the 1920s and 1930s. In 1920, the Communist Party of Iran was formed and, along with the more moderate Socialist and Revival Parties, continued the advocacy of the older social democratic reform programme.¹⁶ Soon, two factions appeared in the Communist Party: one, associated with Avetis Mika'ilian (Soltanzadeh), saw Iran ready to move towards a Soviet-type worker-peasant government; the other faction, led by Heydar Khan (Amoghli), considered Iran to be still at the beginning of a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Inspired and directly supported by the Bolsheviks, the Communist Party entered an alliance with a peasant-based revolutionary movement that declared a Soviet socialist republic in the northern province of Gilan (1920–21). The Gilan revolutionaries had come close to capturing Tehran and replacing the unstable British-supported regime. But their coalition with the Communist Party fell apart and the movement was defeated by the Tehran forces.¹⁷

In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks retreated from internationalism and world revolution; and by the 1930s, the Stalinist model of 'socialism in one country' had triumphed in the USSR. Stalinism, or Marxism–Leninism,

gave a new meaning to socialism, and hence to the Left, that was very different from what social democracy had been about. Stalinist socialism was a project aimed at the rapid development of pre-capitalist societies, such as the former tsarist empire, with a bureaucratic statist economy under a one-party dictatorship. Thus Marxism–Leninism jettisoned Marx's ideas on the necessity of capitalist development as a precondition to socialism, along with the tradition of democratic politics that was mainly the accomplishment of the international social democratic movement. However, the Stalinist version of socialism was appealing in societies like Iran, where capitalist development appeared late and retarded, the modern democratic tradition was weak, and authoritarian culture was the norm even among the reformist intelligentsia. Thus began the Stalinist detour of the Iranian Left led by the Tudeh Party in the mid-twentieth century.

The Tudeh Party: Stalinism and middle-class reformism

Originally seen as a reformist nationalist, Reza Khan had received at least partial support from the Left in the early 1920s.¹⁸ But as the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925–79), he quickly drifted to the Right, replacing constitutionalism with a modern autocracy and disallowing independent political expression. Leftists became the main target of repression with the passage of the 1931 law that declared membership in 'collectivist' organizations to be punishable by up to ten years' imprisonment. The uprooting of the Communist Party and leftist trade unions was followed by the 'most sensational political trial' of the 1930s, in which the famous 'Group of Fifty-three' received long prison sentences for having propagated Marxism.¹⁹ Meanwhile, an unknown number of Iranian leftists perished in Stalinist purges.²⁰

With the fall of Reza Shah, the Left re-emerged as the Tudeh Party of Iran, the most influential political and intellectual force of the mid-twentieth century. By all accounts, including its own official self-criticism (but excluding 'confessions' obtained under duress and torture), the Tudeh Party record is seriously flawed. Still, much of the anti-Tudeh rhetoric, reproduced in most scholarly studies, stems not from historical investigation but from conservative, nationalist and Islamist biases.

More balanced reappraisals of the Tudeh Party are overdue, especially with the passing of the Cold War. Here only a few points can be made briefly. First, and on the positive side, the Tudeh was successful primarily because it offered the most coherent vision of social reform to Iran's urban middle and lower classes. The party's initial and phenomenal success was due more to its conscious revival of the social democratic tradition than to the presence of the Red Army or Soviet manipulations. In 1941, the Tudeh was launched as a party adhering to constitutionalism, nationalism, democracy and reformist socialism, not Marxism–Leninism.²¹ Moreover, as with

the older social democracy, the Tudeh's main social base was a coalition of the modern urban middle and working classes.²² The Tudeh was not revolutionary or proletarian, even though it propagated revolutionary ideas and defended working class interests more than any other twentieth-century party. Other middle class parties, such as those in the National Front, were concerned mostly with the restoration of national sovereignty and constitutionalism. But the Tudeh had a serious focus on the social question, placing issues such as the redistribution of Crown lands, labour law reforms, equal pay and voting rights for women, on the national agenda.²³

Secondly, the Tudeh's major failure, and the greatest setback for the Iranian Left in general, was its capitulation to Stalinism and the dictates of the Soviet state. But it must be remembered that an important section of the Iranian Left resisted this capitulation and continued on an independent path. A host of socialist or left-leaning intellectuals, including Sadeq Hedayat, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Khalil Maleki, Anvar Khomeini, Eprim Eshaq and Naser Vosuqi, broke with the Tudeh in the 1940s. Some of these formed the Socialist Society of the Iranian Masses (called the Third Force in the 1950s and the Socialist League in the 1960s) and tried to preserve the Tudeh Party's original social democratic, nationalist and reformist agenda.²⁴ But in the highly polarized Cold War atmosphere of the mid-twentieth century, this independent Left was marginalized as it was attacked by both the Stalinist Left and the regime. Nevertheless, the non-Tudeh Left persisted as an intellectual force and had an impact both on the 1950s National Front and on the next generation of radicals who looked for inspiration beyond Soviet Marxism between the 1950s and the 1970s. During this period, leftist views were expressed in influential periodicals like *Elm va zendegi*, *Andisheh va honar*, *Negain* and *Arash*, as well as in more popular weeklies such as *Ferdowsi* and a host of literary and semi-political publications in Tehran and other cities.²⁵ Along with the Tudeh, the Socialist League was the co-founder of the Confederation of Iranian Students, the country's largest and most enduring opposition organization during the two decades prior to the 1978–79 revolution.²⁶

A final word on the Tudeh Party must deal with the charge of 'treason' that is often used to dismiss and discredit the party and its entire record. Tudeh Party leaders lacked independent initiative, and their subservience to Soviet state ideology may seem a 'betrayal' of the great expectations they aroused in two generations of leftists. But the party's Stalinism and pro-Soviet line did not automatically amount to 'treason', a political accusation that was never borne out by any independent court of law or historical investigation. Originating in the military courts of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941–79), this charge was magnified in the anti-Tudeh polemics of various nationalist, Islamist and Leftist groups, and finally 'proven' in the tribunals of the Islamic Republic. From a less partial point of view, despite its faulty policies and/or inadequate reactions, the Tudeh Party was not

responsible for *causing* events such as the 1945–46 Azerbaijan crisis or the 1953 overthrow of Premier Mohammad Mosaddeq; nor were its positions in the 1960s and 1970s, for example vis-à-vis the White Revolution and the shah's regime, much different from those of the National Front.²⁷

The darkest moment of the Tudeh Party came after the revolution, when it opportunistically sided with the Islamic Republic between 1979 and 1983. By almost any definition, active support for a regime bent on the bloody decimation of all dissent amounts to a betrayal of progressive politics. For the Tudeh, this blunder was also an act of self-destruction. It was smashed in 1983, when the Islamic Republic was done with destroying the independent Left and all other opposition. Thus the forced confessions of Tudeh leaders to charges of 'treason', during the show trials of the Islamic Republic, marked the tragic end of a false road taken by one tendency in the Iranian Left. Still, the record of the Tudeh Party cannot be judged by these events alone;²⁸ nor can the Iranian Left in general be measured by the performance of the Tudeh Party.

Westoxication, Islamic populism and Third Worldist Marxism: the heterogeneous Left of the 1960s and 1970s

A major legacy of the Tudeh was the influence of its Stalinist ideology on the opposition of the 1960s and 1970s, the ensuing revolution, and the Islamic Republic. During the 1980s, while mainstream academics were preoccupied with the rise of Islamism and the supposed failures of modernism and secularism, a few scholars had stressed the impact of modern secular ideologies, especially Marxism, on the Iranian revolution and the Islamic Republic.²⁹ In the 1990s, a similar analysis was advanced in Iran, especially by Sadeq Zibakalam, a neo-liberal thinker who attributed the initial anti-imperialist and anti-democratic thrust of the revolution, and the Islamic Republic, to leftist and Marxist–Leninist influences.³⁰ This new recognition of leftist influence could have a remedial effect on the historical record, provided it is not used to revive the 'blame the Left' agenda or oversimplify a complex phenomenon.³¹

The genealogy of leftist influences on Iran's pre-revolutionary political culture is in fact more indirect and less understood in its subtleties. The Tudeh bequeathed its Marxist–Leninist ideology to the Iranian Left when the party itself was largely discredited and effectively uprooted in 1953. This new ideology dropped the older social democratic commitment to both socialism and democracy, as goals to be reached by passing through and going beyond a certain stage of capitalist development. According to Marxism–Leninism, the Bolshevik revolution had changed the world into a battle ground between two 'camps'. One of these was the socialist camp, led by the USSR, and the other was the camp of imperialism, led by the US. This world-view was mirrored by the Anglo-American side of the Cold

War, who saw their camp as the positive contender and insisted on calling it 'the Free World' or 'the West'.

The great ideological divide of the mid-twentieth century between 'the West' and 'the East' was primarily a Cold War construction that built on older ideological dichotomies, including those with strong religious undertones (the jihad/crusade mentality). Discussions of 'the West', its various meanings and their origins in modern European philosophy, have been at the centre of recent studies of Iranian intellectual history. But these works do not pay adequate attention to the Cold War gestation of the notion 'West' and how its identification with imperialism, especially with the US, was linked to the Tudeh Party's Marxist–Leninist discourse.³²

Some nineteenth-century and constitutional-era intellectuals had criticized aspects of European culture and their impact on Iran. But these were qualified critiques rather than blanket condemnations, except in the case of clerics like Fazlollah Nuri who totally rejected '*farangi*' (i.e. 'French' or European) culture on religious grounds.³³ Such views, however, had no major following among Iran's modern-educated intellectuals, whose general attitude towards European culture was positive up to the 1940s and 1950s. This included even Marxists like Taqi Arani, the leader of the 'Group of Fifty-three', who during his 1938 trial defended himself by stressing the 'Western' origin of his 'democratic and socialist ideas'. Arani invoked Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu as champions of the rights of free speech and thought. He also referred to America, Britain, France and Switzerland as the world's most advanced countries where such rights were respected.³⁴

The intellectual 'paradigm shift' towards a largely negative depiction of an entity called 'the West' occurred with the intervention of the Tudeh's Marxist–Leninist discourse, especially in the post-1953 period when the Pahlavi monarchy was increasingly and openly aligned with 'the West'.³⁵ Resistance to 'the West' then became a hallmark of the cultural landscape of the two pre-revolutionary decades, when no form of political opposition was allowed. In 1962, the notion of *Gharbzadegi*, or 'Westoxication', arguably the most potent concept in Iran's 'culture wars' of the 1960s and 1970s, burst upon the scene with Jalal Al-e Ahmad's essay of the same title. A leading writer who in the 1940s had broken with the Tudeh Party to become an independent socialist, Al-e Ahmad almost immediately popularized the term 'Westoxication', by which he seemed to convey Iran's economic, political and cultural subjugation to 'the West'. Originally, 'Westoxication' had been an obscure term coined by Ahmad Fardid, a philosopher inspired by Heideggerian 'anti-humanist' condemnations of 'Western' civilization, and harking back to Iranian illuminationist theosophy. Al-e Ahmad's usage of 'Westoxication' retained a key aspect of this original metaphysical dimension, i.e. the loss of 'authentic' human subjectivity in a 'Western' culture dominated by material gain and technology. But

he politicized the concept by depicting 'the West' as something very akin to 'imperialism' or 'colonialism'. Al-e Ahmad had drawn simultaneously on French and German existentialism, cultural (Gramscian) Marxism, Third Worldist anti-colonialism and Marxist–Leninist theories of imperialism. His synthesis emphasized culture as the site both of 'Western' domination and of resistance to 'the West'; and here he made an important departure in modern intellectual discourse by affirming Islam as a key component of cultural resistance and 'authentic' Iranian subjectivity. With this new twist, 'Westoxication' became the articulation of widely shared sentiments, not only among the intelligentsia, but also at the level of modernist popular culture, i.e. in film, music, and mass circulation books and periodicals.³⁶ 'Westoxication' was thus the core element of an Iranian version of mid-twentieth-century Third Worldist ideologies of resistance to imperialism.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the influential publicist Ali Shari'ati, and the founders of the Organization of the Iranian People's Mojahedin guerrillas, mixed the 'Westoxication' discourse with much stronger doses of Marxism to forge an anti-imperialist, populist and revolutionary 'Islamic ideology'. Thus was born 'Islamic Marxism', an ingenious polemical label used by the regime in the 1970s to describe its most ardent enemies, i.e. Islamist and Marxist guerrillas and student activists, as well as a minority of clerics and seminarians.³⁷

This peculiar fusion of politicized Islam and Stalinist Marxism had a certain 'fit' with the general character of Pahlavi-era modernization. The product of an authoritarian modernist culture, the middle-class intelligentsia was largely unfamiliar with modern democratic politics and its critique of religion and clerical authority. Earlier in the century, the social democrats had called for the separation of religion and state. But the Tudeh Party set a new precedent for Marxists by refusing critical engagement with religion or clerical power. In fact the Tudeh had initially gone as far as insisting on the party's adherence to Shi'i Islam.³⁸

On the other hand, while Iran's clerical establishment had remained politically and intellectually conservative, by the mid-twentieth century a new movement of Islamic modernism had emerged. Led mostly by lay-religious figures, this was in many ways a conscious intellectual response to the success of the Tudeh Party and Marxism among the educated middle classes. The Islamic modernist movement had a liberal/conservative branch and a left-leaning tendency, including a group of 'God-worshipping Socialists'.³⁹ The Islamic Left of the 1960s and 1970s, i.e. the followers of Ali Shari'ati and the Mojahedin guerrillas, issued directly from this latter tendency.

Parallel to and often overlapping with the Islamic Left was the subculture of the secular intellectual Left. This too was a diverse trend encompassing Third Worldist Marxists, Guevarists, existentialist Marxists, social democrats, Maoists and pro-Soviet Marxist–Leninists. The

intellectual Left enlisted leading academics, artists, poets, writers and translators, as well as a larger second echelon of literati in both private and state-owned publishing houses, and in the television and film industries. Cumulatively, these intellectuals had established a strong culture of dissent, where being a member of the intelligentsia was almost synonymous with being on the Left.⁴⁰

The secular Left was particularly influential among university students, the largest social base of opposition in the two pre-revolutionary decades. Despite systematic repression, militant student protests periodically erupted on Iranian campuses throughout the 1960s and 1970s, while abroad they were highly structured and organized. Mainly led by the Confederation of Iranian Students/National Union, the student movement abroad was remarkably successful as the international voice of the opposition. It was also twentieth-century Iran's most effective and enduring experiment in pluralistic politics, uniting various factions (mostly leftists, but also nationalists and Islamists) in a working coalition that lasted for about two decades until the outbreak of the 1978–79 revolution.⁴¹

The revolution: a populist coalition of the Left and the Right

The 1978–79 revolution succeeded under clerical leadership and with a dominant Islamist ideology, but it was also the culmination of a long-term historical struggle, led by the urban middle classes, against a modern autocratic monarchy, supported by the US. The clergy rose to the revolution's leadership only in 1978 when it closed ranks behind Khomeini, who had adapted his brand of Islamist rhetoric to fit the strong populist, anti-monarchist and anti-imperialist sentiments of the 1970s. An innovative blend of conservative and leftist discourses, Khomeini's populism was articulated in the familiar idioms of Shi'i Islam, well-suited to rouse and unite Iran's urban middle and lower classes, under an authoritarian charismatic leadership.⁴²

The overall character of the revolution, however, remained bourgeois. This could be seen in the middle-class background of both leftist and Islamist forces that led the revolution, as well as in the social and class agenda that soon prevailed in the new regime.⁴³ In retrospect, the question of Iran being a thoroughly capitalist society under the Islamic Republic is no longer even debated, whereas two decades ago it was a contested political and academic issue.⁴⁴ The working class joined the revolution rather late but made an important contribution by helping the 1978 general strikes, especially in the oil sector, become a total success. Soon, workers' councils were formed and took over business enterprises across the country. But, as had been the case under the monarchy, the new regime did not allow workers to have independent unions or political activity.⁴⁵ Revolutionary activity was less noticeable in the countryside, but even there a movement of

land seizures emerged in several provinces when the old regime collapsed. The strong leftist-populist sentiments of the revolution, however, were apparent in the slogans of the 1978–79 mass demonstrations. These included recurrent attacks on ‘dependent capitalism’ and the ‘exploitation of man by man’, and demands for sweeping nationalization of all private banks, insurance companies and large enterprises.⁴⁶

Histories of the revolution often fail to note that clerical rule was not part of its original agenda. It emerged only as a third alternative to two other possibilities for new regime formation after the shah fell. The first and more likely outcome seemed to be a bourgeois liberal republic, rather similar to Iran’s old constitutional regime but eliminating the king and giving a share of power to the clergy. The second possibility was a form of ‘people’s democracy’, advocated by Marxists and Islamic leftists, whose combined influence was quickly spreading after the revolution.

The idea of a regime based on Khomeini’s notion of *velayat-e faqih*, i.e. the ultimate political rule of the highest ranking cleric(s), was proposed in the summer of 1979. It was then aggressively promoted by Khomeini’s closest and mostly clerical followers, gathered in the newly formed Islamic Republic Party. But this proposal faced stiff resistance from secular and Islamic liberals and leftists, the moderate clergy, and ethnic minorities, especially the Kurds. In 1979, a left-leaning organization, the Democratic National Front, tried to bring all of these forces together in a coalition that seemed to have a fighting chance of stopping a clerical takeover. But this chance was doomed when a ‘second revolution’ was launched with the US Embassy hostage-taking in the autumn of 1979. This brilliant coup allowed the Khomeini faction to place itself at the head of yet another anti-imperialist mass mobilization, outflank the Left, silence all opposition and push through a new constitutional proposal based on clerical domination. Thus moderates, represented by Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan’s government, were squeezed out of power and the Left was split as a large segment of it followed the Tudeh Party to support Khomeini’s ‘anti-imperialist’ line.⁴⁷

But a substantial part of the secular Left, independents, Marxist–Leninist groups and Kurdish organizations remained in active opposition. From the very beginning, many leftists and liberals had openly rejected a religious government, while some Marxist groups offered rather cogent analyses of its emerging character.⁴⁸ For example, according to the Worker’s Path Organization (*Rah-e Kargar*), the Islamic Republic was a ‘Bonapartist’ regime, ruled by a ‘clerical caste’ that manoeuvred between social classes and deliberately exploited the politics of permanent crisis and war.⁴⁹

Leftist opposition to the Islamic Republic is documented in *Azadi*, organ of the National Democratic Front, *Kar*, organ of the Organization of the Iranian People’s Fada’i Guerrillas (Minority), and various publications of other leftist groups, as well as in dailies such as *Ayandegan* and *Peygham-e emruz*, weeklies like *Tehran-Mosavvar* and *Omid-e Iran*, and independent

leftist periodicals like *Ketab-e jom'eh* and *Naqd-e agah*.⁵⁰ Edited by the poet Ahmad Shamlu, and enlisting other leading intellectuals, *Ketab-e jom'eh* was a good representative of the independent Left. It was openly critical of the new regime's policies, condemned the Tudeh Party's collusion with it, and supported the democratic rights of women and ethnic minorities.⁵¹ It is important to remember this record in order to dispel the right-wing myth of the Left's responsibility for the establishment of the Islamic Republic. In fact, it was the Left, mainly the Mojahedin, Kurdish groups and the Marxists – and not liberals, monarchists and nationalists – who put up the most determined resistance against the clerical takeover and paid most dearly for it.

The Islamic Left, like its secular counterpart, had quickly split into pro- and anti-regime factions. The Mojahedin organization represented Islamic leftists who had fought the shah's regime independently of Khomeini's followers and whose Marxist-influenced views were rejected by the latter. Despite their conciliatory efforts, the Mojahedin were shunned by Khomeini, denied participation in the new regime and forced into opposition. In 1980–81, the Mojahedin, supported by a host of leftist and moderate groups, rallied around President Abolhasan Banisadr (1980–81) to resist a total takeover by the Islamic Republic Party. This coalition, along with independent Marxist and Kurdish organizations, was eventually drawn into a showdown with the regime in June 1981. The combined opposition forces staged large demonstrations and engaged the regime in armed clashes across the country. The Islamic Republic responded by unleashing an unprecedented reign of terror, going as far as shooting demonstrators, including children, on the spot. In less than six months, 2,665 persons, 80 per cent of whom were Mojahedin members, were executed.⁵² Thousands more were killed, imprisoned or fled into exile, as the Mojahedin, Kurdish and secular leftist organizations fought a guerrilla campaign of resistance that was crushed by 1983–84. Last to be eliminated were the Tudeh Party and other Marxists who had supported the regime's war against 'liberals' and 'ultra-leftists'.

In the end, the Islamic Republic emerged victorious. It had accomplished what the shah had failed to do: an entire generation of Marxist and Muslim leftists was decisively destroyed. The number of those executed in the 1981–85 reign of terror was reported to be between 8,000 and 10,000. By comparison, during the most repressive decade of the shah's rule in the 1970s, less than 100 political prisoners were executed.⁵³ The 1980s' death toll rose even higher when in 1988 another mass execution of political prisoners, including many who had already served time, took place. According to various estimates, an additional 2,500 to 12,000 were executed in 1988 alone, just one year before Khomeini's death.⁵⁴

Still, a large faction of the Islamist Left survived by pledging total loyalty to the Islamic Republic and cooperating in the destruction of the

opposition, including the independent Left. Like the Tudeh, this tendency rejected democracy ('liberalism') in favour of a repressive regime that promised anti-imperialism, statist welfare economics and other populist measures. The loyalist Islamic Left was attached to the Islamic Republic Party, whose initial agenda had incorporated leftist and populist demands to better compete with the Mojahedin and Marxists.⁵⁵

The social base of the pro-regime Islamist Left was also the middle and lower classes, represented mostly by university students and some younger and low-to-mid-ranking clerics. Elements of this faction had planned and executed the US Embassy hostage-taking operation. The ensuing hostage crisis was then used as the springboard for launching the 1980 'Cultural Revolution', designed mainly to eliminate independent secular and Islamic leftists from their university strongholds. For this purpose, loyalist Islamic students' associations were brought together and forcibly took over all universities. Thousands of faculty and students were purged and hundreds were jailed or executed, while higher education was halted for at least two years. When the universities reopened in 1983, the student population had dropped from about 140,000 to 117,000.⁵⁶

The struggle against the Left then continued inside the regime throughout the 1980s. Much of the factional conflict of the Islamic Republic's first decade involved the tensions between its left and right wings, which Khomeini kept together for the duration of the war with Iraq (1980–88). Following the 1981 assassination of key Islamic Republic Party leaders, Islamic leftists held most key executive positions, as well as the majority in the first, second and third Islamic majles elections. But after long and protracted conflicts, leftist policies of statist economic controls, labour and land reform, and exporting the revolution were rejected or contained by the regime's right wing, composed mainly of conservative clerics and bazaaris. In 1987, there was an open split between the two factions, followed by the dissolution of the Islamic Republic Party.⁵⁷ By the end of the 1980s, the revolution's populist phase was over, leaving behind a society ravaged by a decade of war and repression, and tired of empty anti-imperialist slogans, where the gap between the social classes was wider than it had been under the shah.⁵⁸

'Socialism is still alive': towards a twenty-first-century democratic Left?

During its second decade, after Khomeini's death in 1989, the Islamic Republic became a different regime as the drift away from populist and statist policies accelerated. In 1992, leftists were decisively purged from the government by a coalition headed by President Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani who promised a new course of economic 'reconstruction' by implementing World Bank and IMF policies of price deregulation, cutting

subsidies, privatization and foreign loans. By the late 1990s, these policies had worsened the economic situation, with high inflation and unemployment, leading to significant outbreaks of popular unrest.⁵⁹

Added to the general discontent was serious intellectual dissension in the ranks of the regime's supporters. The project of creating a new generation loyal to clerical rule had failed. In politics, as well as in the wider cultural arena, no viable ideological rationale for clerical domination could be forged.⁶⁰ Moreover, older secular and religious dissidents were now increasingly joined by secular and clerical defectors from the regime. Many of the new dissidents came from the regime's Left faction. Purged from positions of power, they had gradually reconsidered their beliefs and adopted more democratic positions.⁶¹

Most of this new breed of 'religious intellectual' either had no clear positions on class and socio-economic issues or gravitated towards liberalism rather than socialism. Still, in the daily press, and in current political and academic studies, they are identified as 'the Left', a label many accept and even insist on using.⁶² This is due partly to these individuals' past positions but more importantly to the fact that they still stand to the left of a ruling clique that is obviously on the extreme Right.⁶³ But this nomenclature also testifies to the political attraction of the term 'Left', despite (or because of) its close association with secular ideologies, atheism, Marxism and the Mojahedin, concepts and memories that the Islamic Republic was supposed to have eradicated.

The Islamic Left with the most coherent politics and least involvement with the regime was the group around the monthly *Iran-e farda*. This tendency came from the left wing of the Iran Freedom Movement, an Islamic nationalist organization opposed to the shah and led by Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani and Ali Shari'ati from the 1950s to the 1970s. While accepting the Islamic Republic in principle, *Iran-e farda* had, since its inception in the early 1990s, consistently criticized clerical rule. In 1997, *Iran-e farda*'s editor, Ezzatollah Sahabi, tried to run for president as an 'Islamic social democrat', but was disqualified by the powerful clerical Council of Guardians. Until its closure in 2000, *Iran-e farda* was reported to have been the country's most widely read political monthly.⁶⁴ The brand of Islamic 'social democracy' it advocated had the potential for leading a transition away from clerical rule to a more representative coalition of Islamists, nationalists, liberals and moderate leftists (a role similar to that played by the Iran Freedom Movement in 1978–79).

Most other 'new leftists' or 'religious intellectuals' are haunted by the question of their involvement with the repressive policies of the 1980s. This is a serious issue especially because these intellectuals tend not to admit their own role in suppressing the secular and democratic trends whose ideas they now claim to champion.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, the revival of a secular and

democratic political culture has been an unmistakable challenge to the Islamic Republic during the 1990s.

Earlier in the decade, during Hashemi-Rafsanjani's presidency, mounting intellectual, political and cultural dissent indicated that the repressive policies of the 1980s had become counter-productive. Thus began a new strategy of combining economic 'liberalization' with gestures at political reform and cultural flexibility. Repression and violence were not abandoned, but their application became more sophisticated and selective.⁶⁶ From a broader perspective, the changes of the 1990s corresponded to the growing political sophistication and assertiveness of the urban middle classes, and their weariness of clerical domination. The 1997 election of Mohammad Khatami to the presidency was the clearest indication of this trend, as well as the recognition by even clerical hardliners that without some flexibility, the regime's very survival could be endangered.⁶⁷

Thus began a drift towards a third stage in the life of the Islamic Republic, as various groups, both secular and Islamic, rallied behind Khatami's promises of change and reform. A new discourse on civil society, democracy, religious and political pluralism, and women's rights had been quietly brewing in marginal periodicals during the 1990s. Under Khatami, it burst into mainstream daily newspapers that spearheaded the demands for reform, displaying a vibrancy and sophistication seen only in the revolution's first year. The new press is a middle-class phenomenon, sustained by private financiers and advocating the rule of law, democracy and meritocracy, and cultural and religious toleration, and opposing extra-legal political and economic privileges. Only secondarily addressed, and often ignored, are issues of social justice or the grave problems facing the poor, the unemployed and the labouring population.⁶⁸

But there is also a secular Left standing apart from various Islamist factions and in direct continuity with earlier leftist traditions. This is mostly an intellectual Left that survived the repression of the 1980s by reverting back to the strategy used under the shah, i.e. avoiding overt political confrontation and focusing instead on cultural production, especially in books and periodicals, where the vicissitudes of censorship have permitted a margin of expression to leftist themes. For example, the monthly *Chista* has managed to remain in print since the early 1980s by putting together a curious assortment of Marxist articles, literary and artistic pieces, and Zoroastrian studies. A more directly leftist periodical, *Naqd-e agah*, did not survive beyond the mid-1980s. But other left-leaning monthlies like *Jame'e-ye salem* and *Farhang-e towse'eh* were allowed to be published in the 1990s. In addition, leftist material could be found in the leading cultural monthly *Adineh*, published throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as well as in *Negah-e no*, a quarterly that began publication in 1991, catering to a smaller literati audience. In the more open atmosphere of the late 1990s, leftist articles in

such periodicals became more frequent and explicit, while some new and openly leftist publications came to the fore.⁶⁹

Fasl-e sabz was launched in 1999 as a socialist organ with Marxist leanings and links to the Islamic Left, but its leading writers, Naser Zarafshan and Fariborz Ra'isdana, were soon arrested.⁷⁰ A different type of Left publication is *Karmozd*, which appeared in 1999 to address working-class concerns as directly expressed by activists of the labour movement. *Karmozd* positioned itself in the regime's reformist camp, but it was more radical and independent than the official labour daily, *Kar va kargar* (also tied to the Khatami faction). *Karmozd* criticized the reformist discourse on freedom and democracy for ignoring the needs and grievances of Iran's working people. Along with other Left periodicals, it published documentary studies on working-class conditions, showing standard patterns of lay-offs, strikes, and wage levels drastically below the officially declared minimum subsistence.⁷¹

Leftists' views also found more expression in the daily press of the 1997–2000 period. An outstanding example was a 1999 piece published by the daily *Neshat* and appropriately entitled 'Socialism is still alive'. This was an interview with the old socialist Anvar Khomeh'i, a living testimony to the transformations and persistence of the Left throughout an entire century. Khomeh'i's political career began in the 1930s with membership in the 'Group of Fifty-three'; in the 1940s, he joined and then left the Tudeh Party to continue an independent path; and in the 1990s, he emerged as a bold critic of the Islamic Republic. Khomeh'i's 1999 views included a crisp and unapologetic defence of democratic socialism as a political vision relevant to the problems of today's world. The interview was noteworthy also because it was conducted by Ebrahim Nabavi, Iran's most famous political satirist, who revealed himself well informed about and at least partly sympathetic to socialism.⁷²

Beyond articulating intellectual dissent, the Left has not been allowed to link up with any popular movement of opposition. Dissatisfaction, unrest and occasional violent outbursts are regularly reported among the urban poor and working classes. But so far they have been contained and prevented from finding organized political expression.⁷³ Movements for women's rights and student opposition are other venues for leftist politics. But in both cases the regime has adamantly prevented independent organizing.

In July 1999, university students ignited the most serious explosion of popular protest since the early 1980s. For several years there had been some political build-up on campuses, mostly directed by the Unity Consolidation Bureau (*Daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat*), the same organization that was created during the 'Cultural Revolution' of the early 1980s to purge the universities of dissent. By the 1990s, the Unity Consolidation Bureau had evolved into an active organ of the regime's 'Left' faction, and after 1997 it became the

most radical supporter of Khatami. But there was also independent student activism by Islamist, leftist and secular nationalist groups.⁷⁴

The 1999 upheaval began with small student demonstrations against the closure of the reformist daily *Salam*. A retaliatory vigilante raid on Tehran University dorms then ignited larger protests that quickly spilled into the streets and turned into several days of violent clashes in more than a dozen major cities. The pro-Khatami Unity Consolidation Bureau lost control of the situation and only the massive use of force finally quelled the protests.⁷⁵ This event showed that Iran once again had a militant student movement that could pose a serious challenge to the Islamic Republic by leading popular opposition beyond the limits set by the regime's reformist faction.

The slogans of the 1999 student protests were often radically anti-regime and anti-clerical, but they were not leftist, anti-imperialist or focused on popular socio-economic grievances. The new student movement has been so far confined to campuses, and the course of its future politicization remains uncertain. It will not necessarily become more radical or take a leftist turn, but it has the potential to do so. Iran's great student opposition of the 1960s and 1970s was radicalized after its initial modest and reformist demands were stifled by regime violence.⁷⁶

Finally, there is the Left opposition abroad, active mainly among Iranian exiles, refugees, and immigrants in Europe and America, and including various tendencies and organizations. The Left opposition abroad was formed in the 1980s when growing repression in Iran forced the Mojahedin and Marxist organizations to find safer bases outside the country.

The Mojahedin survived in exile but underwent drastic transformations. The initially pluralist coalition they led soon fell apart due to a host of problems, including their own heavy-handed impositions. Meanwhile, the Mojahedin gradually shed their 'anti-imperialist' and 'Islamic socialist' image, developed a strong leadership cult and attached themselves to the Iraqi government. Unlike most other leftists, they accepted no criticism, claiming to be the only true alternative to 'Khomeini's regime', because they had given the largest number of martyrs to the cause.⁷⁷ These authoritarian postures, and their close association with the Iraqi regime, led to the Mojahedin's isolation in the exile community. They have claimed credit for armed actions and assassinations of the regime's personnel in Iran. But such acts are of dubious political value and may even serve the regime's purpose of portraying the opposition as a frightful alternative, composed of violent fanatics tied to foreign governments. Still, the Mojahedin, along with a number of 'orthodox' communist organizations, have persisted in total opposition to the Islamic Republic, including its reformist faction.⁷⁸

The majority of the secular Left abroad took a different direction. Soon after relocating to Europe and the US in the early 1980s, most Marxist-Leninist groups either dissolved or continued as small circles engaged in anti-regime propaganda among students. However, despite the

substantial growth and politicization of post-revolutionary Iranian communities abroad, no unified leftist opposition, comparable to the 1960–70 Confederation of Iranian Students, emerged. Disillusioned by a decade of war and revolution, and influenced by monarchist propaganda and an international conservative drift, Iranians abroad in the 1980s and 1990s were not as responsive to the Left as they had been before the revolution.

Nevertheless, Leftists continued their theoretical work, propaganda and publication activities. Many groups and individuals began to criticize leftist dogmatism and authoritarianism, reflecting on their own past, the historic defeats of the Iranian Left and the fall of Soviet-style socialism.⁷⁹ By the late 1990s, most leftist tendencies were critically supportive of the reform movement in Iran, without necessarily accepting the framework of a religious government. The majority of those on the Left were no longer communists but social democrats or democratic socialists, even though some remained committed radicals or Marxists.⁸⁰ During Khatami's second presidential term, however, the movement of reform from within the Islamic Republic reached an impasse, and therefore the more radical views in the Left appeared to have gained some ground.

To conclude, as with the international Left, the theme of the Iranian Left's 'final demise' and 'ideological bankruptcy' has echoed throughout the twentieth century. Such declarations, however, have repeatedly proven to be ideological anticipations rather than serious historical reflections. The above investigation was intended as a contribution towards a more balanced assessment of the Left's place in contemporary Iranian history.

Despite its long journey, filled with pitfalls, dead ends, detours and defeats, the Iranian Left has survived into a new century. So far, and as in most of its past history, the Left exists more as a potential rather than an actual political movement. But if this potential is actualized, we are likely to see an Iranian Left that will be once again both democratic and socialist, as it was in the early twentieth century.

Notes

- 1 The case against the Left has been first and foremost articulated by those bent on destroying it, i.e. in the political tribunals and official propaganda of the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic. See *Ketab-e siyah* (1956) and *Seyr-e komonism dar Iran* (1957), published by Tehran's Martial Law Offices following the 1953 CIA–monarchist coup. See also *An Alliance of Reaction and Terror: The Revealing Story of Nearly 15-Years of Anti-Iranian Activities Abroad* (Tehran: Focus, 1977) and *Asrar-e Fa'aliyatha-ye zedd-e Irani dar kharej az keshvar* (Tehran: 1977). The latter works were meant to discredit leftist student and exile opposition abroad. Being police and intelligence productions, these publications are without individual authorship.

On the history of the Left's repression under the Pahlavis and the Islamic Republic, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

Examples of Cold War-era scholarly studies of the Left are George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran (1918–1948): A Study in Big Power Rivalry* (Ithaca, NY: 1949) and *Iran under the Pahlavis* (Stanford, CT: Hoover Institute, 1978); Donald L. Wilber, *Iran: Past and Present* (Princeton, NJ: 1951) and *Riza Shah Pahlavi: The Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran* (New York: Expositions Press, 1975); and Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966).

Negative and/or dismissive assessments of the Left continued in post-revolutionary studies such as Gholmahosseini Afkhami, *The Iranian Revolution: Thanatos on a National Scale* (Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 1985); Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); and Mohsen M. Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution: From Monarchy to Islamic Republic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988).

The Left received less than adequate treatment even in the more balanced accounts of Richard Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966); Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran* (London: Yale University Press, 1981); and Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of Ayatollahs* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

A standard academic text of the 1990s, Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville (eds), *The Cambridge History of Iran: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic*, Vol. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) has no index entries for the term 'Left', nor do its Chapters 12 and 13, on modern Iran, deal with the topic.

- 2 From a US foreign policy perspective, this interest was reflected in periodicals like *Problems of Communism*. See, for example, Shahram Chubin, 'Leftist forces in Iran', *Problems of Communism* XXIV (July–August 1980): 1–25; and Zalmay Khalilzad, 'Moscow's double-track policy; Islamic Iran: Soviet Iran', *Problems of Communism* XXXIII (January–February 1984): 1–20.

For leftists' views, or views sympathetic to the Left, see M.H. Pesaran, 'Dependent capitalism in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14(4) (1982): 501–22; Cosroe Chaqueri, 'Sultanzade: the forgotten revolutionary theoretician of Iran: a biographical sketch', *Iranian Studies* XVII(2–3) (Spring–Summer 1984): 215–37; Hamid Dabashi, 'The poetics of politics: commitment in modern Persian literature', *Iranian Studies* XVIII (1985): 147–88; Leonardo Alishan, 'Ahmad Shamlu: the rebel poet in search of an audience', *Iranian Studies* XVIII (1985): 375–422; Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, 'Protest and perish: a history of the Writers' Association of Iran', *Iranian Studies* XVIII (1985): 189–230; Nozar Alaolmolki, 'The new Iranian Left', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41(2) (Spring 1987): 218–33; Janet Afary, 'Peasant rebellions of the Caspian region during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1909', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23(2) (May, 1991): 137–61; and Mansur Moaddel, 'Class struggle in post-revolutionary Iran', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23(3) (August 1991): 317–43.

In the 1990s, the leading American academic periodicals on Iran and the Middle East, *Iranian Studies* and *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, paid less attention to the Left.

- 3 The major English-language studies of twentieth-century Iranian intellectual history have mainly bypassed the Left. See Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996); and Ali Gheysari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the*

- Twentieth Century* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998). See the review by Valentine M. Moghadam of Gheissari's book in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31(3) (August 1999): 480–82; and Mohamad Tavakoli-Tarqi's review of Boroujerdi's *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 32(4) (November 2000): 565–71.
- 4 Abrahamian's major works are *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982); *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993); and *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).
 - 5 Valentine M. Moghadam is another scholar who has systematically studied the Iranian Left. See Shahrzad Azad (Valentine M. Moghadam), 'Workers and peasants councils in Iran', *Monthly Review* 32(5) (1980): 14–29; Valentine M. Moghadam, 'The revolution and the regime: populism, Islam and the state', *Social Compass* 36(4) (1989): 415–50; 'One revolution or two? The Iranian revolution and the Islamic Republic', in Ralph Miliband, Leo Pantic and John Saville (eds), *Socialist Register 1989: Revolution Today: Aspirations and Realities* (London: The Merlin Press, 1989), pp. 74–101; 'The Left and revolution in Iran: a critical analysis', in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Manucher Parvin (eds) *Post-Revolutionary Iran* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988); 'Socialism or anti-imperialism? The left and revolution in Iran', *New Left Review* 166 (November–December 1987): 5–28; 'Revolutions and regimes: populism and social transformation in Iran', *Research in Political Sociology* 6 (1993): 217–55; and, co-authored with Ali Mirsepassi-Ashtiani, 'The Left and political Islam in Iran: a retrospect and prospects' *Radical History* 51 (1991): 27–62.
- The scholar who has written and/or recovered and published the most books, articles, manuscripts and documents on the Iranian Left since the 1960s is Cosroe Chaqueri. A partial list of his works includes: *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–21: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995); 'Did the Soviets play a role in founding the Tudeh Party in Iran', *Cahiers du Monde russe* 40(3) (July–September 1999); 'The Baku Congress', *Central Asian Studies* 2(2) (1983); 'Sultanazade: the forgotten revolutionary theoretician of Iran: a biographical sketch', *Iranian Studies* XVII(2–3) (Spring–Summer 1984); 'The Jangali movement and Soviet historiography', *Central Asian Surveys* 5 (1985); and, as editor, *Historical Documents: The Workers, Social Democratic, and Communist Movement in Iran*, 23 vols (Florence and Tehran, 1969–94).
- Other works on the Left include Samih K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekhi (eds), *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic* (New York: Routledge, 1992); John Foran (ed.), *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-defined Revolutionary Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Janet Afary, *Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Azadeh Kinan-Thiebaut, *Secularization of Iran: A Doomed Failure?* (Paris: Peeters & Institute d'étude iranienne, 1998); Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); and Afshin Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000).
- 6 For example, Haideh Moghissi's *Populism and Feminism in Iran* is an excellent study of how the major Marxist–Leninist organizations helped subvert the women's rights movement during the revolution. But Moghissi's criticism is so

sharply focused on the Left that the latter, and not the Islamic Republic, appear to be the major culprit in destroying women's rights. While she mentions the independent Left's resistance to Islamist impositions, including those on women, the bulk of Moghissi's narrative is an angry indictment of pro-Soviet Marxist–Leninists. See the review of *Populism and Feminism* by Jasamin Rostam-Kolayi in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31(3) (August 1999): 482–85.

Behrooz, in *Rebels with a Cause*, and Mashayekhi, in *Political Culture*, also make contributions to our understanding of the Left. But, like Moghissi, they mainly equate the Left with communism and thus focus their narratives on leftist 'non-democratic' behaviour, leading to 'failure and defeat'. The most recent study of Iranian intellectual history, Ali Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), devotes a chapter to 'The tragedy of the Iranian Left'. Mirsepassi clarifies some of the more glaring misunderstandings of the subject. This chapter, however, is based on an earlier article that saw the Left as synonymous with communism, critiqued its shortcomings and ended with the 'tragedy' of its failure.

7 See the sources cited in note 1 above.

8 I am restating the classic but 'post-revisionist' interpretation of the French Revolution, as opposed to the neo-conservative readings (the Furet school) that condemn the Revolution's radicalism as an early form of totalitarianism. See Edward Berenson, 'The social interpretations of the French Revolution', in Nikki R. Keddie (ed.), *Debating Revolutions* (New York: New York University Press, 1995): 85–111; and Colin Lucas (ed.), *Rewriting the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

For a discussion of the impact of European radical ideas on early twentieth-century Iran, see Afshin Matin-asgari, 'Sacred city profaned: utopianism and despair in early modernist Persian literature', in Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (eds), *Iran and Beyond: Essay in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), pp. 186–211.

9 A. Friend and R. Sanders, *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History* (New York: Anchor Books, 1964).

10 See Marx quoted in David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper & Row: 1973), p. 444; Engels' views are found in David McLellan, *Marxism After Marx* (New York: Harper & Row: 1979), pp. 16–17. On German Social Democracy, see *ibid.* and Carl E. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905–1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

11 Fereydu Adamiyat credits the nineteenth-century thinker Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani with being the pioneer of the idea of social democracy in Iran: Adamiyat, *Andisheha-ye Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani* (Tehran: 1967); see also Adamiyat's *Ideolozhi-ye nehzat-e mashrutiyyat-e Iran* (Tehran: 1977), p. 281, on Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda's social democratic ideas and views on Islam's egalitarianism.

12 Cosroe Chaqueri, 'Communism', in Ehsan Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. VI (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1993), pp. 95–102. According to Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 76–7, the Social Democratic Party was formed in 1904. Afary, *Constitutional Revolution*, p. 81, gives this date as 1905.

13 Afary, *Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 240–8; Chaqueri, 'Communism', pp. 96–7.

14 Afary, *Constitutional Revolution*, pp. 257, 270, 316–17; Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, pp. 76–7. The Social Democrats were also known as

Anjuman-e Mojahedin, since they tried ‘dissimulation’ (*taqieh*) to appeal to popular and Islamic sentiments: Afary, *idem*, pp. 85–6.

- 15 The social democratic agenda was incorporated into the Democrat Party programme, which called for transition from a ‘feudalist order’ to a liberal, secular regime, and capitalist development: Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, p. 104.
- 16 Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 90.
- 17 The most extensive study of this topic is Cosroe Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–21: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).
- 18 Chaqueri, ‘Communism’, pp. 98–9. For Communist Party positions in the early 1920s, see the collection of articles in the party organ *Haqiqat*, published in Rahim Ra’isnia (ed.), *Akharin sangar-e azadi, majmu’eh-e maqalat-e Mir-Ja’far Pishevari dar ruzname-ye Haqiqat, organ-e Ettehadiye-ye omumi-ye kargaran-e Iran, 1300–1301* (Tehran: Shirazeh, 1998).
- 19 Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, p. 48.
- 20 Chaqueri, ‘Communism’, p. 101.
- 21 *JAMI, Gozashteh chragh-e rah-e ayandeh ast*, Vol. 1 (Tehran: 1979), pp. 178–85. Early Tudeh Party pronouncements specifically denied that it was against capitalism; *ibid.*, p. 179.

The old charge of the Tudeh Party being a mere ‘tool’ of Soviet policy is tenaciously recurrent in recent scholarship. Here is how a well-researched political biography describes the party’s formation and political success, as well as the rise of Marxism among Iranian intellectuals:

As was its practice, the Soviet government used the occupation of Northern Iran to help create a communist party that would become the pliant tool of Soviet policy. Lest it raise the ire of the religious and conservative communities, the party eschewed an overt communist label and opted for the more innocuous name of the Tudeh (mass party). The Tudeh Party’s rapid expansion, its strong sense of discipline, and the help it received from “Big Brother” allowed it to play a crucial role in the politics of the next decade in Iran...Marxist ideas began to spread and soon came to dominate intellectual discourse in Iran.

Here, the Tudeh Party’s success has nothing to do with its politics and what it offered to its Iranian members and followers, who are denied all agency as ‘pliant’ pawns of Soviet policy. Nor does the author even try to explain why Marxism came to dominate the country’s intellectual discourse. Given his premise about the Tudeh, this too must have been due to ‘Big Brother’ machinations. Thus we are back to Cold War conspiracy theories, complete with a disdainful view of the Iranian people’s capacity to make political and intellectual choices of their own. See Abbas Milani, *The Persian Sphinx: Amir Abbas Hoveyda and the Riddle of the Iranian Revolution* (Washington, DC: Mage Publishers, 2000), pp. 83–4.

- 22 Kinan-Thiebaut, *Secularization of Iran*.
- 23 The passage of Iran’s first major labour laws in 1949 was closely related to the activities of the Central Council of United Trade Unions, which the Tudeh had organized. Enfranchisement of women, suggested earlier to the Second Majles by the social democrats, was reintroduced as a majles bill by Tudeh deputies in 1944, the same year it was enacted in the Azerbaijan autonomous government: Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism*, p. 95.

- 24 Homayoun Katouzian (ed.), *Khalil Maleki: Khaterat-e siasi* (Hanover: 1981); Anvar Khomeh'i, *Khaterat-e siasi-ye doktor Anvar Khomeh'i*, 3 vols (Tehran: 1983).
 - 25 A good discussion of these periodicals, including some content analysis, is found in Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals*, pp. 78–82; see especially the author's extensive reference notes to this section.
 - 26 Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, Chs 2–4.
 - 27 On Tudeh Party positions during the 1960s and 1970s, see Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*, Chs 5–9. Even in the 1940s and 1950s, the Tudeh had not always followed the official Soviet policy line towards Iran. For example, the party's early negative attitude towards Mosaddeq and the National Front was different from the more positive estimations of the Soviets. See *JAMI*, *Gozashteh*, Vol. II, pp. 534–7.
 - 28 Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, Ch. 4.
 - 29 See the works of Abrahamian and Moghadam, cited in notes 4 and 5 above; and Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State* (London: Routledge, 1989).
 - 30 Sadeq Zibakalam, *Ma cheguneh ma shodim?* (Tehran: Rowzaneh, 1996) and *Moqaddameh-i bar enqelab-e eslami* (Tehran: Rowzaneh, 1993). See Afshin Matin-asgari, 'The causes of Iran's backwardness', *Critique* 13 (Fall 1998): 103–7.
 - 31 The 'blaming the Left' school of interpreting the 1978–79 revolution began as a monarchist conspiracy theory according to which the Soviets and the Left, i.e. the Tudeh, were actually behind the revolution and the Islamic Republic, using Khomeini and the clergy as covers. The shah himself seems to have subscribed to a version of this theory. See Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein & Day, 1980). This view must have been totally discredited with the Tudeh's fall, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union; but its residues still linger on the paranoid fringes of the political Right.
 - 32 Gheissari's *Iranian Intellectuals* does not consider this point in the chapter entitled 'Critique of Westernism and debates over modernity'. His discussion of Fakhr al-Din Shademan's *Taskhir-e tamaddon-e farangi* (1948) equates the older notion of *farangi* with 'Western'. Boroujerdi's *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, pp. 54–8, also takes *farangi* and 'Western' to be synonymous. Boroujerdi locates the rise of the notion of 'the West' in post-Second World War intellectual discourses, but he denies its Cold War connections; see *ibid.*, p. 53 n. 1. However, seminal pre-Second World War intellectual works, for example, Mohammad-Ali Foroughi's *Seyr-e hekmat dar Orupa* (Tehran: 1938), did not ascribe the same meaning or centrality to the idea of 'the West'. Instead they refer positively to *farang* or *Orupa*. Similarly, the title of the famous reformist journal of the 1920s, *Farangestan*, was chosen to imply positive connotations.
- 'The West' has of course a much older and more complex genealogy. Modern European notions of 'the West', or 'Western' civilization, evolved under the influence of the 'Aryan' model of Greek history, constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by romantic and racist historiography and philology. See Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, Vol. I (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), especially the introduction; see also *ibid.*, pp. 402–3, on how racial theories and models were projected onto the Third World after the Second World War.
- 33 On nineteenth-century Iranian encounters with Europe, see Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, 'Women of the West imagined: the farangi other and the emergence of the woman question in Iran', in Valentine M. Moghadam (ed.), *Identity Politics and Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 98–120. Tavakoli-Targhi does not

focus on the distinction between the two notions of *farang* and 'West'. But he quotes nineteenth-century writers, as well as Fazlollah Nuri, who use the terms *farang* and *farangestan*, and not *gharb* or *gharbi* ('the West' or 'Western').

Tavakoli-Targhi's extensive review of Boroujerdi's *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* does not explicitly make the above distinction either. But his references to influential mid-twentieth-century texts again show the prevalence of the term *farang* – and not *gharb*. He mentions, for example, Fakhr al-Din Shadman's *Taskhir-e tamaddon-e farangi*, which discusses 'Farnagshenasi', and not 'Gharbshenasi'. He also mentions the mid-twentieth-century intellectual Ahmad Kasravi's use of the term '*Oropai-garai*', i.e. 'Europeanism', and not 'Westernism'. In another post-Second World War text Kasravi had used the term *Orupa'igary*, as in *Shi'igari* (Shi'ism), the title of another famous work of his. See Ahmad Kasravi, *Dar piramun-e falsafeh* (Tehran: n.d.), p. 83. The term *gharb* is not used in this text, even though *sharq* ('East') is.

- 34 Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, p. 65. Arani had used the term 'West' (*gharb*) but obviously with positive connotations. He was quoted originally in 'Matn-e defa'-e doktor Arani dar dadgah-e panjah-o-se nafar', *Donya* IV(1–2) (Spring–Summer 1963): 108–20; the term 'gharb' is on p. 111. I am thankful to Ervand Abrahamian for sharing the information on the original reference.
- 35 The Tudeh Party increased its anti-imperialist rhetoric in the early 1950s, especially in its attacks against the National Front. For numerous examples of such references in the party's newspapers, see *JAMI, Gozashteh*, Vol. II, pp. 522–37.
- 36 Jalal Al-Ahmad, *Ghrabzadehi* (Tehran: Revaq, 1962). For good discussions of *Ghrabzadehi* and its impact on pre-revolutionary culture, see Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West*, Ch. 3, and Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*, Ch. 5.
- 37 Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, Chs 3 and 4.
- 38 See the Tudeh Party organ, *Rahbar*, 2 May 1943 and 10 March 1943, quoted in *JAMI, Gozashteh*, Vol. II, p. 136. According to another party organ, *Mardom*, 'the Tudeh Party of Iran will be a serious defender of Islam's holy teachings' and would respect Islam and the 'intellectual and sagacious clerics': *Mardom*, 4 December 1945, quoted in *JAMI, Gozashteh*, Vol. II, p. 438.
- 39 Islamic liberals were led by Mehdi Bazargan, Yadollah Sahabi and Mahmud Taleqani. The more left-leaning branch of Islamic modernism included Taleqani and 'God-worshipping Socialists' like Mohammad-Taqi Shari'ati and Mohammad Nakhshab: H.E. Chehabi, *Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism (The Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini)* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990) and Mahmud Nekuruh, *Nehzat-e khodaparastan-e sosyalist* (Tehran: 1998).
- 40 Among the more prominent leftists were scholars like Hamid Enayat, Fereydon Adamiyat, Morteza Ravandi, Amir-Hosein Ariyanpur, Naser Pakdaman, Homa Nateq and Mohammad Ja'far Mahjub; writers and translators such as Baqer Mo'meni, Karim Keshavarz, Ebrahim Golesatn, Manuchehr Hezarkhani, Mahmud E'temadzadeh, Najaf Dariabandari, Mohammad Qazi, Ali-Asghar Hajj-Seyyed-Javadi, Mahmud Dowlatabadi, Ali-Mohammad Afghani, Ahmad Mahmud, Samad Behrangi and Gholam-Hosein Sa'edi; poets like Ahmad Shamlu, Siavosh Kasra'i, Ne'mat Mirzazadeh, Esma'il Kho'i and Mehdi Akhavan-Sales; and film makers including Mas'ud Kimia'i, Bahram Beyza'i and Dariush Mehrjui. See Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals*, pp. 69–70, 76–83.
- 41 Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*.
- 42 Moghadam, 'The revolution and the regime' and 'One revolution or two?'; Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*.
- 43 *Ibid.*

- 44 For opposing views, see, for example, Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo Modernism, 1926–1979* (New York: New York University Press, 1981), and Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (New York: Penguin, 1979).
- 45 Assef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran* (London: Zed Books, 1987).
- 46 Saeed Rahnama and Sohrab Behdad (eds), *Iran After the Revolution* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), pp. 100–1.
- 47 Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, Ch. 4.
- 48 On 15 January 1979, the Tehran daily *Ayandegan* published an article by Mostafa Rahimi, a leftist writer and lawyer, entitled 'Why I am against the Islamic Republic'. Written as an open letter to Khomeini, the article warned that such a religious regime would turn into a dictatorship and called instead for a secular democratic republic. See *Ayandegan*, 15 January 1979, cited in Bakhash, *Reign of Ayatollahs*, p. 71.

Similar protests and warnings were expressed in an open letter to Khomeini by the executive committee of the National Democratic Front, published in *Tehran Mosavvar*, 7 June 1979; in an interview with the National Front leader Karim Sanjabi, *ibid.*; in interviews with Abdolkarim Lahiji and Rahmatollah Moqaddam-Maraghe'i in *Omid-e Iran*, 29 July 1979; with Ahmad Shamlu and Mahmud Enayat in *Omid-e Iran*, 10 and 17 June 1979; with Ahmad Shamlu and Mas'ud Behnud in *Tehran Mosavvar*, 17 April 1979; and by Mas'ud Behnud in *Tehran Mosavvar*, 3 April 1979. On Kurdish groups, see Behrooz, *Rebels*, pp. 130–1.

Even a faction of the Tudeh Party, led by Iraj Eskandari, split in 1979, objecting to the policy of total support for the Islamic Republic: Iraj Eskandari, *Yadmandeh-ha va yaddashtha-ye parakandeh* (n.p.: Mard-e emruz, 1987).
- 49 Behrooz, *Rebels*, p. 105. For a brief analysis of the positions of various leftist groups, see Moghadam, 'The Left and revolution in Iran: a critical analysis', pp. 30–3.
- 50 See the spring and early summer 1979 issues of *Ayandegan*, *Paygham-e emruz*, *Omid-e Iran* and *Tehran Mosavvar*. For political organizations, see *Azadi*, published by the Democratic National Front (1979); *Raha'i*, published by the Organization of Communist Unity (Tehran: 1979–83); *Rah-e Kargar*, published by the Organization of the Workers' Path (Tehran: 1980–81); *Kar*, published by the Organization of the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerillas (Tehran: 1980–83); and *Paykar*, published by the Organization for Struggle on the Path of Working Class Emancipation (Tehran: 1979–82).
- 51 Contributors to *Ketab-e jom'eh* included Naser Pakdaman, Homa Nateq, Baqer Parham, Esma'il Kho'i and Mohammad Mokhtari. A random sample, covering about two months, yielded the following: 10 March 1980, on regime's manipulations of the American hostage crisis; 30 January and 27 February 1980, on Kurdish autonomy; 13 March 1980, special issue on women, with two articles by Homa Nateq, sharply criticizing Islamist impositions on women; and a series of articles by Baqer Parham, criticising the Tudeh Party, 30 January–13 March 1980.
- 52 Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 68.
- 53 Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, p. 169, and Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse*, pp. 171–4. The latter gives a total of about 10,000 Mojahedin and 1,000 Marxists.
- 54 Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions*, pp. 215–16.
- 55 For instance, on 1 May (Labour Day) 1979, the Islamic Republic Party held its own rallies attacking 'liberalism' and demanding a forty-hour working week, land reform, labour legislation, a higher minimum wage, confiscation of vacant

- houses, and nationalization of large companies owned by foreigners and supporters of the old regime: Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 49. These leftist positions, however, were not shared by all party factions. In fact, from the very beginning, the Islamic Republic Party was ridden by major conflicts: Reza Zarifinia, *Kalbodshekafi-ye jenahha-ye siyasi dar Iran* (Tehran: Azadi-ye andisheh, 1999), pp. 60–3.
- 56 All remaining and new faculty and students had to pass ideological tests and prove their loyalty to the regime. Women were barred from studying subjects such as engineering and law. Quotas were used to enrol members and families of the clergy, the Revolutionary Guards and Iran–Iraq war veterans. See Ali Akbar Mahdi, ‘The student movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran’, *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 15(2) (November 1999): 5–32.
- 57 The ‘Left’ faction, *Majma’-e ruhaniyun-e mobarez*, enlisting Mehdi Karrubi, Mohammad Kho’eihi, Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari, Mohammad Khatami and Hadi Khamenehi, broke with the more conservative *Jame’e-ye ruhaniyat-e mobarez*: Zarifinia, *Kalbodshekafi*, pp. 69–71.
- 58 Rahnema and Behdad, *Iran after the Revolution*; Jahangir Amuzegar, *Iran’s Economy under the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993). In 1994, Ali-Naqi Khamushi, president of Iran’s Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Mines, and a majlis deputy, said that up to 40 per cent of the population was considered ‘low income’, i.e. below the poverty line or barely above it: *LA Times*, 2 December 1994.
- 59 In 1998, Khatami admitted that the economy was ‘sick’ in every possible sense: Akbar Karbasian, ‘Islamic revolution and the management of the Iranian economy’, *Social Research* 67(2) (Summer 2000): 621–40; Khatami is quoted on p. 640. See also Wilfred Buchta, *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic* (Washington, DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000), pp. 170–3, and Olivier Roy, ‘The crisis of legitimacy in Iran’ *Middle East Journal* 53(2) (Spring 1999): 201–16.
- 60 Matin-asgari, ‘Cultural politics: Iran 1997–98’, *Middle East Research Associates* 2 (1998): 55–67; Hamid Dabashi, ‘The end of Islamic ideology’, *Social Research* 67(2) (Summer 2000): 475–518.
- 61 Matin-asgari, ‘Abdolkarim Soroush and the secularization of Islamic thought in Iran’, *Iranian Studies* 30(1–2) (1997): 95–115; Farhang Rajaee, ‘A thermidor of “Islamic yuppies”? Conflict and compromise in Iran’s politics’, *Middle East Journal* 53(2) (Spring 1999): 217–31.
- 62 See, for example, the interview with Alireza Alavitarab, editor of *Bahman* (1996), *Rah-e no* (1998) and *Sobh-e emruz* (1999), reformist publications that defined the positions of the Islamic ‘New Left’ in the late 1990s: *Middle East Report* 212 (Fall 1999): 28–31. See also Rajaee, ‘A thermidor of “Islamic yuppies”?’
- 63 Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, esp. the introduction; Sa’id Barzin, *Jenahbandi-ye siyasi dar Iran* (Tehran: Markaz, 1978). For analyses of Left/Right factions in Iranian publications, see Zarifinia, *Kalbodshekafi*; “‘Left’ and ‘Right’: a game with sixty million spectators”, interview with the secretary of the Organization of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, in the Tehran daily *Iran*, 25–26 July 1998; and *Tavana*, 1 August, 1998.
- 64 *Iran-e farda* was the country’s leading political monthly according to the survey published by *Adineh* 106 (December 1995), p. 47.
- 65 *Iran-e Farda* 8(60) (19 October 1998), special issue on ‘political factions and factionalism’; see in particular the views of Alireza Alavitarab on ‘the critique and assessment of the reformist movement’s forces’: *ibid.*, pp. 29–35. See also the interview with Morad Saqafi, editor of the Tehran quarterly *Gof-o-Gu*, in

Middle East Report 212 (Fall 1999): 47–50; and Morad Saqafi, 'Eslahtalabi: bayadha va nabayadha', *Gof-O-Gu* 22 (Winter 1998): 7–15.

- 66 Thus began a transition from the rather indiscriminate repression of the 1980s to 'smart killings', exemplified by the infamous 1990s 'serial murders' (*qatlha-ye zanjireh'i*), in which secular intellectual and political dissidents were mysteriously assassinated by security agents. The most famous victims were nationalist leaders Dariush Foruhar and Parvaneh Eskandari, and leftist intellectuals Mohammad Mokhtari, Ja'far Puyandeh, Majid Sharif and Piruz Davani. The strategy of covert and selective assassinations had been previously used against key opposition figures abroad. In the 1990s, it was employed domestically to terrorize and control dissidents, and the public at large, without directly implicating the state. On 'serial murders', see Buchta, *Who Rules Iran?*, pp. 156–61; on assassinations of opposition leaders, especially those of the Kurdish Democratic Party, in Europe, see *ibid.*, p. 102.
- 67 Rajaei, 'A thermidor of "Islamic yuppies"'?
- 68 Akbar Ganji, *Talaqi-ye fashisti az hokumat va din* (Tehran: Tarh-e no, 1999) and *Tarikkhane-ye ashbah* (Tehran: Tarh-e no, 2000); and Sa'id Hajjarian, *Jomhuriyat; Afsunzoda'i az qodrat* (Tehran: Tarh-e no, 2000). These are collections of daily and periodical press articles by the leading new 'religious intellectuals' in the pro-Khatami reformist camp. See also the various 1998 issues of the Tehran weekly *Rah-e no*, featuring views of Alireza Alavitarab, Akbar Ganji, Abas Abdi and Sa'id Hajjarian.
- 69 For the 1990s, see, for example, *Adineh* 60 (June 1991). This issue featured several leftist pieces: a critique of the 'New World Order'; a translation of Noam Chomski's criticism of the same concept; a review of the leftist writer Gholam-Hosein Sa'edi's work; an interview with the left-leaning film-maker Mas'ud Kimaia'i; a lecture by Mahmud Dowlatabadi; an article against book censorship; and an article on torture and political confessions.

Nagah-e no 14–15 (Spring 1993) had a two-part translation of an article by the Italian Marxist Lucio Colletti and an article on Khalil Maleki (issue 15). *Gardum* 10–11 (May 1991) featured an article on 'The philosophical foundations of [Georg] Lukacs' ideas'.

In 1997–98, the frequency of articles from a Left perspective, or on Left topics, in *Negah-e no* increased noticeably, as the following examples demonstrate: issue 33 (Summer 1997) had leftist articles on the Constitutional Revolution and on the Tudeh Party, an interview with Leszek Kolakowski, and critiques of Martin Heidegger and of contemporary American culture; issue 36 (Spring 1998) featured articles critical of nationalist historiography and of the Tudeh Party, plus the translation of a piece by Jacques Derrida on capitalism; issue 37 (Summer 1998) included translations of articles on *The Communist Manifesto*, on the Left in the Constitutional era, and on socialism, liberalism and conservatism, a critique of Jean-François Lyotard's relativism, and a leftist essay on literary criticism; issue 38 (Fall 1998) included articles on Marx's legacy, Richard Rorty and Nima Yushij, and an interview with Isiah Berlin; and finally, issue 39 (Winter 1979) covered the Nobel laureate Amartia Sin, the Tudeh Party, Nima Yushij and the trial of the Chilean dictator Pinochet.

Farhang-e towse'eh regularly featured leftist articles; see, for example, issues 44–46 (July 2000).

- 70 *Fasl-e sabz* 2 (September 1999) and 3 (December 1999–January 2000).
- 71 See various articles in *Karmozd* 1 (1999) and 2 (2000); see also Ebrahim Hajjani, 'Sociological study of workers strikes in Tehran's industrial units (1989–93)', *Andishe-ye jame'eh* (June 2000): 30–37. *Andishe-ye jame'eh* was an academic Left bimonthly launched in 1998.

- 72 'Socialism is still alive', interview with Anvar Khomeh'i, *Neshat*, 7 and 12 July 1999.
- 73 Assef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movement in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). See also *Karmozd* and the daily *Kar va kargar*.
- 74 See the articles in *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 15(2) (November 1999).
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 Matin-asgari, *Student Opposition*.
- 77 Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, Ch. 11.
- 78 The most vociferous of the latter is the Workers' Communist Party (*Hezb-e komonist-e kargari*), a small group that aggressively upholds the tradition of leftist dogmatism and hyperbole. See *Anternasional-e haftegi*, organ of the Workers' Communist Party of Iran, for example 11–13 (July 2000) and 33–34 (December 2000). Similar positions are found in *Tufan*, organ of Iran's Labour Party (*Hezb-e kar-e Iran*), for example 7 (October 2000), and in *Payam-e Fada'i*, organ of Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas (*Cherikha-ye fada'i-e khalq-e Iran*), for example 26 (February 2000).
- 79 Among the more prominent leftist periodicals are the following: *Cheshmandaz* (Paris, 1980s-90s); *Kankash* (US, 1980s-90s); *Noqteh* (US and France, 1990s); *Ketab-e jom'eha* (Switzerland, 1980s); *Zaman-e no* (France, 1980s). *Arash* (France, 1990s); *Naqd* (France, 1990s); *Andisheh va enqelab* (US, 1980s); *Akhtar* (France 1980s); and *Nazm-e novin* (US, 1980s).
- 80 See *Rah-e Azadi*, organ of a social democratic splinter faction from the Tudeh Party. A recent typical issue of *Rah-e Azadi* included several articles in support of the reformists in Iran, a critique of old-style Tudeh followers (*Rah-e Tudeh*), an interview with Alireza Nurizadeh, lead reporter of the right-of-centre weekly *Kayahn* (London), an article praising the socialist leader Khalil Maleki, and a critical study of political violence: *Rah-e Azadi* 65 (June 1999).
Views of other Marxist groups with a similar orientation are found in: *Tarhi-no*, organ of the Provisional Council of Iranian Left Socialists (*Shura-ye movaqqat-e sosialistha-ye chap-e Iran*), for example IV(37) (March 1999); *Rah-e kargar*, organ of the Organization of Iran's Revolutionary Workers (*Rah-e kargar*) (see, for example, the article by Mohammad-Reza Shalguni, 'Islam and modernity: prevalent views on the Left', *Rah-e Kargar* 164 (Winter 1999): 49–54); and *Kar*, central organ of the Iranian People's Fada'ian Organization (*Sazman-e fada'ian-e khalq-e Iran*), for example 3(209) (June 1999).
See also Sa'id Rahnema, *Tajdid-e hayat-e sosial demokrasi dar Iran?* (Sweden, 1996).

Part II

THE IRANIAN LEFT

Historical dimensions

ARMENIAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, THE DEMOCRAT PARTY OF IRAN, AND *IRAN-I NAW*

A secret camaraderie¹

Janet Afary

Introduction

Chroniclers of the Constitutional Revolution have often hailed the courage and fearless commitment of the Armenian revolutionaries who participated in the restoration of the constitutional order in 1327/1909. What is often lost in these accounts, however, is the contribution of Armenian social democrats to the debates over revolutionary and democratic ideas in the Second Constitutional Period of 1327–29/1909–11. As historians in the West have become more committed to documenting the multicultural nature of their societies and social movements, so should we pay more attention to the fact that the democratic order of the Constitutional Revolution stemmed in part from the multicultural and multi-ethnic leadership of the revolutionary movement, which included religious dissidents, non-Persians, and non-Muslims.

Iraj Afshar, who has contributed so much to our understanding of the Constitutional Revolution, published in 1980 a new documentary collection entitled *Awraq-i tazahyab-i Mashrutiyyat marbut bih salha-yi 1325–1330 Qamari*,² which is of considerable importance for gaining an understanding of the above issues. This volume stands out in particular for illuminating the origins of the Democrat Party (*Firqah-i Dimukrat-i Iran*) (1327–29/1909–11), Iran's first modern political party, and the intellectual and organizational contribution of several Armenian-Iranian social democrats to the party. Afshar's facsimile publication in this volume of close to one hundred pages of private correspondence conducted in French between two Armenian-Iranian social democrats, Vram Pilossian and Tigran Ter Hacobian (T. Darvish), and majlis deputy and leader of the Democrat Party, Sayyid Hasan Taqizadah, shows that there was a close affinity of ideas between the

Muslim and Armenian social democrats who created the party. The correspondence indicates that the idea of forming the party took shape in Tabriz during the siege of that city in late 1326–early 1327/the winter and spring of 1909.³ The letters also point to the intimate camaraderie of Ter Hacobian and Pilossian with the two celebrated Transcaucasian Muslim social democrats, Haydar Khan ‘Amu Ughlu and Mehmet Emin Resulzade, who also worked within the Democrat Party. Moreover, Resulzade and Ter Hacobian helped shape the journal *Iran-i naw*, which remains one of the most sophisticated socialist newspapers of twentieth-century Iran.

The Tabriz social democrats, the origins of the democrat party, and *Iran-i naw*

In August 1906, after more than a year of strikes and protests, Muzaffar al-Din Shah (r. 1896–1907) signed a royal proclamation that called for the formation of a parliament (*majlis*) and the writing of a constitution. The coalition that made the revolution possible included groups with differing political ideologies, such as clerics and theology students, who resented the increasing centralization of power in the hands of the government, local merchants, who opposed customs tariffs on their exports, and liberal and radical intellectuals, including some members of the nobility, educators, religious dissidents, Freemasons, and freethinkers, who were impressed with democratic institutions of the West, and wished to bring political reform to Iran.

Soon after the revolution, a large number of grass-roots urban councils, known as *anjumans*, became active in Iran. Many of the most active *anjumans* were in the northern cities of Tehran, Tabriz, and Rasht. They were influenced by political tendencies from Transcaucasia, especially the Iranian Organization of Social Democrats in Baku and its branches inside Iran. Social democrats were active during the First Constitutional Period (1906–1908) as members of the parliament, journalists and orators, and members of *anjumans*. The secret social democratic cells had a group of rank-and-file fighters who were known as the *mujahidin*. Their task was to defend the parliament and the constitutionalists, as well as their own secret societies. Social democratic leaders campaigned for a bill of rights in the parliament that guaranteed basic freedoms. They helped organize village councils in northern towns and villages of Azarbayjan and Gilan. They were instrumental in placing many limits on the authority of the new king, Muhammad ‘Ali Shah (r. 1907–1909), and the orthodox clerics, and they supported women’s education and political participation.

The shah, who resented his curtailed authority, soon accused the constitutionalists of harboring anti-Islamic tendencies. He formed an anti-constitutionalist opposition that included the cleric Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri and some members of the nobility. The ratification of the Anglo-Russian

Convention of 1907 in St. Petersburg, an agreement in which Iran was secretly partitioned between the two powers, coincided with progressive reforms of the majlis, radicalization of the press, and increased demands of the anjumans. The king began to plan a coup against the parliament and turned to the Western powers for help. In the spring of 1908, Russian minister of Tehran N.H. Hartwig and British chargé d'affaires Charles Marling decided to renew their support of Muhammad 'Ali Shah. The shah was eager to take advantage of their backing. The Cossack Brigade under his command would carry out a coup against the majlis, bringing the First Constitutional Period to an end.

On 23 Jumadā I 1326/23 June 1908, the majlis was closed by a royalist coup led by the Russian officer of the Cossack Brigade, Colonel Liakhoff. Many leading constitutionalists of Tehran went into exile, and the revolutionary center moved to Tabriz. The Azarbayjan Provincial Council (*Anjuman-i Iyalati-yi Azarbayjan*, also known as *Anjuman-i Tabriz*), the social democratic Secret Center (*Markaz-i Ghaybi*), and the rank-and-file *mujahidin* fighters would soon form the revolutionary army of Tabriz, whose military leadership was held by the former horse-dealer and outlaw Sattar Khan and his colleague the stone mason Baqir Khan. A number of Transcaucasian revolutionaries (Muslims, Armenians, Georgians), as well as many Iranian-Armenians, joined the resistance as well.

On 19 Ramadan 1326/16 October 1908, a group of thirty mostly Armenian social democrats, who held leadership positions in the resistance army of Tabriz, organized a conference in that city where they discussed the future direction of the movement. Two different political strategies were discussed during this conference. The majority believed that socialists should struggle for the establishment of liberal democracy and for the achievement of radical social and economic progress for the poor and the working class of Azarbayjan and ultimately Iran. The minority argued that social democrats must temporarily abandon their more radical agenda, and instead fully enter the democratic movement, forming alliances with the leadership of the constitutional movement.⁴ After the meeting, Vasu Khachaturian and Arshavir Chalangarian on behalf of the majority, and Tigran Ter Hacobian who represented the minority wing of the conference, each sent copies of the minutes of the meeting to the leading Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov.⁵

The correspondence between Taqizadah, Pilossian, and Ter Hacobian shows that following the victory of the constitutionalists and the reconquest of Tehran in Jumadā II 1327/July 1909, the minority wing of the Tabriz social democrats defied the majority and followed through on precisely the policies they had presented at the October 1908 conference. They became close colleagues of the majlis deputy Hasan Taqizadah, who had arrived in Tabriz in mid-Dhu al-Hijjah 1326/late December 1908, and explored with him the possibility of organizing Iran's first modern political party.

Taqizadah returned to Tehran on 21 Rajab 1327/8 August 1909 after its reconquest by the revolutionary army and became the foremost member of

the provisional government, which began preparations for elections to the Second Majlis. During the same period, Taqizadah campaigned for the formation of the Democrat Party which he and his colleagues from Tabriz had discussed. Gradually, branches of the Democrat Party were formed in a number of cities, including Tabriz, Urumiyah, Mashhad, Rasht, Kirmanshah, Isfahan, Qazvin, and Hamadan. Many of the local branches published their own newspapers, but the most important newspaper of the party was *Iran-i naw*, which was published in Tehran between 1327/1909 and 1329/1911.⁶

Iran-i naw had a circulation of two to three thousand and was the most sophisticated daily paper of Tehran during the Second Constitutional Period. The paper was founded in Rajab 1327/August 1909 (hence the phrase "*Rajab 1327*" incorporated in its caption title) and began publication on 7 Sha'ban 1327/24 August 1909. It became the official organ of the Central Committee of the Democrat Party on 21 Shawwal 1328/26 October 1910. Edward G. Browne would thus praise *Iran-i naw* for its contribution to the Constitutional Revolution:

Iran-i-Now had the most extraordinary adventures in defending its Liberal policy and during the period of its publication was frequently the object of vehement attacks on the part of the journals which opposed it, so that most of its time was spent in polemics and it became both the agent and victim of important political events...Since the *Iran-i-Now* was in opposition, that is to say was the partisan and organ of the minority (i.e., the Democrats), it was always liable to repression or suppression, and was the constant object of the anger, vengeance and recriminations of the supporters of the Government.⁷

The paper, which introduced European-style journalism to the country, broke new ground in its social criticism. Its targets included class society, prejudice towards women, anti-Semitism, and other forms of long-held ethnic and religious discriminations. In addition, the journal made significant literary contributions. Some of the earliest poems of Malik al-Shu'ara' Bahar and Lahuti Kirmanshahi, two leading poets of the early twentieth century, were first published in *Iran-i naw*.⁸ The works of several major European writers, among them Alexandre Dumas and Leo Tolstoy, were made accessible to the Iranian public through Persian translations. Edward G. Browne's *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* was translated and published in serialized form in *Iran-i naw* soon after its publication in Britain. Browne's lectures in Europe on behalf of the constitutionalists were also extensively reported in *Iran-i naw*.

Of special importance was the regular coverage of the debates in the parliament under the title "*Akhbar-i Dar al-Shura-yi Milli*" ("News of the

National House of Consultation"). These reports provided readers with a perspective different from that of the official *Ruznamah-i Majlis* (*Majlis Newspaper*), which sided with the conservative Moderate Party (*Ijtima'iyun-i I'tidaliyun*). *Iran-i naw* printed letters and commentaries on social issues of the time. It discussed – often in articles written by women – the need for greater freedom for and education of women, the many grievances of workers and artisans, and, to a lesser extent, the oppression of the peasantry. In addition, it reported on major labor and socialist movements on the international scene. Reports on China, India, Russia, and North Africa, as well as news of labor movements, socialist organizations, and especially women's suffragists in Western Europe, were published with much sympathy. The editorials were highly critical of the imperialist policies of the European powers in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. The harshest criticisms were reserved for the tsarist government, which had occupied the northern provinces of Azarbayjan, Gilan, and Qazvin, while a strong bond of solidarity was drawn between the revolutionary movements in Russia and Iran.

The nominal editor of *Iran-i naw* in its first year was Muhammad Shabastari, also known as Abu al-Ziya', a former editor of the paper *Mujahid* in Tabriz.⁹ The principal financial backer of the paper, as well as its managing editor, was a wealthy Armenian named Joseph Basil, who also financed the Dashnak Armenian paper *Aravud* (*Morning*).¹⁰ The editorial board included Muslims and Armenians from both Iran and Transcaucasia. The actual editor, Mehmet Emin Resulzade (1884–1954), a Muslim social democrat from Baku, came to Gilan in 1327/1909 on behalf of the Organization of Social Democrats (*Firqah-i Ijtima'iyun-i 'Amiyyun*). A month after the reinstitution of the constitutional government, he helped to establish *Iran-i naw* in Tehran. Resulzade had been involved in the 1905 Russian Revolution, had joined the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, and had assumed the editorship of the socialist paper *Tekâmül* (December 1906–March 1907) in Baku. Even before his arrival in Iran in 1327/1909, Resulzade was known as an accomplished journalist, poet, and playwright. Though he knew little Persian at first, and for the first three months worked through a translator, Resulzade regularly contributed to the paper, and some of his articles appeared under the pen name *Nish* (Sting).¹¹

Many of the more ground-breaking theoretical articles in *Iran-i naw* did not have Resulzade's signature. Edward G. Browne has argued that the more significant articles were written by Amir Hajibi, also known as Ghulam Riza. He identifies Hajibi as a Georgian who assumed the identity of a Muslim, wrote his articles in French, and had them translated into Persian.¹² The correspondence between Taqizadah and Ter Hacobian confirms, however, that it was Ter Hacobian, an Iranian-Armenian and not a Georgian, who, under the pen name T. Darvish, submitted many of the more important theoretical essays that were published in the paper, particularly after the autumn of 1328/1910.¹³ These articles were originally written

in French and then translated into Persian. Ter Hacobian, who had studied political science in Switzerland, was a key theoretician of the minority wing of the Tabriz social democrats. It was he who had written to Plekhanov in the fall of 1908 and argued for a “democratic” rather than a “social democratic” ideology for the future party.

Both Pilossian and Ter Hacobian corresponded in French with Taqizadah because, as Armenians, they were beginners in the Persian language, a deficiency they deplored and were trying to remedy.¹⁴ Our information about both men and their other Armenian colleagues is limited, but a closer look at their letters to Taqizadah, as well as some of Ter Hacobian’s writings, shows the extent to which these two Armenian social democrats helped shape the Democrat Party and its organ *Iran-i naw*.

The letters of Pilossian to Taqizadah: a new form of organization in Iran

Pilossian, who signed his letters and articles under the pen names *Bahr* (Sea) or *Dihati* (Peasant), was active in forming committees of the Democrat Party in Tabriz.¹⁵ Seven letters from Pilossian to Taqizadah have survived and appear in *Awraq*. In these letters, written between 19 August 1909/2 Sha‘ban 1327 and 19 October 1910/14 Shawwal 1328, Pilossian proposed new ways of developing the party nationally and giving it specifically Iranian characteristics. He warned Taqizadah that membership should not be limited to Azarbayjanis, adding: “you must find members among the Persians as well, so that the Party will not have a provincial character.”¹⁶ He also suggested that an appropriate Persian substitute for the word “democrat” be found, asking: “do you have a Persian or Arabic word that would mean “democrat”? I am afraid this European word would keep away those who always have a repugnance for foreign words. Furthermore, they may equally confuse it with “social democrats”. In any case, I do not give much weight to a name, as long as our compatriots do not find it inappropriate.”¹⁷

When Taqizadah wrote to him of the growth of the party in Tehran in January 1910/Dhu al-Hijjah 1327–Muharram 1328, Pilossian rejoiced at the development, replying that it was indeed a tremendous achievement “to have in an Oriental country 390 people under the flag of a democrat party, especially when this party is organized on a European model.”¹⁸ The letters indicate that the Armenian social democrats were involved not only in the organizational work of the party, but also in establishing its ideological direction.¹⁹ Pilossian wrote the internal regulations of the party in French and told Taqizadah that he was sending them to Tehran for adoption by the Central Committee.²⁰

In his letter of 19 August 1909/2 Sha‘ban 1327, Pilossian sent a list of possible candidates which the joint committee of Armenian and Muslim

social democrats in Tabriz had drafted, and suggested that they be asked to run for elections to the Second Majlis: "We must strive to create within the second parliament an organized democratic majority. People are tired of the revolution and its upheavals. They want peace. If the Constitutionalists are not organized both inside and outside the Parliament, peace will never arrive."²¹

A month later, Pilossian would anxiously enquire about the work of the Democrat Party and majlis elections: "Internal disorders on the one hand, and the presence of foreign soldiers on the other hand, threaten the integrity and independence of the country. We must have energetic and truly patriotic men in the Second Majlis, because if the Second Majlis does not satisfy people, and does not put an end to the anarchy in the provinces, our very independence will be in danger."²² Seasoned party members were not to be engaged in military campaigns in the provinces because they were needed in Tehran. When the famous Transcaucasian Muslim social democrat Haydar Khan 'Amu Ughlu accepted an assignment to fight the Shahsavari brigand Rahim Khan in the town of Karaj, north of Tehran, Pilossian wrote to Taqizadah that Haydar Khan's "presence in Tehran is indispensable for the progress of the Democrat Party [and] we have begged him not to go. Please do everything necessary to keep him in Tehran because he is a good organizer and a good propagandist."²³

Despite their relatively moderate politics compared to other socialists of the time, Pilossian and his colleagues were concerned about the growing power of the anti-constitutionalist forces and felt that such challenges to the new order should be dealt with swiftly and severely. When a "reactionary" aristocrat, Habib Allah Muvaqqar al-Saltanah, who had been expelled from the country along with the former shah, Muhammad 'Ali Mirza, returned to foment trouble, he was executed in Muharram 1328/January 1910, and Pilossian wrote with Jacobin enthusiasm: "We read in the newspapers of the latest news in Tehran regarding the arrest of certain reactionaries and the hanging of Muvaqqar al-Saltanah. Well done. If such measures had been taken a few months earlier the reactionaries and the mullahs would not have become so arrogant as they are now. One must be merciless towards these people. Without this [harshness] we shall never have peace."²⁴

Despite the growth of the Tabriz branch of the Democrat Party, Pilossian and his colleagues did not hesitate to abide by the decisions of the Central Committee in Tehran:

For a very long time we have been organizing a section of the Democrat Party in Tabriz and we will probably have the pleasure of including you in the Committee. We shall place ourselves under the internal disposition of the Central Committee and we shall conform to the instructions we receive for the Tabriz section of the organization. You have done very well in organizing the Tehran Central

Committee. Because the people of Tehran are more educated than those of Tabriz, it is not logical to place the former under the orders of the latter.²⁵

The ideological solidarity between Armenian and Muslim social democrats was impressive. Taqizadah pointed out that the Dashnaks in Tehran provided jobs for members of their organization, and that Armenians such as Ter Hacobian, who were not affiliated with the Dashnak Party, often remained unemployed. Nevertheless, Ter Hacobian and Pilossian were committed to the Democrat Party and competed with the Dashnaks in recruiting young Armenian social democrats to their organization.²⁶ Pilossian and his Armenian colleagues in Tabriz also felt that the Democrat Party should consult with them before recruiting any Armenians or Georgians: "You should never enter into relations with either the Armenians or the Georgians without asking for our advice; just as we do not know the Persians very well, in the same way you do not know the Armenians."²⁷

Pilossian encouraged Taqizadah to maintain absolute secrecy in the work of the provisional Central Committee of the party in Tehran. The Armenian social democrats also kept their connection to Taqizadah and the Democrat Party secret because the involvement of non-Muslims in the leadership of the party could give the conservative Moderate Party, as well as the anti-constitutionalists, ample ammunition against the Democrats.²⁸

Despite their strong loyalty to Taqizadah and the Central Committee, the Armenian social democrats recognized the importance of their own contribution to the Democrat Party. When the party began to expand in Tehran, Taqizadah did not keep regular contact with his Tabriz comrades, despite their urgings. Pilossian's anxiety is clear in his letters. He believed that this lack of communication would deprive the Muslim intellectuals in Tehran of the regular guidance and help of their Armenian colleagues in Tabriz and would ultimately hurt the party irrevocably.²⁹

The letters and essays of Tigran Ter Hacobian

A second set of four letters in *Awraq* was written by Ter Hacobian to Taqizadah between 21 January 1910/9 Muharram 1328 and 1 November 1910/27 Shawwal 1328. From Tabriz, Ter Hacobian reported to the Central Committee of the Democrat Party in Tehran on the progress of the Tabriz chapter and contributed articles to *Iran-i naw*.³⁰ After Taqizadah was forced to leave Tehran in Rajab 1328/July 1910, Ter Hacobian moved from Tabriz to Tehran, where he joined the editorial board and also became a consultant to the Central Committee.

Taqizadah's absence severely disrupted the work of the Democrat Party. Upon his arrival in Tehran, Ter Hacobian wrote of the complete chaos and

disorganization in the Democrat Party, including the parliamentary faction. "Almost everything is lost," he wrote to Taqizadah, "your return to Tehran is absolutely necessary."³¹ Contemporaneously, Ter Hacobian suggested a total reconstruction of the party and began to recruit working-class members. He organized a labor union for telephone workers, recruited pharmacy workers, and worked within the Iranian-Armenian community. Had it not been for his insufficient knowledge of the Persian language, Ter Hacobian claimed in his letters, he could have easily recruited 400 to 500 new members into the party. Meanwhile, he continued to support the activities of the literary center where the meetings of the party were taking place, and encouraged the formation of other cultural and political clubs among Persian intellectuals.³²

In late Dhu al-Qa'dah 1328/November 1910, the Bakhtiyari-Democrat coalition government was near collapse, and the nation was threatened with more aggressive political maneuvers from Britain and Russia. In the pages of *Iran-i naw*, Ter Hacobian called for the formation of a National Salvation Committee (*Kumitah-i Najat-i Milli*). This was to be a coalition of the various Left and liberal political parties and heads of tribes, one which Ter Hacobian had hoped would restrain the more conservative Moderate Party.³³ A few months later, however, the new regent Abu al-Qasim Khan Nasir al-Mulk successfully adopted a similar tactic, except that in his plan, a broad conservative majority was created to oppose the Democrats and support the Moderate Party.

A new concept of nationality for the Democrat Party

Two central themes appear in Ter Hacobian's writings: (1) his belief that a new concept of nationality transcending ethnic and religious affiliations should be developed; and (2) his abhorrence of political terrorism and critique of social democrats who had succumbed to terrorism in their efforts to remove the conservative opposition.

The first theme, the construction of a new concept of nationality, was also a great concern of several other social democrats of this period, such as Taqizadah and Resulzade, and would be reflected in the program of the Democrat Party. The subject of political rights for non-Muslims (Jews, Armenians, Zoroastrians), as well as Muslims who did not belong to the Shi'ite Ithna 'Ashari branch of Islam, was a highly controversial one during both the First and Second Constitutional Periods. In the spring of 1325/1907, a heated debate developed over article 8 of the proposed Supplementary Constitutional Laws (*Mutammim-i Qanun-i Asasi*). This article, which was originally adopted from the Belgian Constitution of 1831, had been proposed by a seven-member commission that included Taqizadah.³⁴ It stated: "The people of the Persian Empire are to enjoy equal rights before the Law."³⁵ "The people" were defined as male and

middle-class members of society who were not religious dissidents such as Baha'is or Azali-Babis. Partly in response to that article, Shaykh Fazl Allah Nuri, the staunchly anti-constitutionalist *mujtahid*, who had referred to the Supplementary Laws as *Zalaalatnamah* (*Book of Deviance*),³⁶ proposed article 2, which stated that no legal enactment of the majlis could "be at variance with the sacred principles of Islam."³⁷ He also called for the establishment of a committee of ulama to monitor all deliberations in the majlis.³⁸ After much heated debate and discussion, both article 2 and article 8 were ratified and incorporated into the Supplementary Constitutional Laws.

Taqizadah and his colleagues took pride in ratifying article 8 and felt that even in its modified form, the Supplementary Constitutional Laws had made a breakthrough by recognizing the equal rights of *dhimmis* (recognized non-Muslims) in Iranian society. In his lecture to a British audience at the Central Asian Society in November 1908, Taqizadah, who was in London to appeal to the European community for the restoration of the constitutional order, began by speaking of article 8 as one of the most important achievements of the First Majlis, if not the most important one:

One thing established by the Constitution was religious equality...a real religious equality, and not a theoretical one. Before that non-Mussulmans had been treated as not on the same plane in the matter of liberty of observance as the followers of the Prophet...The clerical element in Persia was against the framing of a fundamental law of religious liberty, but the reformers succeeded in getting it through, and obtaining recognition of the great principle that in the eyes of the law and the Administration there should be no difference between Christian or Muhammadan, Zoroastrian or Jew.³⁹

After the restoration of the constitutional order in Tehran in Jumadá II 1327/ July 1909, Ter Hacobian, Resulzade, and Taqizadah further developed this new concept of nationality in their writings, as well as in their activities. Ter Hacobian felt that the issue was not only a matter of equal protection for non-Muslims and Muslims before the law, but also implied a new concept of nationality in which ethnic and religious affiliations were altogether irrelevant:

We must create a new [concept] of nationality which will be Iranian. It would be the same to us if people speak different languages or worship different gods. In our view, there should be no differentiation among ethnic groups (*les nations*). We shall recognize only one nation – the Iranian nation, the Persian citizen.⁴⁰

Resulzade continued this line of thought in his political treatise *Tanqid-i Firqah-i I'tidaliyun ya Ijtima'iyun-i I'tidaliyun* (*Critique of the Moderate Party or Social Moderates*), in which he developed a scathing critique of the ethnic prejudices of the Moderate Party.⁴¹ The most provocative section of the treatise was its commentary on the role of religion and on the attitudes of the Moderate Party towards members of non-Muslim ethnicities. The Moderates had called for the unity of all Iranians, claiming they were all "Muslims and followers of one religion and one ideology." This argument showed that the Moderate Party "did not recognize a single person other than Muslims as citizens of Iran." Their attitude was thus similar to that of the tsarist government, which accused the revolutionaries of being "fooled by the Jews, sold out to the foreigners, and enemies of the nation." The truth, however, was that "the history of the Iranian revolution, which still continues, shows that [many] *Fidais* [who helped restore the constitutional order] came from among the ranks of these same non-Muslims."⁴²

These views were also reflected in the program of the Democrat Party that was presented to the majlis and published in *Iran-i naw* on 19 Rabi' I 1329/20 March 1911. The program called for "equality of all people of the nation before the government and the law without distinction of race, religion, or nationality," as well as "complete separation of political power from religious power."⁴³

The Democrats' commitment to equal civil rights especially troubled the conservative Moderate Party and gave the opponents of Taqizadah the opportunity to remove him from the majlis. In the spring of 1328/1910, a case was brought up in the majlis which involved two Isma'ili Iranian victims, men who were both Muslim and Shi'ite but did not belong to the dominant Ithna 'Ashari branch of Shi'ism. When the two Isma'ili men returned to their village near Nayshabur from a pilgrimage to Mecca, they were killed as a result of a religious edict (*fatwa*) issued by a local cleric, Shaykh Baqir, and upheld by the leading *mujtahid* of Mashhad. Taqizadah called attention to the matter in the majlis and asked that the police arrest and prosecute Shaykh Baqir, who apparently had killed the men himself and confiscated their property. When Shaykh Baqir was arrested by the Armenian chief of police Yephrem Khan, the ulama were outraged. Those who had waited for an opportunity to force out the leader of the Democrat Party, including some of the Najaf ulama, saw this as their chance. Taqizadah was accused of conduct that was "in conflict with the Muslim characteristics of the nation and the holy *shari'at* laws."⁴⁴ The condemnation by the ulama was not openly debated in the majlis since this would have brought to surface the unconstitutional nature of their conduct. Instead, on 24 Jumada' II 1328/2 July 1910, Taqizadah was quietly asked to take a three-month leave of absence from the majlis.⁴⁵

In Tabriz, Pilossian was outraged by this treatment of Taqizadah and the pressure by Sayyid 'Abd Allah Bihbahani and other members of the ulama

to force Taqizadah out of the majlis. He complained to Taqizadah that had they been informed sooner and been kept abreast of the events in Tehran, they could have helped him by organizing demonstrations in his support. Through public protestations in Tabriz, Pilossian argued, they could have warned the majlis that it had no right to expel a delegate of the province of Azarbayjan without the express approval of that province.⁴⁶ But Taqizadah had not informed his colleagues and no such demonstration in his support took place. Instead, some members of the Democrat Party, who were angry with the unconstitutional treatment of their leader, resorted to political terrorism, thereby further alienating the progressive community that had placed much of its hope in the Democrat Party.

Ter Hacobian's critique of political terrorism

On 8 Rajab 1328/16 July 1910, Sayyid 'Abd Allah Bihbahani was gunned down in his home by four members of the *mujahidin* who were associated with Haydar Khan and the Democrats. Bihbahani, the leading constitutionalist *mujtahid*, who with his son led the Moderate Party, had been blamed for the censure of Taqizadah in the majlis. The murder of the 70-year-old cleric, one of the two ranking ulama who had been the initial leaders of the Constitutional Revolution, created mass outrage. The bazaars closed in protest, and both Haydar Khan and Taqizadah, who was then still in Tehran, were implicated.⁴⁷ This incident led to the exile of Taqizadah from Iran and subsequent terrorist actions by supporters of the Moderate Party against members of the Democrat Party. The assassination of Bihbahani and the subsequent killings of supporters of both the Democrat and the Moderate Parties seriously demoralized the public. It seemed that their many sacrifices for the re-establishment of the parliament and the constitution had proved futile. Rather than solving conflicts in a democratic fashion, as all had hoped, the contending political parties now resorted to assassination and terrorism.

Of particular significance in this period is a series of eight essays in *Iran-i naw* in which Ter Hacobian analyzed the question of political terrorism and declared it detrimental to the progressive cause. He tried to demonstrate why political terrorism was destructive, and presented the contemporary social democratic analysis that progressive changes in social conditions of a society resulted only from fundamental changes in economic structures and not from the removal of individual leaders through terrorism.

Ter Hacobian began by explaining the point of view of the adherents of political terrorism. Those who tried to justify terrorism as a viable means for social change considered it a powerful tool through which the state machinery could be crushed. The proponents of this ideology argued that when the authorities faced individual acts of terrorism, they became concerned for their personal safety. This, in turn, led the government to

adopt a more moderate course of action and lessened the prevalent political oppression of the people. The advocates of political terrorism argued that their actions "awakened the populace," so that when citizens realized that the aim of the rebels was to help the poor and oppressed, they became politically conscious. They were further strengthened by the knowledge that the revolutionaries were not weak, but were strong and capable men who could hurt the regime.⁴⁸

Ter Hacobian then presented his rebuttal, and in the process gave a short synopsis of his social democratic views as well. He contended that socialism rejected political terrorism as a viable course of action. Individual leaders were not the cause of deteriorating social conditions; economic structures were. With the gradual development of means of production according to "scientific means," a new, freer, and more developed social formation came into being. Each new stage of production gave birth to new social classes which in turn determined the political character of society. With each progressive stage of culture, from the hunter-gatherer society, to agriculture, and finally to capitalist society, the "influence of religion" on the people also diminished.

The Iranian revolution was itself a result of growing capitalist relations of production which necessitated an end to the reign of the *khan*, the landlords, and the monarch, Ter Hacobian wrote. The revolution, however, had developed only halfway, and unless there was a corresponding change in the means of production, it could proceed no further. Ultimately, once new social classes began to grow stronger, and the new society gained an independent life of its own, the old government and the old ways of life would disappear.⁴⁹

The murder of an influential figure would not alter a system of government or challenge oppressed social forces to make a revolution. We cannot allow "revolution and terror" to become synonymous, he contended. Revolution was the act of a whole society which had acquired the necessary material, intellectual, and spiritual forces to take "the role of the midwife" in giving birth to a new society. Terrorism was a "futile one-shot act," which stemmed from the illusion that society could be transformed in one stroke and through an individual's will.⁵⁰

"Every dictator and every absolute monarch represents a certain class," Ter Hacobian argued. "Napoleon represented the French bourgeoisie, Pugachev represented the Russian peasantry, while Nadir Shah represented the *khans* of Iran." Just as no building could stand without proper foundations, so no government could remain in power without its class foundations. The supporters of political terrorism made a grave mistake when they compared the government to a machine, using the analogy that if one removed a few nuts and bolts, the whole system would collapse. The political machinery of the government needed an internal social revolution before its life could be ended. If indeed terrorism had such magical powers,

Ter Hacobian argued, then no system of government would exist for long. There were always many who were discontented, and if indeed the political terrorism of a few instigated the movement of the whole, then the continuing fight between the ruling classes and the forces of opposition would result in a series of unstable governments.⁵¹

"History shows that the result of acts of terror is not revolution but an unleashing of counter-revolution."⁵² Drawing upon the example of the Russian Revolution, Ter Hacobian presented a chart which listed the number of imprisoned revolutionaries from, and acts of political terrorism carried out in, the first decade of the twentieth century in Russia. The chart showed that in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, when many acts of terrorism were committed, there was a significant increase in the level of government repression as well. Thus in 1909 alone, 240,000 revolutionaries were imprisoned in addition to the thousands who were killed or sent to exile in Siberia. Terrorism neither disturbed the government nor succeeded in changing the foundations of power. Rather, as the case of Russia demonstrated, after each act of terrorism, "repression gains more, the inhumane acts of the government increase."⁵³

In fact, terrorism had had yet another disastrous effect, Ter Hacobian warned. Revolutionaries, terrorists, and murderers became the same in the minds of people. Political terrorism resulted in the loss of respect for revolutionary ideas among the people and took away from revolutionary organizations the one foundation they could count on, namely the people's support and sympathy, which was of utmost significance for any revolution.⁵⁴

The political salvation and security of Iran depended upon its adherence to democracy. Terrorism not only did not improve the situation of the country, it created a further excuse for foreign enemies to enter the country on the pretext of ending internal disorder. The autocrats did not fear the hand grenades of a terrorist, but they trembled at the thought of an educated and orderly nation aware of its power and its rights.⁵⁵

The detailed discussion of terrorism in *Iran-i naw* points to the major political disagreements within the Democrat Party in the months following the assassination of Bihbahani and others. Ter Hacobian's strong criticism of political terror and his emphasis on the way it alienated the masses from the revolutionaries was significant. Clearly, Haydar Khan 'Amu Ughlu was among the targets of this criticism. A new ideological rift had emerged within Iranian socialism and would continue to exist throughout the twentieth century. This was not a division between those who opted for alliance with liberal politicians and those who wanted to push for a more radical agenda, including workers' rights. It was an ideological division between those who saw political terrorism as a viable means towards reaching the end of a new social order and others who rejected it, but who nevertheless adhered to a quasi-mechanical concept of

Marxism in which economic structures determined ideological superstructures and modernization progressively eliminated the influences of cultural and religious beliefs.

Conclusion

The Democrat Party and its organ *Iran-i naw* began a new era of social democratic politics and journalism in twentieth-century Iran. As the writings of Pilossian and Ter Hacobian have demonstrated, Armenian social democrats were involved at every stage of the formation of the party and made important organizational and intellectual contributions to it. They oversaw the development of the Tabriz branch of the party and made many suggestions about the composition and activities of the Central Committee in Tehran. They proposed new deputies for the Second Majlis and contributed to the by-laws and program of the Democrat Party. They brought new recruits to the party, especially from within the Armenian community, organized labor unions, and became involved in the political and cultural clubs of the Democrats. They also provided Taqizadah, Resulzade, and other Muslim social democrats with constant support and advice. Ter Hacobian was an outspoken critic of political terrorism and showed that it could lead to a strengthening of the conservative opposition and alienation of the ordinary people. The Armenian social democrats and their Muslim colleagues saw their intellectual cooperation as a possible model for a future Iranian society. They were committed to a new concept of nationality, one in which prejudicial attitudes towards non-Muslims were replaced by social integration and solidarity. They also envisioned a multi-ethnic social democratic Iranian society in which Muslims and non-Muslims lived in harmony and worked towards a secular progressive society.

Because nearly everyone in the Democrat Party kept the involvement of Armenian social democrats secret, fearing an outburst by the conservative opposition against the party, this important dimension of the Constitutional Revolution was nearly lost to us. Taqizadah himself, as well as leading historians of the Constitutional Revolution such as Kasravi and Malikzadah who mentioned the role of Armenian social democrats, also downplayed its importance, sometimes in a misguided effort to legitimize the Revolution. With his effort to bring to light neglected or forgotten aspects of the Constitutional Revolution, Iraj Afshar has once again made us aware of the multidimensionality of that revolution, and its important contribution to the origins of democracy in Iran.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Kambiz Eslami for his many suggestions and helpful editing of this article.

- 2 Afshar, Iraj (ed.) (1980) *Awraq-i tazahyab-i Mashrutiyat marbut bih salha-yi 1325-1330 Qamari*, Tehran: Javidan, 1359 Sh.; the cover title of the book is slightly different: *Awraq-i tazahyab-i Mashrutiyat va naqsh-i Taqizadah*.
- 3 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 19 August 1909, in Afshar (1980), pp.239-40. See also Cosroe Chaqueri (1988) "The role and impact of Armenian intellectuals in Iranian politics, 1905-1911," *Armenian Review* 41(2-162) (Summer): 1-51.
- 4 Afary, Janet (1994) "Social democracy and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11," in John Foran (ed.) *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 21-43, esp. pp. 30-6.
- 5 See Chaqueri, Cosroe (ed.) (1979) *La Social-démocratie en Iran: articles et documents*, Florence: Edition Mazdak, pp. 44-9, and Ravasani, Shapur (1989) *Nahzat-i Mirza Kuchak Khan Jangali va avvalin jumhur-i shurayi dar Iran*, 2nd edn, Tehran: Nashr-i Sham', 1368 Sh., pp. 101-17. Ravasani and Ittihadiyah, who has made extensive use of these documents in her study of the development of political parties during the Constitutional Revolution, have assumed that Ter Hacobian was a member of the Dashnak Armenian Nationalist Party. But Taqizadah, as we shall see later, argues otherwise. See Ravasani (1989), p. 104, and Ittihadiyah, Mansurah (1982) *Paydayish va tahavvul-i ahzab-i siyasi-i Mashrutiyat: dawrah-i avval va duvvum-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Milli*, Tehran: Nashr-i Gustarah, 1361 Sh., p. 244.
- 6 Sadr Hashimi, Muhammad ([1948-53] 1984-85) *Tarikh-i jara'id va majallat-i Iran*, 4 vols, reprint, Isfahan: Kamal, 1363-64 Sh., Vol. 1, pp. 345-48. For a list of the newspapers of this period see Gharavi Nuri, 'Ali (1973) *Hizb-i Dimukrat-i Iran dar dawrah-i duvvum-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Milli*, Tehran: 'A. Gharavi Nuri, 1352 Sh., pp. 76-103. See also Ittihadiyah (1982), p. 218, and Kuhin, Gu'il, *Tarikh-i Sansur dar Matbu'at-i Iran*, 2 vols, Tehran: Agah, 1360-62 Sh., Vol. 2, pp. 537-60.
- 7 Browne, Edward G. ([1914] 1983) *The Press and Poetry of Modern Persia: Partly Based on the Manuscript Work of Mirzā Muhammad 'Ali Khān 'Tarbiyat' of Tabriz*, reprint with new Preface by Amin Banani, Los Angeles, CA: Kalimāt Press, pp. 52-3.
- 8 Kubickova, Vera (1968) "Persian literature of the 20th century," in Jan Rypka (ed.) *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Co., pp. 366-7.
- 9 It was difficult to remove Abu al-Ziya' as editor after the paper became the official organ of the Democrat Party. There was much arguing over money before he agreed to relinquish his position. See Afshar (1980), pp. 328-9.
- 10 Sadr Hashimi ([1948-53] 1984-85), Vol. 1, pp. 110-11.
- 11 After Resulzade was expelled from Iran by the government, his biography appeared in *Iran-i naw* 3(55), 30 May 1911. See also Bennigsen, Alexandre and Wimbush, S. Enders (1979) *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, p. 204; and Adamiyat, Faridun (1975) *Fikr-i dimukrat-i ijtimā'i dar Nahzat-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran*, Tehran: Payam, 1354 Sh., pp. 96-7.
- 12 Browne ([1914] 1983), p. 52.
- 13 Ter Hacobian to Taqizadah, 1 November 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 318. Most of the columns and editorials in *Iran-i naw* do not have a signature. It is, therefore, difficult to determine which were written by Resulzade. Many of the more substantial essays, however, have Ter Hacobian's pen name.
- 14 Ter Hacobian to Taqizadah, 1 November 1910, in Afshar (1980), pp. 317-18.
- 15 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 19 August 1909, in Afshar (1980), p. 240.
- 16 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 3 February 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 260.

- 17 *Ibid.* The name ‘*Amiyun*, roughly meaning “of the people,” was suggested instead and was used intermittently in party documents, but the organization was primarily known to all as the *Firqah-i Dimukrat-i Iran*. The name “Social Democrat” would presumably have discouraged liberal politicians (whom the Democratic Party was courting) from joining.
- 18 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 26 January 1910, in Afshar (1980), pp. 247–8.
- 19 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 19 August 1909, in Afshar (1980), pp. 239–40.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 238–42, and Afshar (1980), Appendix, p. 366 (11–23). The internal regulations reprinted in facsimile in *Awraq* appear to be in Ter Hacobian’s handwriting and not Pilossian’s. It is, of course, quite possible that the two collaborated on composing the document.
- 21 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 19 August 1909, in Afshar (1980), p. 240.
- 22 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 19 September 1909, in Afshar (1980), p. 244.
- 23 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 26 January 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 250.
- 24 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 3 February 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 257.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 251–2.
- 26 See the draft letter by Taqizadah dated 28 Ramadan 1328/3 October 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 223, which shows that Ter Hacobian was not a Dashnak, certainly not by this time.
- 27 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 3 February 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 254.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 253.
- 29 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 9 May 1910, in Afshar (1980), pp. 267–8.
- 30 Ter Hacobian to Taqizadah, 23 May 1910, in Afshar (1980), pp. 321–2.
- 31 Ter Hacobian to Taqizadah, 1 November 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 319.
- 32 *Ibid.*, pp. 311–20.
- 33 *Ibid.*; *Iran-i naw*, 7 November 1910, p. 1.
- 34 Adamiyat, Faridun (1976–[92]) *Idiuluzhi-i Nahzat-i Mashrutiyat-i Iran*, 2 vols, Tehran: Payam (Vol. 1), Rawshangaran (Vol. 2), 2535 Shahanshahi (1371 Sh.), Vol. 1, pp. 408, 417–18.
- 35 Browne, Edward G. ([1910] 1995) *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*, ed. Abbas Amanat, reprint with new Introduction, correspondence, and reviews, Washington DC: Mage Publishers, p. 374.
- 36 Malikzadah, Mahdi (1984) *Tarikh-i Inqilab Mashrutiyat-i Iran*, Tehran: Ilmi Press, Vol. 4, p. 873.
- 37 Browne, Edward G. ([1910] 1995), pp. 372–3.
- 38 Adamiyat (1976–[92]), Vol. 1, pp. 412–16.
- 39 Browne, Edward G. (1909) *The Persian Constitutionalists*, London: Central Asian Society. Mansour Bonakdarian brought this article to my attention.
- 40 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 21 January 1910, in Afshar (1980), p. 304.
- 41 Resulzade, Mehmet Emin (1982) “Tanqid-i Firqah-i I’tidaliyun ya Ijtima’iyun-I’tidaliyun,” in Mansurah Ittihadiah (Nizam Mafi) (ed.) *Maramnamahha va nizamnamahha-yi ahzab-i siyasi-i Iran dar dawrah-i duvvum-i Majlis-i Shura-yi Milli*, Tehran: Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran, 1361 Sh. The treatise was originally published in Tehran in 1328/1910.
- 42 Resulzade (1982), pp. 75–6.
- 43 *Iran-i naw*, 20 March 1911, p. 1. For a more detailed discussion of the Democrat Party and its agenda, see Afary, Janet (1996) *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- 44 Afshar (1980), pp. 230–1, 207–17; see also Taqizadah (1993), pp. 152–5, 348–9.
- 45 Afshar (1980), p. 226. See also the report in *The Times* (London), 4 July 1910, p. 6.
- 46 Pilossian to Taqizadah, 9 May 1910, in Afshar (1980), pp. 267–8.

- 47 Malikzadah (1984), Vol. 6, pp. 1336–7; Kasravi, Ahmad (1971–72) *Tarikh-i hijdah salah-i Azarbayjan*, 5th edn, Tehran: Amir Kabir, Day 1350 Sh., pp. 130–1.
- 48 Ter Hacobian, “Terror,” *Iran-i naw*, 18 December 1910, pp. 1–2.
- 49 Ter Hacobian, “Terror: 3,” *Iran-i naw*, 21 December 1910, p. 1.
- 50 Ter Hacobian, “Terror: 4,” *Iran-i naw*, 29 December 1910, pp. 1–2.
- 51 *Ibid.*
- 52 Ter Hacobian, “Terror: 6,” *Iran-i naw*, 31 December 1910, p. 2.
- 53 Ter Hacobian, “Terror: 7,” *Iran-i naw*, 3 January 1911, p. 2.
- 54 Ter Hacobian, “Terror: 7 [8],” *Iran-i naw*, 4 January 1910, pp. 1–2.
- 55 *Ibid.*

THE FIRST CONGRESS OF PEOPLES OF THE EAST AND THE IRANIAN SOVIET REPUBLIC OF GILAN, 1920–21

Pezhmann Dailami

The overwhelming majority of the historians of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (1905–11) have presumed that the ‘social democrats’ of the time actually wanted socialism. Faced with a ‘constitutional’ government of landlords and the elite that was far from bourgeois in character, in reality they were populist subordinates of a bourgeois-democratic revolution.¹ Even their northern Azeri instigators, the social democrats of the Himmat Party, did not want socialism in Russian Azerbaijan. Not only that, the instigators of all, the Russian social democrats, did not want socialism in Russia proper at the time. The Iranian social democrats, with the help of their Transcaucasian counterparts, established a tradition of populism in Iran that continued through the days of the Jangali movement (1915–20), all the way until the Baku Congress and the last days of the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan, and beyond, far beyond.

The First Congress of Peoples of the East was yet another turning point in the reassertion of that policy. It saw the collision of the two halves of Iranian communism which had different ideas about the fate of the Iranian revolution. The contest was about either having a national and bourgeois-democratic revolution for Iran, which Lenin had originally suggested and continued to believe in, or having a proletarian and military revolution based on the Turkestani model. The first clash of the two halves of Iranian communism thus took place in Turkestan in early 1920. At that stage, the Eurocentrism of the local Bolsheviks won the day.

By then, the contest was about collaborating or not collaborating with the anti-imperialist and populist social democrats of Gilan, the Jangalis, who had restarted the Iranian revolution in the autumn of 1915 and established a Soviet republic in northern Iran in June 1920. The policies of the Left having failed, the course of the revolution was changed at the Baku

Congress with the help or perhaps even initiation of Moscow. Once again, the Iranian revolution became national and bourgeois-democratic, and subsequently, once again, Moscow became able to come to terms with Iranian nationalism. At the heart of the revolution in Gilan, the revolutionaries saw an expression of Soviet respect for the sovereignty of the locals, as well as a recognition by the communists of the historical stage through which Iranian society was passing.

The migrant proletarians

...in the villages and towns far and near the borderlands, in graveyards and on tombstones, one rarely sees the name of a man. They are all names of women; as though it were the city of women.

Haji Zeinalabedin Maraghehi, *Travellogue of Ebrahim Beyk*

Horses, cats and dogs are beaten, and in Astrakhan policemen beat the Persians. I'd seen it with my own eyes.

Maxim Gorky, *My Childhood*

For hundreds of years the Iranian peasantry was victim to a system of government in Iran in which legality was absent. Under this form of government, known as oriental despotism, the peasant was at the bottom of a pyramid of economic exploitation and political oppression. As the most productive and least powerful class, the Iranian peasant had to pay dues and bribes to everyone, from the local governor to the landlord's bailiffs. This situation worsened in the course of the nineteenth century when excessive and irregular taxation combined with the decline of production in handicrafts, the result of importation of manufactured goods, to bring about devastating results. Then, there was greater demand for imported goods and, at the same time, less demand for raw materials. Foreign imports had to be paid for by the production of cash crops such as cotton, opium and silk. This resulted in the so-called 'commercialisation' of agriculture, which did not bring about any development in the system nor even in the relations of production in Iran. The effects of the production of cash crops were inflation in the price of foodstuffs as well as their irregular production.

At the same time, the decline of handicrafts resulted in an increase in the introduction of labour to the market although the population had not increased. Wages were reduced. In the final analysis, in the course of the nineteenth century, the increase in available labour, reduction of wages and increased taxation caused the artisans to abandon their villages in search of work. In addition, the late nineteenth century saw the privatisation of crown lands which in turn added to the intense exploitation of the peasantry.

Private landlords extracted even more than the crown. The peasants and the artisans emigrated to India, North Africa, Turkey and especially to the southern regions of the Russian empire: Transcaucasia and Central Asia.²

While the Iranian economy was declining, Transcaucasia was exploding with economic growth. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the construction of railways, the exploitation of oil wells and the development of capitalism in general was underway. There was a great demand for labour and the Iranians filled the vacuum. Research is yet to determine the exact class character of the Iranian immigrants who mostly came from the north-western province of Iranian Azerbaijan. As well as peasants, of course, there were also artisans, and a good number of the Iranians were unemployed even in southern 'Russia'.³ The Caucasian economy also attracted Iranian capital. The left-wing Iranian communist resident of Baku Mir Javad Javadzadeh (later Ja'far Pishehvareh) states in his memoirs that in late 1917 there were over 50,000 Iranian non-proletarians in the city.⁴ However, we can perhaps safely presume that most of the Iranians in the Caucasus were wage earners. They worked in the oil industry of Baku, in copper mines and in the ports around the Caspian Sea as dockers. They were also employed in digging canals. But the number of Iranian industrial workers was small and, considering that by 1905 the Iranians in southern Russia numbered some 500,000,⁵ it appears that in fact most of them were employed in the agricultural sector.

The Edalat Party: class without class consciousness

The last Shah of old Iran, the candidate saviour of the great Iranian republic [is] Ahmad Mirza.

Beyraq-e Edalat, 14 July 1917

By the early twentieth century, well over 1,200,000 passports had been issued by the Russian authorities to Iranian subjects. Of those who travelled to the Russian empire, 500,000 remained and worked there. Hence, the first historical experiences of Iranian communism took place not on Iranian territory but in the Caucasus and, to some extent, in Turkestan.

The Iranian industrial proletariat was small and politically undeveloped. Before the Russian Revolution of 1905–07 their number in the Baku oil fields was 10,000.⁶ By 1915, after arrests and the conscription of the native workers for war, they constituted approximately 30 per cent of the workforce.⁷ The Iranians worked under conditions unacceptable to others,⁸ thus sabotaging the economic struggles of the local workers. They accepted lower wages. They formed the mass of unskilled workers. Their purely economic aspirations were an obstacle to their political development. They huddled together in the Baku areas of Sabunchi and Balakhani.

At the time, Baku was deeply fragmented on the basis of the ethnic origins of the workers. As Ronald G. Suny, who has pioneered the study of Baku in those years, argues, nationality tended to accentuate differences of status within the working class. Animosities of a national kind were coupled with social and economic antagonisms, leading to tension and disunity in the working class rather than the cohesion which the social democrats wished to promote.⁹

Also important is the fact that, along with the native Azeris, the Iranians were the most passive of workers. A Menshevik revolutionary, Eva Broido, described the condition of the Iranian workers in 1904–05 in this way:

Our basic difficulty was the fact that the Persians hardly realised how badly off they were. They lived in the midst of the oil fields in barracks which were exceptionally insanitary even for Baku. Huddled together, they were completely isolated from the outside world. The majority of the Persians had drifted to Baku in search of work, leaving their families behind and longing above all to return home. Their nasal oriental voices could be heard singing unending monotonous and nostalgic laments to accompany their unhurried work at the oil wells or to while away their leisure hours. Their song seemed to reflect their hard, joyless life, their hopeless longing for their distant homeland and the heady mysticism of the East...¹⁰

Suny suggests that in Baku, Muslims were the least political and revolutionary because of their agrarian-peasant cultural background. They nevertheless were swept along at times by the general strikes of other workers. In the wake of the second congress of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party (RSDWP), in 1904, an exclusively Azerbaijani group, the *Himmat* ('will'), which cooperated with the Baku Committee of the party, was formed. The *Himmat* was organised as an exception to the Bolshevik cardinal rule that all branches of the party had to be established on a territorial basis and not on the basis of nationality or ethnicity.

The Azeri intellectuals who formed the *Himmat* had links with the RSDWP (Bolshevik). They published a newspaper by the same name and from the outset began agitating among the Iranians for the purpose of forming social democratic organisations.¹¹ However, the *Himmat* kept a great degree of autonomy from the RSDWP(B) as a number of its leaders were not Bolsheviks. On the whole, the autonomy of the *Himmat* was geared to dealing with the undeveloped class consciousness of the Azeri and Iranian workers. By 1905, the group was joined by two RSDWP(B) men who were later to occupy key positions in the party, Nariman Najaf-uglu Narimanov and Meshedi Azizbeyk-uglu Azizbekov. RSDWP(B) influence was exercised by its members who were also members of the *Himmat*. At the higher level, contact between the two was maintained by a leading

Bolshevik, P.A. Dzgharidze, and perhaps Joseph Stalin too. In the wake of the 1905–07 revolution in Russia, the Himmat was suppressed by the tsarist regime. After that time, very little of it survived in Transcaucasia.¹²

The party was not resurrected until after the victory of the February Revolution, in early April 1917. Nariman Narimanov assumed the leadership, and the top ranks of the party included well-known revolutionaries such as Azizbekov, D. Buniatzadeh, S. Israfilbekov and A. Sultanov.¹³ At about the same time, an Iranian political party of the same kith and kin was established under the leadership of Assadullah Ghaffarzadeh. Within the context of Baku politics, we have to add, the ethnic fragmentation of the city's workers was complemented by institutional differences as well as the existence of an Iranian mission for this party, the *Edalat* (justice). The time for the establishment of the party was ripe. However, there is no evidence to suggest that the Iranians, as an immigrant community, had found fresh vigour. Instead, it can be suggested that they were swept along by the revolutionary events of the Russian empire. Iranian political consciousness was still immature.

The party, established in May 1917, began publishing an occasional paper in Azeri, *Beyraq-e Edalat* (*Banner of Justice*), in June of the same year. Between June and September, five issues were published. The paper introduced the Russian Provisional Government to the Iranians and published photographs of its members, although some time since Lenin's famous "April Theses", arguing for the seizure of power, had passed. It also celebrated Shamil, the Caucasian national hero. Later, *Beyraq-e Edalat* nominated Ahmad Shah as the future leader of an Iranian republic.

Most noteworthy was the populism adopted by the Edalat Party. Their paper praised the Friday Imam of Tehran and claimed that Islam provided the best background for social democracy. In fact, the Edalat had proclaimed its establishment by citing Qoranic verses, and claimed divine inspiration. But that was not the only aspect of the Edalatis' populism. In late 1917, the party absorbed an Iranian pan-Islamist party, and later, in 1919, it absorbed the Baku branch of the Demokrat Party which had been formed in 1909 to organise the crowd of 'social democrats' in Iran.

In a major series on the land question, the Edalatis expressed their concern about the resolution of the agrarian question both in Russia and in Iran. They had no industrial concerns. *Beyraq-e Edalat* claimed that 'Islam is the uncompromising enemy of cruelty' and 'therefore, naturally, in the shadow of Islamic teachings and ancient Iranian ideas, a very suitable background for a social-democratic society for the Iranians is prepared'.¹⁴ The Edalat claimed to be a social democratic party which advocated the interests of 'workers, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie'.¹⁵

It must be noted that in Baku, Bolshevik power was not established until April 1918. When the October Revolution broke out, the Baku Bolsheviks were still busy trying to seize power. Although they had dominated the

political scene and had assumed the leadership of the city's Soviet, they were yet to capture political power in its entirety. In the Soviet there were a whole array of political parties which represented various interests, and the Soviet had in turn rivals in the city in the organisations of the Duma and the Executive Committee of Public Organisations. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the arrangement and disposition of political forces changed so that the communists had to share and contend for power with Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalists. New political forces had emerged.

In Baku, the Edalat Party held loosely organised political meetings and was mostly engaged in scuffles with the Iranian consulate. So much so that even the Tehran government became aware of the activities of its leader, Ghaffarzadeh. But, on the whole, it appears that in this period, the activities of both the Edalat and the Himmat were submerged under the cover of the more prominent RSDWP(B) in the city. Throughout the period between March and November 1917, the Himmat only occasionally surfaced as an organisation in its own right. Having considered all the underdevelopment of the Edalat and the Iranian workers, it must be stated that the Bolshevik connection was unmistakable. As from the third issue of the *Beyraq-e Edalat*, the party introduced itself as the 'Persian Social-Democratic Workers Party (Edalat)', and the first pages of the paper were garnished with the slogan 'Proletarians of all countries, Unite!', in Azeri and Russian. Yet the Edalat enjoyed a great degree of autonomy, as was indicated in its passivity during the Baku civil war which took place at the end of March 1918.

At the end of February 1918, fighting broke out between the Baku Soviet's forces and the Muslim nationalists outside the city in Lenkoran. It was evident that the fighting was eventually going to extend to Baku. On 30 March, the Soviet forces' attempt to disarm the Muslim Savage Division and the latter's refusal to give up arms sparked off the fighting. Muslim fever was high and sporadic firing on Soviet troops began. The Bolsheviks, in retaliation, began to organise themselves and fight back. In a surprise move, the Armenian nationalists, at the eleventh hour, decided to join the Soviet forces. Such a decision could not have been unexpected, for if the Muslims had emerged victorious from the fighting, they would have no doubt taken their toll on the ranks of their national rival in the aftermath. The battle began on the morning of 31 March. On 1 April, the Muslims were beaten back and the Dashnaks began taking revenge for their national grievances; hence the submerged national content of the civil war in Baku became evident. During the fighting, known in history as the 'March Days', the Iranian workers remained passive throughout. They waited for an end to the bloodshed and found that their identity as a Muslim political party did not allow them to take part in the fighting. It is not possible that Iranian passivity was consequent upon Bolshevik directives, for the Himmat did participate in the fighting.

After the 'March Days', the Bolsheviks finally came to power and established their famous Baku Commune in April 1918. The Muslim nationalist party of Baku, the Musavat ("equality"), having been expelled from the city, took refuge in Ganja (Elizavetpol). After that, one Muslim Socialist Bureau was to become the sole voice of the Muslims in the Baku Soviet. It was composed of the Edalat, the Himmatt and Akinchi, which was a Muslim Left Social-Revolutionary organisation led by a Ruhullah Akhundzadeh.¹⁶

Soon the Commune faced a crisis on two fronts. By the end of June, the Ottoman army had moved to Transcaucasia. The second problem was the unbearable conditions under which the Bolsheviks were required to fight for the extension of Soviet power. At this time, Baku was at war on two fronts: within Baku, against the internal counter-revolution, and outside, against a foreign power. At the same time, two other foreign powers also began to compete for the eventual control of the city. These were the British and the Germans. Neither wanted the Turks in Baku. The British were waiting in Gilan in northern Iran to enter Baku at an opportune moment. The Bolsheviks were resolutely opposed to inviting the British to besieged Baku, but eventually they were defeated and resigned their positions in the Soviet.¹⁷

The Ottomans captured Baku on 15 September 1918, and their Azeri companions took their revenge on the Armenians and made up for the 'March Days'. Many Edalatis reportedly lost their lives too.¹⁸

The Edalat Party: the interface of localism and internationalism

The Ottoman capture of Baku lasted for a very short while. They left the city but not without leaving behind a nationalist government which they had installed. When the Turks were still at the stage of besieging the city, they had rallied around themselves the Azeri nationalists, the great majority of whom were Musavatists, and had formed the 'Army of Islam' to fight the Soviets. Once in Baku, the mainly Musavatist 'Muslim National Council', with the approval and encouragement of the Turks, established the Republic of Azerbaijan. When the Turks left, the British, after making insignificant criticisms, found that the Azeris' republic could be to their advantage if given only limited powers and strictly controlled. They moved into Baku and replaced the Turks on 17 November 1918. The British were in fact welcomed to Baku by the Azerbaijani nationalists and their leader Fathali Khan Khoiski. The Edalatis, together with other Left socialists who had fallen into disarray, had from then on to adopt methods of political activity which were at best semi-legal. The Bolsheviks and others, however, very quickly managed to organise the 'Baku Committee'. At that stage, they tried harder than before to get a foothold among the Muslim workers, who constituted one half of the Baku labour force and who had previously been

to some degree under-represented and perhaps even ignored. The task, as expected, was assigned to the allies of the Bolsheviks, the Edalat and the Himmat.¹⁹ By early 1919, members of Bolshevik organisations in Baku numbered some 3,000 persons, two-thirds of whom were workers.²⁰

By then, the Russian Bolsheviks of Baku, led by Anastas Mikoyan, began to think of reversing their original decision to allow the Himmat and the Edalat to have an autonomous status. Now that emphasis was on working among the Muslims, work also had to be done to link the different nationalities of Baku. It seemed inevitable that the Bolsheviks would attempt to dominate the communist politics of the city and push the local revolutionaries to the background. But that was not to be the case. The fear, however, was real for the Himmat and the Edalat.

In the first place, Mikoyan attempted to effect a split in the Himmat Party and to subsidise it. That took place, eventually, in July 1919. According to the Azeri historian Dzh. B. Guliev, the Edalat was left intact for the time being. He claims that the Baku Committee held this Iranian group in low esteem, as it demonstrated little class consciousness and was organisationally weak.²¹ The Edalat shared many of its cells with the Himmat, and soon its Central Committee was to be headed by Buniatzadeh, a Himmati leader.

Mikoyan's efforts were directed towards the unification of all Left political forces, and he had to make concessions of a nationalist nature to those forces. While he was securing the unanimous support of his colleagues in the Baku Committee, he made concessions by confronting Tiflis and changing the local party's slogan from 'A Soviet Caucasus' to 'A Soviet Azerbaijan', a tactic which outraged the Tiflis Kavkraikom (Kavkazkii-Krayevoye-Komitet, Caucasus Regional Committee), which was the highest Bolshevik body in Transcaucasia.²² The native communists of Azerbaijan, the Himmatis, must have believed that a Transcaucasian federation would rather diminish their role in the politics of their own society. The Edalat appears to have backed the Himmat on this issue all the way. Mikoyan understood that, at least temporarily, if he were to centralise and unite all the Left organisations in Baku, this would have to be at the cost of Transcaucasian unity.

The Kavkraikom was dominated by Georgian Bolsheviks, and Mikoyan could not win his argument with them. He therefore attempted to establish direct contact with Moscow and Astrakhan, where the Transcaucasian Commissariat was based. But before he could put his case forward, he had to deal with the Himmatis, who insisted that they would need organisational autonomy in Azerbaijan. Mikoyan had to deal with the centre and the local communists at the same time. In early May 1919, he put forward the idea of a single Communist Party of Azerbaijan.²³ The communist leader's efforts in Baku were also part of his preparation for seizing power in the area. In a letter to Lenin, he specifically asked for dispatching of party workers, especially Muslims, and party literature in Russian, Armenian and Azeri.²⁴

On 27–28 May, a meeting of the Kavkraikom headed by ‘Sergo’ Ordzhonikidze was convened in which he, convinced of the soundness of Mikoyan’s argument, also gave the green light for independent Georgian and Armenian republics. Ordzhonikidze also informed the Central Committee in Moscow of the decision to propose an armed uprising in the region. The meeting adopted a resolution which called for the union of the three republics with the RSFSR on the basis of Soviet federalism.

In any case, Mikoyan eventually had his way, although not entirely. In July 1919, the Himmat was recognised as the autonomous Communist Party of Azerbaijan, but with limited territorial powers. Azerbaijan itself was recognised as a would-be independent Soviet republic.²⁵

The Kavkraikom was loath to see the affairs of Baku slipping from its jurisdiction, especially because the autonomous status of Baku was something which other nationalities might also have demanded for themselves. Yet the Himmat and the Edalat were not satisfied. The former wanted to consist exclusively of Azerbaijanis, and to go with that, there was a suggestion that the Edalat would retain its status as an organisation for Iranian immigrants. The Baku Bolsheviks, now renamed the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) (RCP(B)), would admit all other nationalities. In every respect, the Edalat supported the position of the Himmat – an indication, perhaps, of Muslim solidarity, but even more importantly of organisational affinity and the Himmat’s influence in the ranks of the Edalat’s leadership. In late October, they both refused to participate in a Bolshevik caucus in charge of planning an uprising.²⁶

But already in March 1919, after a conference of Left political organisations in Baku, the leadership of the Edalat had fallen into the hands of the Himmatists. After that, the Edalat published a whole series of proclamations together with the RCP(B) and the Himmat, as the ‘Iranian Communist Party (Edalat)’. Later, it also adopted the programme of the Bolsheviks, as did the Himmat also.

In the following month of November, however, the Muslim organisations boycotted a conference called by the Baku Committee to discuss unification with the RCP(B). Tadeusz Swietochowski suggests that ‘this was the high point in the Azerbaijani communists’ efforts to assert the national identity of their party’. He further adds that the Bolsheviks at this stage decided to disregard the locals and absorbed, one after another, the ranks of the Himmat and the Edalat.²⁷ Moscow later, in January 1920, decreed that there would be a single party in Azerbaijan for all of its nationalities. The name ‘Himmat’ would be replaced by ‘Azerbaijani’, connoting territorial and national conditions.²⁸ But the controversy continued well into February 1920 at the constituent congress of the Azerbaijani Communist Party.

The resistance to amalgamation, however strong it may have been, must have mainly rested among the leadership of the Himmat and the Edalat. The amalgamation appears to have been accomplished rather easily. According

to Guliev, the organisational work of these groups was in an appalling state. The Edalat's cells held no meetings and even lacked membership lists.²⁹ It has been said that the idea of retaining the Edalat as an independent Iranian communist party in Azerbaijan had been abandoned as early as late 1919, because of its support for the Himmat.³⁰ But this overlooks the fact that in reality, the Edalat was indeed more Azerbaijani and Russian than Iranian. Up until 1920, in its three-year history, it had hardly done anything in relation to Iran itself.

In December 1919, at the conference of the RCP(B), it was decided that all national organisations on Soviet territory were to dissolve and to join the Communist Party at the level of its territorial subdivisions. The problem, however, was not resolved for the Azeris and the Iranians until the constituent congress of the Azerbaijani Communist Party, which was convened on 11 February 1920. There the Himmat and the Edalat representation was overwhelming. From Baku, the Edalat, the Himmat and the RCP(B) had thirty representatives each. Another sixty delegates came from the communist organisations in the provinces, which were mostly adherents of the Himmat Party. In this way, a solid majority of the Himmatis and the Edalatis were able to dominate the outcome of the conference. The arguments of 1919 were repeated.

Three views had been predominant in Transcaucasia. One was that the Azerbaijani Communist Party must be exclusively composed of native Azeri communists. This had been mainly the Himmatis' argument all along. The second view, argued by Mikoyan and his supporters, was that all communists in Azerbaijan should unite and form the Communist Party on a territorial basis. The third view, put forward by the Tiflis-based Kavkraikom, argued against the two above and was, on the whole, against the formation of any Azerbaijani party.³¹

However, the very fact that the locals had an overwhelming majority in the congress must have reassured them that the Russian Bolsheviks had no intention of dominating the politics of Baku. The congress eventually passed a resolution to unify all the Left political organisations under the banner of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan (Bolshevik). In this way, the Himmat, the Edalat and the RCP(B) united. The congress also resolved to dissolve the Himmat and the Edalat Committees, but they were allowed to work until a united Baku Committee could be formed.³²

The second phase of the story of the Edalat in Baku was indeed about the radicalisation and also the proletarianisation of that party. But, even more importantly, in this way, the idea of local sovereignty was firmly planted in the minds of Iranian communists. Their emergence in the Iranian revolution was high and their historical experience could have helped them to understand the Iranian revolutionaries of Gilan. But this was not to be the case. As it turned out, it was the Turkestanian experience that was to inspire communist policy in Gilan up until the Baku Congress.

The Revolutionary Party of Iran: the first clash

A good practical worker but weak theoretically.

Avenir Avisalumovich Khanukaev on Haidar Khan

In fact he was born of a Muslim father but he has the misfortune of having an Armenian mother.

Mikhail Pavlovich (Vel'tman) on Sultanzade

The Edalat Party was not the only one that claimed to represent and aimed to mobilise the Iranian working class. In fact, there was another radical political party, which history has hitherto buried under the rubble of political battlefields. The leader of this party was Haidar Tariverdiev (famously known as Haidar Khan Amu-Ughly), who has gone down in history as a hero of the October Revolution. Subsequently, Soviet and pro-Soviet sources always attempted to portray Haidar as an orthodox Bolshevik – a label which is certainly not appropriate for him.

Haidar Khan was born in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1880 into a wealthy family, and at a very early age he emigrated to the Caucasus with his family. He studied as an engineer in Ganja and Tiflis, and there it is said he made friends with prominent revolutionaries such as Makharadze, Ordzhonikidze and even Stalin. He reportedly joined the RSDWP in 1898.³³ However, we can be sure that Haidar was a graduate of the Georgian school of revolution, in which making and throwing bombs were specialities.

After his graduation from the Tiflis Polytechnic, he went to Mashhad as an engineer and set up a small power station. There he began his revolutionary efforts to set up a social democratic cell, but he failed miserably. In his memoirs, he speaks of the unripe heads of the people who quite simply could not understand the ideas of socialism.³⁴ It was from then on that the subjective conditions of Iranian society became important for Haidar.

In 1904, Haidar moved to Tehran, and there he found the situation more ripe for revolutionary activity. It was there that he reportedly set up the first social democratic organisations. His main activities were directed towards supporting the Constitutional Revolution, which flared up in late 1905. At this time, Haidar is reputed to have engaged in terrorist activities. Historians generally agree that he was responsible for the assassination of the prime minister, Atabak, in 1907. He was arrested at the time but later released.

In 1908, Haidar is also said to have organised an assassination attempt on the life of Mohammad Ali Shah, who had carried out a coup and managed temporarily to suppress the constitutionalists. At this time, Haidar left for Baku, where he organised support for the Tabrizis who were holding out against the shah's army. He himself went to Tabriz and distinguished himself in the art of making and using bombs.

In 1909, he reportedly accompanied the revolutionaries in the conquest of Tehran and the banishing of Mohammad Ali Shah. As the second period of the Constitutional Revolution began, he was instrumental in the creation of the Demokrat Party. Apparently, he worked hard behind the scenes and appears to have been the Demokrat Party's organisation man. Haidar, however, made many enemies for himself. In early 1911, when a right-wing clergyman by the name of Behbahani was assassinated, he was sent into exile. He reportedly made his way to Europe by way of the Caucasus and Russia.³⁵

When the First World War broke out, Haidar Khan, as the most radical figure in Iranian politics, behaved no differently from other revolutionaries. He moved to Berlin and chose to cooperate with the Central Powers against Russia and Britain. In late 1915, as the radical nationalists (also known as the 'Migrants') evacuated Tehran, he communicated the following proclamation to his followers:

Given that the central government of Tehran has given way to the Anglo-Russian threats, that the legations of powers friendly to Iran have left Tehran and those of her enemies have stayed there, that the true patriots have also escaped from Tehran, and that from that time onwards all hope of a movement on the part of the Iranian government and for the safeguarding of the independence of the country must be considered completely lost...

The committee of Persian patriots judges it absolutely necessary to mobilise without delay the national forces under the flag of revolution to attack Tehran and the northern and southern provinces under enemy occupation and save the country. It is necessary throughout to act entirely in conjunction with the German representatives. The young Shah must be saved from his treacherous entourage.³⁶

By late 1915, most of Iranian territory was under the occupation of the British, Russian and Ottoman armies. The Iranian nationalists, including the radical Demokrat Party, had sided with the Central Powers in order to rid Iran of the old and dominant imperialists. As Tehran was threatened by the advancing Russian army, the radicals evacuated Tehran and moved west, where they fought the Russians until early 1917. Haidar demanded money and weapons from the Germans in order to create an Iranian army 10,000 strong. The Germans could not and would not fulfil Haidar's demands, but what was even more important was his demand for the complete independence of his force. This the Germans did not like.³⁷

Soon, Haidar left Berlin for Russia. We know that in 1918 he worked in the Commissariat for the Affairs of Nationalities under Stalin. He was in charge of international propaganda. In November of the same year, he was involved in organising the Central Bureau of Muslim Communist Organisations.³⁸

During the First World War, the Demokrat Party had been greatly weakened. Most of its leaders had gone into exile to Istanbul and Berlin. After the Bolshevik revolution, the party considered taking its place in the political arena again. But differences of opinion over the appropriateness of an immediate political organisation, when not all the émigrés had returned to Iran, provoked a split at the very heart of the party. They split into the 'Tashkilis', who wanted to reorganise, and the 'Zedd-e Tashkilis', who opposed that position. The Tashkilis won the argument and emerged as pro-British politicians.³⁹

The reorganisation of the left wing of the Demokrat Party occurred in 1919. While in Tehran a Demokrat leader, Soleyman Mirza Eskandari, rallied the left-wingers to his side and called them the Zed-de Tashkilis, in Berlin, another leader, Hasan Taqizadeh, was involved in the establishment of a secret organisation by the name of *Anjuman-e Enqelabi-ye Donya* (the Revolutionary Society of the World). This society included Young Turks and radical Germans. A British report suggests that it was based in Bern, with branches in Geneva, Lausanne, Istanbul, the Caucasus and Baku. A number of figures were alleged to be in contact with this society, the most important of whom was Haidar Khan.⁴⁰ Later, in February 1920, *The Times* alleged that Taqizadeh and his comrades were working in collaboration with German agents who had 'Red' plans. It was generally agreed that the Iranian members of the Society were Demokrats of the Russian school of revolution.⁴¹

And, sure enough, in 1919 in Petrograd, we find Haidar Khan representing a Revolutionary Party of Iran. It appears that ever since 1917, Haidar had endeavoured to establish an alternative party to that of the Edalat. In 1919 too, while a branch of the Edalat existed in Petrograd, Haidar claimed to represent a Revolutionary Party of Iran which was undoubtedly connected with Taqizadeh in Berlin and the Left Demokrats.⁴²

In 1919, Haidar does not appear to have done much except attend meetings and organise charity work for Iranians who were resident in Russia. He was also involved in translating Soviet literature into Persian.⁴³ Soon, however, in early 1920, he arrived in Turkestan on the propaganda train 'Red East'. He carried a mandate from Leon Trotsky.⁴⁴ The political commissar of the 'Red East' was Georgii Ivanovich Safarov, a personal emissary of Lenin.⁴⁵ In Turkestan, heavy recruitment of Muslims, including Iranians, was the priority of the day, and Haidar took up the task.⁴⁶

While in Baku the Edalatis were struggling with the local RCP(B), which was trying to absorb them, Turkestan was home to a similar problem, which could be seen as a contact point between Soviet and Iranian communist politics. The problem, in short, was about the Eurocentrism of the leading Bolsheviks in Turkestan, who did not care much for an Eastern revolution and who had dominated the politics of the area. The politics of the region had come to be dominated by Russians, who considered the local Bolsheviks to be backward. Safarov explained the situation in this way:

It was inevitable that the Russian Revolution in Turkestan should have a colonialist character. The Turkestani working class, numerically small, had neither leader, programme, party nor revolutionary tradition. It could therefore not protest against colonialist exploitation. Under tsarist colonialism, it was the privilege of the Russians to belong to the industrial proletariat. For this reason the dictatorship of the proletariat took on a typically colonialist aspect.⁴⁷

In Turkestan, the Demokrats had been organised independently of the Bolsheviks and the Edalatis since 1917. On the whole, they appear to have adopted a brand of social democracy which was more radical than that of their counterparts inside Iran. Both factions of that party demanded land reform in Iran. One side opposed the payment of compensation to landlords, while the other favoured the payment of such compensation.⁴⁸

While Haidar worked to recruit the Demokrats and bring them under the banner of the Revolutionary Party of Iran, which adhered to Soviet power, he was to compensate them ideologically by adopting a programme of a national and democratic revolution which later, in 1921, became far more visible. He thus issued nationally inclined proclamations to the Iranian Demokrats.⁴⁹

One document which is revealing of Haidar's ideas appeared in *Zhizn' Natsional'nostei* in early 1920. Once again, the Himmati leader, Efendiev, voiced his objection to the Eurocentrism of the Russian Bolshevik leaders. In essence, his argument was that the Bolsheviks should pay more attention to the revolutionary waves that were going to sweep Iran. The Iranian revolution was national and democratic in character and yet it had to be an integral part of the world revolution. The Bolsheviks could not afford to ignore the revolution in the East. While this argument was a contribution to the discussion on the character of world revolution, in a more specific context it was a demand not only for a recognition of the status of the local revolutionaries but also for a recognition of the national and democratic character of revolution in the East. At the end of his article, Efendiev stated that all his ideas were shared by the Iranian revolutionary Haidar Khan.⁵⁰

At the same time, the organisations of the Edalat in Turkestan were injected with fresh vigour. As in the case of Azerbaijan, in Turkestan too all radical organisations were to merge to form the Communist Party of Turkestan. In January 1920, the Edalat, having emerged from its friendly conflict with the RCP(B), sent a number of emissaries to Turkestan to work towards the same goal. The best-known of those was Avetis Mikaelian, a Russian Bolshevik who arrived from Moscow and was put in charge of Edalat organisations in the Caucasus and Turkestan by the Bolsheviks.⁵¹

Mikaelian's mentality was that of an inferior foreigner, the likes of whom one frequently encounters in the streets of London, Berlin and Paris. His father, Sultan (as Mikaelian's patronymic, Sultanovich, suggests), was a

Muslim; it is not clear where the Christian names of Avetis Mikaelian come from, other than that he had an Armenian mother.⁵² Mikaelian, on the whole, and at that stage, was to offer to Iran what Lenin had offered to Moscow and Petrograd. He simply tried to copy the Bolshevik revolution, and his hypocritical radicalism (as will be seen) was an integral element of his inferiority. He arrived in Turkestan under the name of Mikaelian and, when he joined the *Sovinterprop* (Soviet of International Propaganda), he changed to Sultanzade – later Avetis Sultanovich Sultanzade. In Turkestan, where a bunch of chauvinist Russians were carrying out their own revolution, he found the perfect pattern for the Iranian movement (hence and only hereafter he will be referred to as Sultanzade).

He was a student of the 'Russian' Revolution, and by attempting to copy that revolution in Iran, he was to come into conflict with the old Edalatis, as well as with Haidar Khan. In his struggle against Haidar, Sultanzade was to draw on the Eurocentric support of the Bolsheviks. In his mind, as it later transpired, the personification of world revolution was the Russian civil war itself, which expanded as the Red Army conquered new territories. His revolution was a proletarian revolution with a military character, as indeed the revolution in Turkestan was. There is no sign of Sultanzade's involvement in Iranian communist affairs before 1920. He came from the north and he found in Turkestan the perfect pattern for the forthcoming Iranian revolution. He was a Stalinist before Stalin. Indeed, the Iranian upheaval would be just another stage of the Russian civil war, where the Red Army would intervene and establish the dictatorship of the Iranian proletariat that was based in Baku and Turkestan. Sultanzade thus also introduced an element of regional separatism into Iranian communist politics, which had hitherto been merely a condition of local movements in Iran, particularly of the Jangali movement in the north of the country. Sultanzade did so despite the fact that by copying the Bolsheviks' programme for the Iranian Communist Party (Bolshevik) (ICP(B)), he unsuspectingly offered federalism to Iranian society for the first time.

On the other hand, Haidar, in the manner of a skilful diplomat, spoke in favour of both the Revolutionary Party of Iran and the Edalat.⁵³ Soon, the two sides were to collide and collude and leave the differences unresolved. In April 1920, a conference of Iranian communists was convened in Turkestan. As it turned out, Sultanzade was to win the first battle. The conference adopted a number of resolutions which gave the forthcoming Iranian revolution both a proletarian and a military character. They resolved to set up an Iranian Red Army.⁵⁴

At the same time, the authorities in Turkestan decided not to tolerate the existence of the Demokrat Party on their territory. They effected a split within that party and merged it with the Edalat. The Left Demokrats were also promised representation at the first congress of the Comintern, which does not appear to have materialised.⁵⁵ In turn, the Edalat officially

liquidated itself and joined the territorial communist parties. In reality, the regional organisations of the party remained active until the end of 1920.⁵⁶

In the process, Haidar Khan was excluded from Iranian communist politics until September 1920, when he re-emerged at the Baku Congress and captured the leadership of the ICP(B). Prior to that, he had been unable to attend the first congress of the party, which was convened in Gilan in June of that year.⁵⁷

The Jangali movement and the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan

A thieving baron.

A. Mikaelian on Kuchek Khan

Kuchek Khan is an outstanding personality.

M. Pavlovich

The Jangali movement was set off in Gilan in the context of widespread national risings of late 1915, when a whole array of political forces rose against the domination of British and Russian imperialisms in Iran. The movement began under the leadership of Mirza Kuchek Khan, behind the Russian lines, as the nationalists evacuated Tehran and formed an army with the help of the Germans and the Ottomans to fight the armies of the Entente. The 'Migrants', as they became known, fought the Russian army until early 1917 in western Iran and Mesopotamia. Their movement was of a purely nationalist nature.

The Jangali movement, however, survived the ravages of both the Russian and the British armies. Unlike the Migrants, they also carried out an intense agrarian revolution in Gilan, although their primary concern was the military occupation of Iranian territory. As an anti-imperialist front, the Jangali movement was the result of the collusion of a whole array of political forces, from the Caucasian Bolshevik to the anti-Russian *akhund*.

After the Bolshevik revolution, in early 1918, the Jangalis resorted to republicanism, but their designs for capturing Tehran failed. Iranian society was deeply fragmented and the rest of the country was not ready for such an action. Southern Iran was under British occupation and they soon replaced the Russians in the north of the country too. North-western Iran was under the occupation of the Ottoman army. A profound awareness of Iran's fragmentation also affected the Jangalis' agrarian policy, and then and there they resolved that general land reform was impossible until Tehran was captured. This point was to sow seeds of discontent among Left Iranian communists during the Gilan Republic. The Jangalis did not manage to fight imperialism and carry out the class struggle at the same time.⁵⁸

Soon, the British army entered the scene. In 1918, the Germans and the Ottomans, supporters of the Jangalis, were defeated in the First World War, and the Jangali movement entered a period of internal conflict which resulted in the surrender of the right wing to the British and the Cossacks. A course of decline began in 1919. Throughout this period, the Jangalis maintained good relations with the Bolsheviks both in Gilan and in Baku. As the Edalat was injected with fresh vigour in 1919, it also extended its activities into Gilan. At the same time, those Jangali leaders who had survived formed radical socialist organisations in the province. By late 1919, the arrival of the Red Army in Iranian territory was a foregone conclusion.⁵⁹

The Bolsheviks, having captured Baku on 28 April 1920, landed in Gilan on 18 May and drove the British occupation force out of Rasht and Anzali (the main port in Gilan). Soon, negotiations took place between the Jangalis and the Bolsheviks, and on 5 June, the former proclaimed a Soviet republic in the province. The conditions of alliance between the forces were initially acceptable to all concerned. The Jangalis had to deal with both the Bolsheviks and the Edalatis under Sultanzade. First of all, ever since the Bolshevik revolution, the Soviets had pursued a policy of respect for Iranian sovereignty. Lenin himself wished to come to terms with Iranian bourgeois-nationalism, which could weaken Western imperialism and thus facilitate the advent of world revolution.⁶⁰

As far as the Edalatis were concerned, they also had respected Iranian sovereignty, all the way from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution until 1920. The Caucasians had always supported Iranian revolutionary forces, including the Jangalis. But the Edalat was no longer under the leadership of the old social democrats. New figures had replaced them, most notably Sultanzade, who had no history of involvement in Iranian affairs. At the Jangali-Bolshevik negotiations, the former proposed and the latter agreed that communist measures should not be introduced in Gilan too hastily.⁶¹ But the ICP(B) was to defy both Soviet policy and the Transcaucasian social democratic tradition.

Initially, the communists supported the Jangalis and hailed Kuchek Khan as the Iranian 'champion of liberty'.⁶² However, in late June 1920, the first congress of the ICP(B) was convened in Anzali, and, as expected, the Turkestani Iranian, as well as some left-wing members from the Caucasus, dominated the congress.⁶³ Haidar Khan and the Revolutionary Party of Iran were excluded from the gathering, and Sultanzade, who headed the Turkestani delegation, dominated the scene. He and his Azeri right-hand man, Mehmed Qoli Alikhanov, were the main speakers. The congress essentially became a contest between the ultra-radical declarations of left-wing Edalatis led by Sultanzade and the restraining hands of the Soviet representatives, Victor Ivanovich Naneishvili and Batirbek Loqman-uglu Obukh (Abukov).

In his report, Sultanzade claimed that in Iran, a revolutionary situation did not exist at that time. He nevertheless went on to argue that apart from a struggle against British rule in Iran and the shah's government, the revolutionaries should also commence a campaign against the landowners. Presumably, he believed that communist reforms would inject revolutionary vigour into the exploited peasantry and that the Iranian proletariat of Baku would lead the revolution.⁶⁴

Naneishvili, representative of the Azerbaijani Communist Party's Central Committee, presented an opposing argument. In his opinion, supporting the national liberation movement was the primary task of the communists. The time for a communist revolution was not ripe. In support of his argument, Naneishvili referred to the first Russian Revolution, when in 1905 Lenin had spoken not of a social revolution but of a democratic republic. The Iranian peasant was too undeveloped, and the only organised force capable of leading a revolution at that stage was the Iranian bourgeoisie. Iran was devoid of an industrial proletariat, and the Iranian workers of the Caucasus and Turkestan, who had shared and experienced the struggle of the Bolsheviks, were few in number and did not possess sufficient organised socio-political strength to enable them to lead the revolution.⁶⁵ In even greater opposition to Sultanzade was the argument of Obukh, who wished to collaborate with the landlords. Obukh warned the communists against the radicalism of the Jangalis in this way: 'The only thing which can attract serious attention is the appearance on the territory of Iran of the revolutionary Kuchek Khan and of Soviet power. If, however, now the bourgeoisie is not rising against Britain and is not supporting Kuchek Khan, then the reason for this is the mistaken creation here in Iran of Soviet power...'⁶⁶

Thus, ironically, the immediate concerns of the Bolshevik revolution both gave an international character to the resolutions of the congress and at the same time tried to restrain the hands of left-wing communists – that is, those very Eurocentric communists who had gained the upper hand in the communist movement of the East precisely by drawing on the support of the Russian Bolsheviks. The national question in the Russian empire was one thing and the attitude of the Bolsheviks towards a semi-colony like Iran was another. The congress resolved to struggle against British imperialism and the shah's government, which was in the hands of the British. It resolved to 'battle against world capitalism alongside Soviet Russia', to support all elements in this cause, to agitate among and mobilise peasants and the working masses, and to work towards constituting communist organisations until the time for class struggle and the seizure of 'power and land' arrived.⁶⁷ There and then, a number of left-wing communists, Sultanzade, Agazade, Javadzade (Peshehviri), Alikhanov and others, were elected into a central committee.⁶⁸

But the 'left'-wingers were not tamed. Sultanzade went on to adapt and adopt the programme of the RCP(B) for the Iranian Communist Party.⁶⁹

And on 19 July 1920, he attended the second congress of the Comintern in Moscow, where he was to repeat his arguments for a communist revolution in Iran. Lenin, initially, presented his well-known *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions*, which he had produced on the day the Gilan Republic was proclaimed. He argued for supporting the bourgeois-democratic revolutions of the colonial world. But as a result of the opposition of the Indian communist M.N. Roy, the congress produced a resolution in which various national liberation movements were distinguished from each other. Lenin agreed to change the term 'bourgeois-democratic' to 'national-revolutionary'. In this way, he sought to separate the sheep from the goats. He agreed that support should be given only to those liberation movements which 'do not hinder our work of educating and organising in a revolutionary spirit the peasantry and the masses of the exploited'.⁷⁰ However, Lenin added that 'it is beyond doubt that any revolutionary movement can only be a national movement, since the overwhelming mass of the population in the backward countries consists of peasants who represent bourgeois capitalist relationships'. This particular statement of Lenin's was largely ignored. But the final outcome of the arguments, the resolution of the congress, was held as a hostage by the left-wing communists.

Sultanzade also contributed to the debate. In his thesis, he reiterated essentially the same argument that he had presented in the programme of the ICP(B). Once again, he claimed that commercial capitalism had begun to flourish in the countries of the East since the 1870s. An intense antagonism of interest prevailed among the ruling classes. The big landowners were in favour of the colonialists whereas the urban bourgeoisie opposed interference in the country. This created the greatest possibility for revolution which, although national in character, would inevitably pass on to the socialist stage, owing to the weakness of the bourgeoisie.⁷¹

Delirious with his successes, Sultanzade went on to repeat his argument at the fifth session of the congress on 28 July. This time, he found the courage to make alterations which added to his wishful thinking in an unprecedented manner. He began by speaking in favour of establishing Soviets in 'feudal or semi-feudal' countries. This time, he stated that those countries had been *dominated* by merchant capital ever since the 1870s. At the same time, colonialism seriously hampered the growth of national industry. When Sultanzade spoke of the ruling classes on this occasion, he completely refrained from mentioning the landlords. He quite clearly gave the impression that the ruling classes of Iran were the merchants and the bourgeoisie, these two working in opposite directions – for and against imperialism. He once again reiterated that this was a revolutionary situation which would give rise to a revolution passing from the national to the social stage.⁷²

Sultanzade wanted a communist revolution in Iran and he wanted it there and then. Up until the Baku Congress, he oscillated within the general

framework of a communist revolution, be it proletarian or be it agrarian with a proletarian leadership. His thinking showed neither originality nor independence. Interested parties may wish to compare his arguments with that of Pokrovsky, the official Soviet historian, who, in order to explain the Russian Revolution, claimed that Russia had been dominated by merchant capital long before the 1870s.⁷³ We can see that while the Bolsheviks still had problems with a historical justification for their revolution, Sultanzade wanted to copy that revolution in Iran.

During 1920, in order to support his Comintern arguments, Sultanzade also published a series of articles in *Zhizn' Natsional'nostei*, the organ of the Soviet Commissariat for the Affairs of Nationalities under Stalin. In these articles, he rejected the legitimacy of all other political parties and, as expected, hailed the Communist Party as the only legitimate and popular political party in Iran, which supposedly had 10,000 members. He even condemned the social democrats. Nevertheless, Sultanzade was quite lenient towards the Tabriz Demokrats who had persecuted and killed the Azeri communists in early 1920 under the leadership of Mohammad Khiabani, who had revolted against the Tehran government. He had heard about the Tabriz incident at the first congress of the ICP(B) in June. It appears that his only problem was with the Jangalis, who, contrary to the Tabriz Demokrats, actually collaborated with the communists.⁷⁴

Sultanzade went on to produce a thesis in August 1920, together with his Russian comrade Mikhail Pavlovich (Vel'tman), at Lenin's request. This time, he changed his mind and altered his argument again, which still contained contradictions. This time, the primary tasks of the movement were the expulsion of the British from Iran and the overthrow of the shah's government. At the same time, the ICP(B) had to work towards the 'complete elimination of the landlords' ownership of land and appropriation of land by peasants'. The Communist Party supported 'all revolutionary elements' who worked towards the above three goals.

Pavlovich and Sultanzade argued that an immediate 'realisation of communist agriculture' in Iran was impossible, but they nevertheless went on to suggest a Sovietised Iran. They demanded an exclusive monopoly of Soviet support for the ICP(B) (in terms of arms, money and manpower) in order for the party to capture the leadership of the revolution and prepare the workers and peasants 'for the take-over of the state apparatus'. They once again argued for a military revolution in Iran which would be assisted by the Red Army.⁷⁵

In any case, although the second congress of the Comintern had produced a resolution most irrelevant to Lenin's policy, Sultanzade had heard enough. From Lenin, he had heard that only 'revolutionary' national movements should be supported. And Roy's thesis was to allow an immediate takeover of the leadership of the revolutionary movement. Upon the conclusion of the debate, he immediately reported his practical deductions

to Gilan,⁷⁶ where three days later, on 31 July, the communists staged a coup with the approval of some Baku Bolsheviks. Sultanzade's total ignorance of the history of the Jangali movement (and, indeed, that of the ICP(B)) had become an ideological asset to justify the coup.

On 4 August, the *Slovo* of Tiflis published an official statement of the new communist government in Gilan which contained the following words: 'The temporary government of Kuchek Khan showed itself unable to lead the Iranian revolutionary movement successfully in the fight against English imperialism and satisfy the needs of the working masses.'⁷⁷ The new leaders, composed of ICP(B) members and the left-wing Jangali Ehsanullah Khan, formed a 'Temporary Revolutionary Committee of Iran'.⁷⁸

The Jangalis, having retreated into the forest, did not remain inactive. Kuchek Khan sent a delegation to Moscow to meet Chicherin, the Soviet commissar of foreign affairs. He wrote open letters to the revolutionary rank and file, to the leaders of the coup, to the Georgian Bolshevik Budu Mdivani, to Haidar Khan, and even to Lenin. Those efforts did not have an effect until 1921.

The Temporary Revolutionary Committee soon established a regime of war communism in Gilan. It tried to carry out land reform and it failed. The military struggle against the big landlords ended in defeat. The front in Gilan almost collapsed. Soviet historians have claimed that the new regime alienated the population, and especially the peasantry.⁷⁹ The Left failed in virtually all respects. After the Baku Congress, when the old Central Committee of the party was dismissed, one of its members, Avenir Khanukaev, had this to report to the Central Committee of the RCP(B) and the Executive Committee of the Comintern:

A complete lack of understanding of the kind of policies that had to be pursued in Iran was a characteristic feature of the work of the old CC. Muslim religious sentiment was offended (a sort of brothel was organised in the house of one Mulla, the existence of God was expressly denied at mass meetings, and so on). A double tax compared to the previous amounts was levied by us through the medium of landowners on the peasantry which thanks to us had received land from the landowners, etc. In order to pay this debt, a peasant often had to sell his last cow, a thing he had not experienced under the Shah's government.

The ICP Central Committee did not even take the trouble of understanding that the revolution we were to bring about in Iran should have been based on quite different principles than those we had in Russia. It proceeded in its actions not so much from the need to eject the British from Iran (and perhaps from India) as from illusions of establishing a socialist order in a semi-feudal country.

The peasantry recoiled from us, the farm labourers did not understand us and also left the sphere of our influence. The so called 'expropriation of the bourgeois', which mostly affected small traders and peasants, ran counter to our Eastern policy of neutralising the petty and even medium bourgeoisie, while the unprincipled use of the former landlords to collect taxes from the peasantry (and even the very fact of imposing these taxes) finally discredited us in the eyes of the masses.⁸⁰

The First Congress of Peoples of the East (an egregious beano)

It was an excursion, a pageant, a Beano. As a meeting of Asiatic proletarians it was preposterous.

H.G. Wells, *Russia in the Shadows*, 1920

The First Congress of Peoples of the East, which was convened in Baku from 1 to 8 September 1920, has attracted attention mostly as a parade of exotic peoples rather than as a serious and fateful political gathering. At the time, those who sympathised with the Bolsheviks, be they professional revolutionaries such as Alfred Rosmer or be they fellow travellers such as H.G. Wells, could not dispose of their Eurocentric spectacles in order to conceive of more serious matters.⁸¹ Others who remained threatened by the revolutionary overtures of the Bolsheviks, such as the guardians of the British empire, were only too happy to emphasise stories of the triviality of the Congress.⁸²

This historical event, however, signified a number of important points in the history of the Bolshevik revolution, and indeed it was not without implications for the Gilan Republic. Stephen White points out that the Baku Congress was about the reaffirmation of the resolutions of the second congress of the Communist International.⁸³ In a way, it was a second discussion of the same issues, except that this time, the composition of the Congress, and in particular its Eastern participants, was different. This time, those Eastern revolutionaries who had participated in the debate about the character of the Eastern revolution, and who had been excluded from the second Comintern congress, were to resurface again. This time, they too had to rehearse the great debate on the national and the colonial questions. Perhaps the most important group of these Eastern revolutionaries were the Turkestanis, with whom the Iranians, led by Haidar Khan Amu-Ughly, had been mingling ever since early 1920. They went to the Congress with complaints regarding their relations with the Russian proletarian forces. As yet, *Zhizn' Natsional'nostei* had not fully expounded their views, which consisted of complaints regarding the dominance of the Russian working class in Turkestan and a rejection of the strict formulae of class struggle.

And yet they went to the Congress to stress that the revolutionary potential of the East was indispensable for world revolution.⁸⁴

Haidar and his supporters could comfortably share these complaints, as they eventually emerged from obscurity and onto the world stage once again. As it turned out, his dual duty of adhering to Soviet power and fostering the national revolution in Iran was quite compatible with the views expressed in the Leninist analysis of the national and colonial questions. Therefore, his appearance in Baku may be seen as a reassertion of an ignored and shattered Leninism.

At the Congress, the Iranians (together with a few Parsees) numbered 192 and formed the second largest group after the Turks.⁸⁵ Haidar was to steal the show and dominate the argument. It appears that he spoke at the Congress on at least two occasions. On the first occasion, while energetically speaking for the Iranian revolution and demanding Soviet support, he quite clearly suggested that the Iranians had to accomplish their revolution by themselves. It is interesting that at the same time, he appears to have advocated a communist revolution. In his mind, as long as Iranian sovereignty was respected, the nature of the revolution could still remain communist. After claiming that the true division among the peoples of the world was that of class, he soon went on to condemn Western imperialism. He then spoke of what he considered to be the revolutionary situation in the world, and finally declared that 'the Soviet regime of northern Iran was planning a march on Tehran'.⁸⁶

On the fifth day of the Congress, Haidar once again took the floor and delivered a radically nationalistic speech, and concluded: 'If left alone by the British, they [the Iranians] can put their house in order and produce enough for themselves, with plenty of leisure for the cultivation of art and literature. They can be a bulwark to the communist world and a bond of union between Russia and the East.'⁸⁷

With his speeches, Haidar was trying to rally the support not just of Iranian nationalists but also of a good chunk of Iranian communists who had been disillusioned with the policies of the regime in Gilan. It appears that he managed to obtain their support. This, however, was not without troubles and skirmishes. While the Congress was going on, behind the scenes the two communist factions were literally at each other's throats. The original conflict between Haidar's Revolutionary Party of Iran and the Edalat Party had now gone beyond party boundaries and had converted a good number of the Edalatis in Haidar's favour as well. According to more than one participant of the Congress, some Edalatis began to support Haidar Khan, and in this process did not fail to face the wrath of one of the Agaev brothers, who were well known for their 'fanatical' left-wing beliefs.⁸⁸

Eventually, the conflict was resolved in Haidar's favour. One British report of the Baku Congress contains the information that at the time, an 'Iranian Central Committee' was formed in Baku.⁸⁹ This was to be an

alternative to the Central Committee of the ICP which had been formed at the first party congress in June 1920.

The communist rebels in fact consisted of a 121-strong group of Iranian delegates who met on 4 September and passed a resolution against the Central Committee of the party. After speeches by Haidar Khan, Arshavir Chilingarian (the old Tabriz social democrat) and others, the mutineers directed a whole series of accusations against the old Central Committee, at the heart of which was dissatisfaction with the rupture with the Jangalis, the exclusion of many party workers and the alienation of the peasantry in Gilan. The meeting resolved to disband the Central Committee and appoint a commission to investigate it, provisionally to nominate for work and convocation of the new congress new party comrades from among the participants in the meeting, and to entrust the provisionally elected Central Committee with full power and to assign to it the task of convening a congress of the ICP(B).⁹⁰

The rebellion of the Iranian communists was in fact part of much wider discontent. At about the same time, a group of twenty-one delegates, including one Edalati, Mohammad Akhundov (Akhundzadeh), submitted a resolution to the Baku Congress which was very critical of Soviet conduct in the East. While the delegates criticised the Russians for excluding the local revolutionaries from power, they asserted that the Eastern revolution was primarily bourgeois-democratic and anti-imperialist in character.⁹¹

Following the formation of a new Central Committee, the newcomers sent representatives to Moscow in the company of delegates from other nationalities. Their object was to meet Lenin and request instructions for further political action. Akhundzade claims to have obtained Lenin's audience despite the latter's illness and to have put forward the arguments that were fostered by Haidar Khan's faction (although he himself was an Edalati). Lenin appears to have agreed with the sentiments of those disillusioned communists. Akhundzadeh states that no sooner had he arrived back in Baku than Stalin, with Lenin's and the Comintern's approval, appeared in the city. As a result of his efforts, two-thirds of the old Central Committee were retired, and in their place nine new members, followers of Haidar, joined to form a new Central Committee.⁹² According to another participant of the Congress, the party reached the decision that the Central Committee had to be re-elected. Consequently, on 11 September, Haidar was elected the general secretary of the party.⁹³

As it turned out, both Haidar Khan and Sultanzade were elected, at the end of the Congress, into the famous Council for Action and Propaganda. As the members of the Council were being elected, a solitary voice signified the position of the Iranian revolution: 'In the case of Iran it is irregular!'⁹⁴ The voice, of course, pointed to the internal struggle among the Iranian communists.

But Haidar and Sultanzade were to have different fates. Sultanzade was to replace Haidar on the propaganda train 'Red East' in Central Asia, and

Haidar was further elected to the presidium of the Baku Congress. Of course, apart from the ICP(B) and the Revolutionary Party of Iran, Jangali delegates also participated in the Congress. The Soviet historian G.Z. Sorkin has written that nine 'Iranian revolutionaries' were present at the event.⁹⁵ They reportedly resorted to 'Sergo' Ordzhonikidze, the organiser of the Congress and a supporter of Haidar, and once again their actions were indicative not of opposition to but of competition with the ICP(B). They argued for Soviet favour and Comintern recognition for their revolution.⁹⁶ The Jangali delegates appear to have been quite active. On 28 October 1920, the *Slovo* of Tiflis reported that 'in Baku there are two letters of Kuchek Khan's, one to Lenin and the other to the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan. In these letters he reproaches the communists for their breach of faith, their treason, their crime against the working class of Iran.'⁹⁷

The extraordinary Jangali mission to Moscow also sent a letter to the presidium of the Congress. Once again they argued that the ICP(B) delegates from Gilan were not the true representatives of the Iranian revolution. They would not be able to explain the problems of the revolution to the Congress and thus would bring about misunderstandings. The Jangalis went on to suggest the formation of a joint commission to deal with the problems of the revolution. In this context, the Iranian case ought to be discussed with special attention, as Iran occupied an exceptional place in the totality of the Eastern revolution. It was suggested that this commission be formed of 'some' delegates to the Congress and that its findings be presented to the presidium.⁹⁸

On 17 September 1920, the presidium of the Council for Action and Propaganda proclaimed:

Our position in Iran has been compromised by the ineffective policy of proclaiming a 'Socialist Republic' there...The premature implementation of certain, ostensibly 'communist' measures, amounting to outright lootings, has antagonised the Iranian population and reinforced the policy of the Shah's government and the position of the English.⁹⁹

Thus there came an overflow of compromising overtures from Baku. On 21 October, the *Slovo* reported that in Bolshevik circles in Baku, the general opinion was that 'the failure of Soviet policy in Iran has to be made good again'. The *Slovo* further stated that a delegate was sent to Kuchek Khan to reunify him with the communists: 'The Bolsheviks know very well that they cannot do anything without Kuchek Khan.' According to this report, the main driving force behind this attempt at reconciliation was the Council for Action and Propaganda. The same report stated that 'Kuchek refuses to negotiate unless he gets the full guarantee that the representatives of the

Soviets and the Committee of the Iranian Communist Party will honestly fulfil their duties.'¹⁰⁰ Kuchek Khan must have got the assurances that he demanded. Once again, he turned to the communists.

The aftermath

The helplessness of the politically uneducated leaders of communism necessitates the long term existence of an appointed party centre whose membership must be supplemented by Russian comrades fully educated in the Marxist sense.

Avenir Khanukaev on Sultanzade and the like

During the Baku Congress and in its aftermath, Sultanzade put up a political struggle. On 3 September, he published an article in the *Kommunist* of Baku in which he repeated his old ideas.¹⁰¹ But he was to be tamed very soon. In a joint session of the two Central Committees and in the presence of representatives from the Council for Action and Propaganda, on 25–26 October 1920, Sultanzade argued that a rapid transition to communism in Iran was impossible. When pressed to explain himself, he stated, however, that 'our slogan is the way of agrarian revolution and peasant ownership of the land. It is the gradual transition approach towards all stages of revolution.' But even that was satisfactory neither to Haidar nor to the Soviets.¹⁰²

The old Central Committee flatly refused to submit and dissolve itself, even though its funds were cut off by the Soviets.¹⁰³ Sultanzade slowly began to mellow ideologically, although his political struggle for power continued. In reality, he pursued two separate campaigns which were not compatible with one another, the Stalinist turning into an opportunist. He was to come to terms with Lenin's policy but he was too slow to do so. On the political front, first, he posed as an uncompromising left-winger, rejecting both Haidar's politics and the Jangali movement. On 15 October, he published an article in the *Kommunist* of Baku entitled 'Persian Events' in which he argued that Kuchek Khan had been 'isolated from his class' of the bourgeoisie because of the impossibility of trade with Soviet Russia and 'British provocative propaganda', and that therefore he had to leave the stage. Near the end of his article, he blatantly stated: 'the present epoch is one of fierce class struggle on the world scale, and Iran cannot be an exception irrespective of the degree of her economic development'.¹⁰⁴ The old Central Committee met on the same day and produced a document in which it called its dismissal illegal and criminal on the part of the Council for Action and Propaganda.¹⁰⁵ Five days later, it passed a resolution approving of the above document and asking for funds from the Caucasian Bureau (Kayburo), which was responsible for providing them on the instructions of the RCP(B). The resolution also called for a request to Moscow to reinstate

Sultanzade, and if this were not successful, for a resort to the Comintern. The resolution contained the signatures of twenty-two Iranian communists, including Alikhanov, Javadzadeh, Bahram Agaev and, of course, Sultanzade.¹⁰⁶ The following day, the old Central Committee passed another resolution, based on a report by Sultanzade, in which it was stated that 'the alliance with the Bolsheviks increasingly began to weigh on Kuchek Khan, against whom the landowners also rose owing to communist agitation'. And 'Kuchek Khan lost all influence among these (the bourgeois and land-owning) classes.' But the resolution nevertheless concluded:

Given that in Iranian reality an immediate realisation of the purity of communist principles is inconceivable, that the petty-bourgeois elements will be playing a significant role in Iran's political life for a long time to come, our party must build its tactics on the basis of passing through all stages of bourgeois democracy in the belief that it is only in this way that a backward country may come to communism.¹⁰⁷

Sultanzade thus resorted to the petty bourgeoisie. This argument was further expounded in the pages of *Zhizn' Natsional'nostei* on 24 December 1920. There, he presented a new thesis 'for discussion' on the Iranian revolution. In it, he stressed once again that the idea that the social revolutions in the colonies and semi-colonies must be preceded by national-democratic revolutions was false. The bourgeoisie there would be satisfied even with a fictitious independence. But Sultanzade's conclusion reflected his own disappointment with, as well as his submission to, the experience of the Gilan revolution. He finally concluded that given the absence of a proletariat with collective universal consciousness, and the ignorance of the peasantry, the social revolution would have to base itself on the petty bourgeoisie. With a proletarian leadership, in the course of the social revolution, the communists must strive for eventual and complete union with this class, as the bourgeoisie was incapable of committing itself to the cause of a national-democratic revolution.¹⁰⁸

Sultanzade also produced a minimum programme, which appeared in the *Kommunist* of Baku on 12 November 1920 and later in the *Pravda* of Moscow on 14 January 1921. In the document, which appeared as the 'appeal of the Central Committee of the communist party', the author claimed that 'In such a backward country as Iran, communists could not put forward the same demands as in highly developed capitalist Europe. Here [in Iran] the ground must still be prepared for building the socialist order.'¹⁰⁹ But even that was not enough. In 1921, Sultanzade produced a draft thesis on the Eastern question together with others for the third Congress of the Comintern. This time, he had tried to comprehend Lenin's policy, but in a laughable manner: 'The relationship of a dominant state to a dependent one

is very similar to the relation of a factory owner to his workers.' He thus reached the ideological extreme of the right wing.¹¹⁰ The Left communists, headed by Sultanzade, nevertheless continued their political struggle for power. At the third Comintern Congress, Pishehvareh (Javadzadeh) made an unscheduled speech in which he accused the ICP(B) under Haidar Khan of being a party of landowners.¹¹¹ At the same congress, Sultanzade and others submitted a report to the Oriental Commission of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in which they finally proclaimed their evaluation of the Jangali movement. After all, despite their acknowledgement of national liberation movements, Kuchek Khan was neither 'the bourgeoisie' nor a 'petty-bourgeois element'. He was a lord:

After a year of experience, we have a negative attitude towards support not only for Kuchek Khan but for any Khan whatsoever. There are very many of them in Iran: there exists Salar Khodan in Khorassan, Seifullah Khan (Amir Miyad) in Mazandaran, Arshat Khan in Qaradagh, Semitko in Kurdistan and, finally Kuchek Khan in Gilan. These are in the northern provinces alone, in the south there are even more of them. All of them are armed and have several hundred horsemen who make their living by robberies.¹¹²

Haidar, on the other hand, had a different fate. For Moscow, Iran was the Tehran government, and immediately after the Baku Congress, diplomatic negotiations for the signing of a treaty were set off. In this way, the Baku Congress had effected a shift from revolutionary doctrine to *realpolitik* in Soviet policy. However, Haidar could not come to terms with Tehran. On 25 January 1921, a meeting took place between him and a number of Caucasian Bolsheviks. There, it was decided that the struggle against the shah should continue. Haidar was to receive manpower and support from Turkestan to conduct the fight. Pavlovich wrote in February that 'a group of Iranian revolutionaries, led by a member of the Council for Action and Propaganda of the Eastern peoples, and head of its organisation department, Comrade Haidar Khan, consider an armed struggle against the Shah's government to be necessary at the present moment'.¹¹³ Among Haidar's Caucasian supporters we find Nariman Narimanov, the old Himmati leader who now chaired the Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee, and of course the Georgian Ordzhonikidze, the old participant of the Iranian revolution since constitutional times and an agitator among the Jangalis since 1915.¹¹⁴ These and others in Baku and Tiflis were to defy Moscow and support the Iranian revolution until the end. By late 1921, Lenin had to reprimand them.¹¹⁵

Haidar was accused of gathering a bunch of bourgeois-nationalists and former speculators around himself in the new Central Committee. According to Pavlovich, this was the reason he was summoned to Moscow

to answer for his actions. But it is more probable that what concerned Moscow was Haidar's radical activities with regard to the Iranian revolution. He went on to reconcile the ICP(B) with the Jangalis. He formed a revolutionary alliance with them which lasted until the end of the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan. And he fought the Tehran government, now under Reza Khan, who carried out a coup in February 1921. Once again, Moscow was defied.

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Notes

- 1 A certain exception was a tiny and very confused group of intellectuals who had emerged from the Hinchak and Dashnakzutiun Parties. They seem to have managed to organise one factory strike and a few proletarian cells in Tabriz. They numbered fewer than thirty persons, nine of whom were Iranian. See S.L. Agaev and V.N. Plastun, 'Spornye voprosy sotsial-demokraticheskogo dvizhenia v Irane v 1905–1911 gg.', in N.A. Nuznetsova (ed.) *Iran, istoriia i sovremennost'* (Moscow: 1983), pp. 15–24.
- 2 See A. Seyf, 'Despotism and the peasantry in Iran in the nineteenth century: an overview', *IRAN XXXI* (1993): 137–47; 'Nineteenth century agricultural development in Iran: a note', *Middle Eastern Studies* 28(3) (July 1992): 577–87; *Eqtesad-e Iran dar Qarn-e Nouzdahom* (Tehran: 1994).
- 3 Haji Zeinalabedin Maraghehi, *Siahatnameh-ye Ebrahim Beyk*, ed. M.A. Sepanlu (Tehran: 1985), pp. 18–26.
- 4 Ja'far Pishehvareh, *Tarikhcheh-ye Hezb-e Edalat* (Tehran: 1980), p. 28.
- 5 See N.K. Belova, 'Ob otkhodnichestve iz severo-zapadnogo Irana v konte XIX-nachale XX veka', *Voprosy Istorii* 10 (October 1956): 112–20.
- 6 N.K. Belova, 'Le "Parti Social-Democrate" d'Iran', in G. Haupt and M. Roberieux (eds) *La Deuxième Internationale et l'Orient* (Paris: 1967), p. 117. This is an apology for the above, which assigns a radical role to the Iranian workers of southern Russia.
- 7 Z.Z. Abdullaev, 'Bourgeoisie and working class, 1900s', in Charles Issawi (ed.) *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 51.
- 8 Pishehvareh, *Tarikhcheh*, pp. 14–15.
- 9 Ronald G. Suny, *The Baku Commune, 1917–1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 13–14.

- 10 Eva Broido, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 71.
- 11 For the Himmat's Iranian concern, see A.M. Agakhi, *Rasprostranenie idei Marksizma-Leninizma v Irane* (Baku: 1961), pp. 24–6.
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IRAN'S FORGOTTEN REVOLUTIONARY

Abulqasim Lahuti and the Tabriz insurrection
of 1922

Stephanie Cronin

For eleven days in early 1922, the red flag flew over Tabriz and power lay in the hands of a revolutionary committee and a soldiers' council, the latter headed by the poet and gendarme officer Major Abulqasim Lahuti. Yet this episode, as dramatic as it was brief, has never been integrated into the history of the Iranian Left. Largely forgotten by later generations of Iranian activists, it has been neglected, or even ignored altogether by their historians. Lahuti himself is now remembered for his contribution to poetry and, in particular, the literary awakening of another country, Tajikistan, but he has attracted little interest as a figure of political significance in the development of Iranian social democracy.

Yet although the rebellion to which Abulqasim Lahuti gave his name, in Tabriz in January 1922, was short-lived and easily suppressed, both the adventure itself and Lahuti's early personal history is of considerable general interest and significance. Lahuti became the first and certainly the most outstanding communist poet Iran has produced. Although his major literary success came after he had established himself in the Soviet Union, the intellectual and political formation which cradled his poetry took place within the context of Iranian social democracy as it was developing during the first two decades of the twentieth century. His progression from militant populist nationalism to committed communism under the impact of his experiences during the Constitutional Revolution and the First World War¹ was shared by many Iranians, and he may be seen as typical of the leftward evolution of the Democrat wing of the constitutional movement.

Lahuti's formative political experiences were, in certain respects, different to those of other Iranian social democrats and proto-communists of whom we have knowledge. One unusual feature of his early life is the military context within which he chose to work. His military career and his continued

life inside Iran, rather than in exile, after the suppression of the majlis in 1911 give his development a trajectory different to that of many radicals of the period. Lahuti is also unusual in that, unlike many Iranian social democrats and later members of the *Firqah-i 'Adalat* (Justice Party), he was never part of the émigré milieu in Baku and he had no direct experience of social democracy in tsarist Russia and Transcaucasia. His own exile, during and after the War, was rather in Ottoman territory, and he had, apparently, very little contact with those who were to become the leadership of early Iranian communism. Although the Tabriz communists spontaneously joined his revolt in 1922, his and their action was unauthorized by and, indeed, completely contrary to the general line of the nascent Communist Party of Iran.

Lahuti is one of the most interesting figures produced by Iran's armed forces in the early twentieth century. He was perhaps the earliest exponent in Iran of the strategy of bringing about revolution through the agency of the army, and in this respect clearly anticipates developments such as the Tudah Military Network of the late 1940s. It was his soldier's background, and specifically his contacts with revolutionaries working among the Russian occupying troops in Iran, which first drew him towards an ideologically clearly defined Marxism. The circumstances driving his transition from militant nationalism to Bolshevik sympathies draw attention to a factor often overlooked in accounts of the spread of leftist ideas in Iran: the role played by the revolutionary soldiers and the soldiers' committees which sprang up under Bolshevik inspiration among the Russian armies in Iran.

The presence of a figure such as Lahuti within the Government Gendarmerie also sheds interesting light on the role and character of that force. The Gendarmerie was deeply identified with Iranian constitutionalism and nationalism and, specifically, with the Democrat Party. The example of Lahuti, and of other officers prominent in the force in the years 1917–21, such as those who constituted the radical wing of the supporters of the revolt of Colonel Pasyan in Mashhad in 1921, clearly indicate the increasing leftward shift of elements within the force under the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Lahuti's seizure of power is also of interest in that it was the last in a series of provincially based radical movements which broke out in the decade between the suppression of the majlis in 1911 and the coup of 1921, of which the most famous was the Jangali revolt. It may also be seen, in particular, as a final stage in the revolutionary constitutionalist history of Tabriz, a city emblematic of Iranian social democracy, and as an immediate sequel to the Khiyabani revolt to which it was inextricably linked. The suppression of the 1922 insurrection was a watershed marking the beginning of the centralized authoritarianism of the early Pahlavi period, which was to endure until another world war provided a new opportunity for a reawakened militancy in the form of Ja'afar Pishavari's Democrat Party and the Autonomous Government of Azarbayjan.

Abulqasim Lahuti: early life

Abulqasim Lahuti was born in Kirmanshah on 4 December 1887 into humble circumstances. His father was a cobbler by trade, his mother from one of the Kurdish tribes of the region, and he grew up knowing Kurdish as well as Persian. In a natural and simple account, he has described some of the experiences of his early years.² Recalling his feelings of revulsion from the violence and injustice which he frequently witnessed in the Iran of his childhood, he explained the development of his sensitivity to the sufferings of the poor and weak, stressing his reaction, as a child himself, on witnessing brutality towards other children, and recounting his burgeoning class consciousness and the mischievousness of “little urchins” such as himself in the face of the arrogance of the rich.³

It was in the environment of his family, and particularly under the influence of his father, that Lahuti first acquired his love of poetry. At an early age he became aware of the power of words, and especially of poetry, over the poor and the illiterate, and he has described the effect on himself of seeing crowds work themselves into ecstasies by the recitations of the Shi‘i narratives of the martyrdom of the Husayn and Hasan, and how he “watched people’s spirits rise” as they listened to Firdawsi’s *Shahnamah*.⁴ These observations naturally led to his becoming conscious of the power of poetry to engage and mobilize people, including the illiterate, in political and social struggles. Lahuti may have received some elementary education at a *maktab*, a traditional school, in Kirmanshah – at any rate, he learned to read and write – but owing to his family’s financial hardship, he was apprenticed and obliged to work from a young age. His father, although almost illiterate, was a lover of Sufi poetry and composed many religious poems, and was considered one of the best poets in Kirmanshah. The young Lahuti often attended poetry gatherings with him and by adolescence had, under his father’s influence, himself begun to acquire a reputation locally as a poet and to attract considerable attention.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Kirmanshah began to share in the general intellectual ferment, and Lahuti has described how “the aspirations of the petty bourgeoisie and artisans found expression in peculiar forms. Various religious sects, lodges of freemasonry and similar organization sprang up like mushrooms.”⁵ All of these groups were keen to win the allegiance of promising young men and apparently tried to cultivate the young Lahuti. Under his father’s influence, Lahuti’s earliest poetry was infused with mysticism, and this particularly attracted the interest of some local adherents of the Babi sect. His father appears to have had Babi connections and one day was persuaded to take his son to a meeting where an effort was made to identify the young man as blessed with divine revelation and to turn him into a Babi preacher. This encounter was significant in that the Babis’ assurances to the young Lahuti that he would have the power to work miracles led to the “bitterness of disillusionment” and the loss, once

and for all, of his religious belief.⁶ This was clearly an episode of great emotional impact. Lahuti later commented that he grew up "almost without noticing it", but his adolescence was marked by one event, the loss of his childhood faith in God.⁷

Lahuti's promise was then recognized by the local Masonic society who, in 1904, sent him to study in Tehran, his only experience of formal schooling. Here, at a school on the Lalezar, Tehran's main street, Lahuti apparently again encountered difficulties arising from his poor background. His stay was short; he described the school as "no place for a cobbler's son" and himself as not sorry to leave.⁸ Arriving in Tehran from such a background at such a moment, Lahuti naturally became involved in the revolution of 1905-06. Influenced, like many others, by the events of the Russian Revolution of 1905, Lahuti joined a revolutionary circle. He later wrote: "I shall never forget the room draped in red calico, the red banner, and the revolver on the table, before which I swore to be a loyal and staunch soldier of the revolution."⁹ As a member of this circle, Lahuti wrote and distributed *shabnamahs* (leaflets directed against the shah and the aristocracy), spoke at meetings and carried messages for the revolutionaries disguised as a muleteer. Of his political evolution, he later commented that by "that time there was not a scrap of mysticism left in my head".¹⁰

Lahuti celebrated the granting of the constitution with verses which were turned into revolutionary songs. After the shah's counter-revolution and the suppression of the majlis in 1908, he left Tehran, together with others among his comrades who had managed to go into hiding, for the constitutionalist stronghold of Rasht. On the way, however, he and his band were captured by a detachment of the shah's supporters. One who resisted was killed on the spot, while the others were imprisoned in Kerej, in a filthy stable. He was eventually able to make his escape thanks to his Kurdish background. Hearing a sentry singing a Kurdish folk song, he spoke to him in that language, learnt from his mother, and the Kurdish soldier helped him to escape. He then made his way to join the revolutionary forces in Rasht, across snow-covered mountains, by remote paths, living on what plants he could scratch from under the snow.¹¹

It appears from one of Lahuti's poems that he took part in the fighting against royalist troops in Rasht and was subsequently decorated by Sattar Khan.¹² The revolutionary movement in Rasht was very mixed, and in Lahuti's published recollections, it seems that the aspect of his time in Rasht which made the greatest impression on him was the danger to the revolutionary movement presented by the possibility of the development of national strife among the Azarbayjanis, Persians and Armenians, and he later took immense pride in the contribution he had made to the prevention of this development and in helping to establish unity among the disparate ethnic groups. In this, he echoed the concerns of the early social democrats in Baku, Russian and Caucasian as well as Iranian, who had

been made only too aware of the disastrous impact of communal and ethnic conflict.¹³ After the constitutionalist victory in 1909, the leader of the revolutionary movement in Rasht, the Armenian Yifrim Khan, became chief of police in Tehran, and Lahuti, together with other revolutionaries, entered his police force.¹⁴

In 1909, Lahuti began his literary career with the publication of his first poem, entitled "*Ay Ranjbar*" ("Oh Toiler"), which criticized social inequality.¹⁵ His first published poems appeared in *Iran-i naw*, the organ of the newly founded Democrat Party, and in publishing his poetry he had the help of Haydar Khan Amu Ughli, then a leading member of the Democrat Party and later one of the leaders of the 'Adalat and Communist Parties.¹⁶ These early poems displayed a militant nationalism, with a marked inclination towards leftist ideas. Even before he had begun to publish poetry, he had become interested in journalism and had begun to write for the progressive newspaper *Habl al-Matin*. In combining poetry with journalism, Lahuti equipped himself with a powerful weapon. The development of a free press during the constitutional years, with the mushrooming of newspapers and periodicals, had placed an immensely important tool in the hands of reformers, and journalists played an important political role. The medium of poetry, in particular, was regarded as an effective means of reaching the wider population, and the leading newspapers published almost daily poems on domestic politics and foreign affairs.¹⁷ In turning to journalism, Lahuti was following the example of the most prominent poets of the time, including Mirzadah Ishqi, Iraj Mirza, Arif Qazvini and Malik al-Shu'ara Bahar.

After the crushing of the constitutionalists in 1911, Lahuti advocated the launching of a new revolution and, with this objective in mind, joined the Government Gendarmerie in 1911–12, he and his comrades wanting all revolutionaries to join the Gendarmerie where they could have access to weapons. At a meeting, he and his comrades "swore under the red banner that we should remain loyal to the revolution, while preserving its armed nucleus under the uniforms of the gendarmerie".¹⁸ Lahuti passed the course at the Gendarmerie officers' school in Tehran in 1912 and acquired a reputation as a capable officer. By 1913, he had risen to the rank of major and was sent to organize the force at Qum, where he became Officer Commanding the Gendarmerie Battalion. When a conflict broke out between the gendarmes and the armed Bakhtiyari tribal forces whom the government wished to remove from Tehran, Lahuti earned the special praise of General Hjalmarson, the Swedish commandant, for disarming 150 Bakhtiyaris in Qum, and was decorated with an Order of Valour.

As commandant at Qum, Lahuti participated in the gendarme campaigns against the Lur tribes, but also, like gendarme commanders elsewhere, seems to have provoked considerable antagonism among the notables of the city by

interfering in their affairs and meddling in the elections to the Third Majlis.¹⁹ Lahuti also apparently continued his political activities and tried to make his gendarme unit a refuge for revolutionaries "on the run".²⁰ After the outbreak of the War, he deserted and was forced to flee from Qum in obscure circumstances. Although accused of taking a bribe from a tribal chieftain, it seems more likely that his flight was connected with his having conducted subversive activities within the force. The changed circumstances of the War certainly made the Allies more wary of the political dangers presented by the militantly nationalist Gendarmerie, and Lahuti himself later wrote that the "commanders of the British and Russian occupation forces in Iran found it inconvenient to have detachments like mine, full of hatred for the occupying forces, on their hands".²¹ Lahuti's unit in Qum was disbanded and he was sentenced to death, in absentia. He escaped across the Ottoman-Iranian border, staying in the small Ottoman border town of Sulaymaniyyah apparently in order to keep in touch with his comrades in Iran, until the Ottoman empire also became embroiled in the War. At that point, the frontier was closed and all communication with Iran ceased. Finding it intolerable to stay abroad, isolated from his own country, Lahuti went on foot to Baghdad, and from there was able to return to Iran. In the early years of the War, Lahuti participated in the nationalist struggle, "the partisan war against the occupying troops", in western Iran.²² In 1915, he was with the pro-Ottoman Kurdish tribes skirmishing with Russian forces in western Iran, and he then entered the service of Schunemann, the German consul in his home town of Kirmanshah, and was employed in training levies. Harboured an extreme mistrust of the Swedish officers of the Gendarmerie,²³ and apparently fearful of the treatment he might receive from the Gendarmerie, since he was still under sentence of death, he left Kirmanshah and tried to open a line of communication to the British, but was rebuffed.²⁴ Apparently reassured regarding his safety, he returned to Kirmanshah, briefly the political and military base of Nizam al-Saltanah's National Government, and became one of the editors of an anti-Allied periodical, *Bisutun*.²⁵

According to Lahuti's own account, it was at this point that he experienced a sharp change in the course of his life.²⁶ He has described how, at the time of the February revolution of 1917 in Russia, discontent was brewing among the Russian troops who had occupied Kirmanshah. He worked with the revolutionaries clandestinely agitating among the Russian soldiers, and made speeches at their meetings, and together with them organized a joint committee of Russian and Iranian revolutionaries which attempted to disrupt British efforts to establish control over western Iran.²⁷ One of the leading Russian revolutionaries in the Russian army in Kirmanshah, with whom Lahuti may have been in contact, was Second Lieutenant Ivan Osipovich Kolomiitsev, who was later shot by Iranian Cossacks while in Iran as the official Soviet representative.²⁸ It seems to have been through these

connections that Lahuti heard, for the first time, about scientific socialism, Marx, Lenin, and the Bolshevik Party and its programme.²⁹ In 1917 in Kirmanshah, Lahuti took part in the creation of what he later described as “the first workers’ organization in Iran”, the *Firqah-i Kargar* (Workers’ Party), which supported the Soviet revolution and opposed the intervention against the new Soviet state, writing and printing its first proclamation himself and also continuing to write revolutionary poems and articles for *Bisutun*.³⁰

The Brest–Litovsk treaty, signed between Germany and the new Soviet government, provided for the withdrawal of all Russian forces from Iran, and on 4 January 1918, Trotsky, the Soviet foreign minister, announced their immediate evacuation. General Baratov, however, commander of the Russian forces in Iran and then stationed at Kirmanshah, who was joined in Kirmanshah at the beginning of January by the fanatically anti-Bolshevik Russian general Lazar Bicherakov, defied this order and attempted to organize his men into White partisan units. According to Lahuti, these newly formed White Guards then launched a bloody terror against the Iranian revolutionaries, and he again had to escape to Ottoman territory, this time to Istanbul.³¹

In Istanbul Lahuti experienced conditions of extreme hardship, surviving among the homeless and street children to whom he later paid tribute in a poem entitled “Orphans of War”. He eventually found work in a variety of menial occupations, as a stevedore, a waiter, then a printer and a teacher. He returned to journalism, which again became his main activity, and he founded and edited, together with Ali Nawruz (Hasan Khan Muqaddam), a magazine called *Pars*, published in both Persian and French. Although only six or seven numbers of the bi-monthly *Pars* appeared, it seems to have been of a high literary standard.³² During his three-year exile in Istanbul, Lahuti also published a few small collections of his own poems. Some overtly criticized social and political conditions in Iran. The following lines are typical:

From the poverty of the peasant and the cruelty of the landowner it
becomes clear that Iran is being laid waste by despotism and I lament
When I see the treacheries of the Shah and the ignorance of the nation I
fear that this country will perish and I lament
The landowner sells the peasant with the land and I see that the nation
is powerless to prevent this oppression and I lament.³³

As was the case with much of the nationalist literature of the time, an important theme in Lahuti’s work was the need for the freedom and education of women, and this became especially prominent in his Istanbul poetry. Many of Lahuti’s Istanbul poems were written in allegorical form, to avoid the Turkish and Allied military censorship. In these poems, Lahuti referred to himself as a nightingale and his country as a ruined garden, while Britain was the hated winter killing the roses in the garden, or a merciless hunter trapping the wounded nightingale.

Nonetheless, eventually Lahuti ran into trouble with the Turkish censorship, and when publication of his magazine was suspended, he decided to return to Iran. However, the Turkish authorities refused to give him an exit visa so again he was obliged to travel clandestinely through remote regions, re-entering Iranian Azarbayjan via Maku. He travelled in the company of Amir Hishmat, a nationalist *fidayi* who had fought in western Iran during the War. Lahuti's attention had been attracted by the revolutionary movement in Gilan, but this had already been suppressed by Riza Khan before he reached Iran towards the end of 1921. He made his way to Tabriz where, with the help of the Swedish officer Colonel Lundberg, whom he had known before his exile, he rejoined the Gendarmerie with his former rank of major.³⁴

The Democrat Party, the Government Gendarmerie and the Iranian Cossacks

It is clear, from Lahuti's own version of his life, that his original decision to join the Government Gendarmerie in 1911–12 was taken with the deliberate intention of providing his trend of radical politics with some military capability. As he himself has described, this path was adopted by a number of revolutionaries, for whom the Gendarmerie provided a receptive milieu.³⁵

The Government Gendarmerie was deeply imbued with ideas of constitutionalism and nationalism.³⁶ It had been established by the Democrat-supported government which had come to power in July 1910, after the restoration of constitutional rule the previous year. The Democrats, acutely aware both of the weakness of the state in the face of foreign intervention and of the helplessness of the majlis against reactionary domestic elements, were eager for the construction of a modern army. With the increased prominence of state-building as a constitutionalist objective in the second phase of the revolution, 1909–11, they were able to take steps towards this goal with the creation of a military force, the Government Gendarmerie, under the leadership of European officers from neutral Sweden.³⁷

The child of the constitutional revolution, even of the Democrat Party itself, the Gendarmerie quickly came to symbolize Iranian aspirations towards reform, national unity and independence. Most of its officers came from Shuster's Treasury Gendarmerie, to which they had been recruited on the personal recommendations of members of the Democrat Party with whom Shuster was closely associated, such as Sulayman Mirza Iskandari and Riza Musavat. In 1911, Shuster described these officers as "the pick of the Young Persia patriots" who, on news of the Russian ultimatum, "came and begged to be allowed to fight for their country".³⁸ The close links between the Democrats and the Government Gendarmerie continued after the suppression of the majlis. The officers' schools of the Gendarmerie,

through which Lahuti himself passed, were particularly targeted by the Democrats as fertile ground for propaganda, and they deliberately introduced teachers into these schools in the hope of spreading their ideas and broadening their support among the young officers.³⁹

With the outbreak of the War in 1914, and the concomitant political polarization, the Gendarmerie identified itself openly with Iranian nationalism and threw its armed strength into the struggle against Allied occupation, the Swedish high command largely eclipsed by nationalist and Democrat Iranian officers. Between late 1915 and 1917, the Gendarmerie engaged in a protracted military conflict with the Allies in western and southern Iran. In November 1915, Gendarmerie officers played an important role in organizing the *muhajirat*, when majlis deputies, government officials and nationalist politicians left Tehran to establish a government, first known as the Committee of National Defence (*Kumitah-i Difa'-yi Milli*) and subsequently as the National Government (*Hukumat-i Milli*), free from Allied control and no longer under Russian guns. Gendarme officers also organized a series of coups in each of the provincial towns in southern and western Iran where they were stationed, including Shiraz, Hamadan, Kirmanshah, Sultanabad (Arak), Isfahan, Yazd and Kirman, seizing control in the name of the Committee of National Defence and forcing Allied nationals to leave. Throughout 1916 and into 1917, the gendarmes fought a series of battles with the Russian armies, in defence of the National Government established under the leadership of Nizam-al-Saltanah in Kirmanshah.⁴⁰

Although the National Government was eventually driven into exile, the Russian Revolution of February 1917 and the subsequent disintegration of the tsarist armies gave heart to the nationalists, who, with the gendarmes, began spontaneously reorganizing themselves. Among the officers and men of the Gendarmerie, there naturally developed sympathies with various of the radical movements which were appearing in the area, especially the Jangali revolt. There was both support within the Gendarmerie for the Jangalis and also some defections from the force to Kuchik Khan. By early 1918, ex-Gendarmerie officers were providing the Jangalis in Gilan with military training⁴¹ and there were substantial contacts between the Tehran gendarmes and the Jangali capital at Rasht. As 1918 progressed, sympathy for the Jangalis developed among provincial Gendarmerie regiments.⁴² During the joint Bolshevik-Jangali takeover of Rasht in May 1920, the gendarmes refused to fight with the Cossacks against Kuchik Khan and, after the Cossack surrender, went over to him, remaining more or less loyal.⁴³ Indeed, some ex-gendarmes remained with Kuchik Khan until the end. In May 1921, there were still many gendarme deserters acting as officers with the rebel forces. After the Jangali rebellion was crushed and Kuchik Khan was in hiding with only six followers, one of these was an ex-gendarme officer.⁴⁴

In Kirmanshah and other towns of western Iran, as Lahuti has described, the gendarmes had been directly and dramatically exposed to revolutionary ideas and activity through contact with the soldiers' committees set up during 1917 by the Russian soldiers still in Iran. These committees, in Kirmanshah, Hamadan and elsewhere, were especially active in encouraging the gendarmes and the Democrats in their nationalist resistance to the extension of British control in Iran.⁴⁵ The October Revolution and the overthrow of tsarism, and the subsequent renunciation of secret treaties and capitulations by the new Soviet government, had been greeted with great enthusiasm by all shades of nationalist opinion in Iran. Declarations such as the Appeal addressed to the Muslim workers of Russia and the East, issued by the Soviet government on 3 December 1917, had a deep resonance.⁴⁶ The Soviet struggle against British interventionist forces, which had begun using northern Iran as a base, aroused widespread sympathy, and the Soviet objective of removing British influence from Iran harmonized with the aims of the nationalists and the gendarmes. In these circumstances, the ideology of Bolshevism naturally began to exert a considerable attraction, and it seems that in the following years, the Gendarmerie was one of the segments of society specifically chosen as a potentially receptive target by the 'Adalat Party, later the Iranian Communist Party.

The 'Adalat Party had been formed during the early years of the War by the more radical survivors of the old Social Democratic Organization of Iran, and it carried on a clandestine agitation against the "imperialist" war. In 1917, it was able to begin public activities, joining forces with Bolshevik organizations in the Caucasus, publishing several newspapers, and recruiting Iranian worker immigrants for an Iranian "Red Army" to join in the Russian civil war against the Whites.⁴⁷ In these years, the 'Adalat Party directed constant propaganda, although mostly of a nationalist character, at the Gendarmerie. This propaganda became especially intensive in the summer of 1920, after the Bolshevik landing at Anzeli. In June, the 'Adalat Party's newspaper, *Bayraq-i 'Adalat* (*Banner of Justice*), published an article entitled "Appeal to Persian Gendarmerie". This article, couched in purely nationalist terms, contained extravagant praise of the patriotism of the Gendarmerie and included a document purporting to be the political testament, or "will", of Major Ali Quli Khan Pasyan, one of the martyred leaders of the 1915-16 anti-British insurrection in Shiraz, calling on the force to save Iran from the British.⁴⁸ *Bayraq-i 'Adalat* published other such articles during 1920, exhorting the gendarmes to remember the revolutionary traditions of their force and even referring to the heroism of named Iranian officers, both living and martyred. On 2 July, for example, *Bayraq-i 'Adalat* wrote that

the honour and glory of being a member of the force can only be maintained until and as long as their country remains independent. The Gendarmerie force of Persia is in reality the only military

creation of the Persian revolution...The gendarmes are the “children” of the Persian democratic Revolution and it can only be expected that they will prove their worth in the Persian Communist Revolution.⁴⁹

In these months, there appears to have been a consistent effort by the ‘Adalat Party to encourage gendarmes at frontier posts to defect to Soviet territory, perhaps with the intention of recruiting them into the military units which they were trying to form. Party members crossed the border from Turkistan to Mashhad to join the force with the specific object of converting their fellow gendarmes to Bolshevism. *Bayraq-i ‘Adalat* wrote:

Those of the force guarding the frontiers, having witnessed the favourable treatment extended to the Persians by the Soviet government...leave their posts in large numbers and join the party, which is determined to liberate mankind from the tyranny of the British.⁵⁰

When Haydar Khan Amu Ughli, then a leading ‘Adalati, arrived in Lutfabad, he suggested to the commanding officer of the Gendarmerie post that he and his men should leave the post in a body and join the Iranian communists at Ashkhabad.⁵¹

These efforts appear to have an effect, and in the spring and summer of 1920, a number of gendarmes deserted from north-eastern frontier posts to Soviet territory, including three or four who had originally come over the border from Turkistan to proselytize among the force. This caused the Iranian authorities to express a good deal of concern about the impact of Bolshevik propaganda on the Gendarmerie. Qavam al-Saltanah, Governor-General of Khurasan, for example, was seriously worried about the loyalty of the local regiment which had, as *Bayraq-i ‘Adalat* had happily pointed out, experienced a number of defections from frontier posts, and he ordered the Gendarmerie commander to organize the relief of those gendarme posts on the frontier whose fidelity was in some doubt. The Bolshevik newspaper *Tocsin* commented that, although duty on the frontier was considered onerous, the authorities’ main consideration was

the fear that men remaining for long on frontier duty may fall sick of that dangerous illness – Bolshevism. This illness is considered incurable.⁵²

Some of the gendarmes who deserted gave explanations of their action which chimed with ‘Adalat Party objectives. In April, for example, three men, including a non-commissioned officer, deserted from Darrah Gaz. They gave as the reason for their action the bitterness they felt at seeing their country under the English heel, and stated that others of their comrades

were of the same way of thinking, although a contributory cause of their action was probably the fact that their pay was six months in arrears.⁵³ In June, ten gendarmes, again including a non-commissioned officer, deserted their border post at Shams-i Khan. Once on Soviet soil, in Askhabad, they joined the 'Adalat Party and the Soviet authorities refused to surrender them. The attitude and behaviour of the Ashkhabad authorities was by now beginning to arouse the extreme indignation of the provincial government in Mashhad, and the Governor-General addressed a strong protest to them regarding their attempts to seduce the gendarmes from their allegiance.⁵⁴

Throughout its life, the Gendarmerie's nationalist inclinations had been highlighted by the contrast it presented to Iran's other military force, the Russian-officered Cossack Brigade/Division. This was never more so than in the immediate afterglow of the Russian Revolution, when the prestige of the Gendarmerie, with its record of active service against foreign occupation, was at its height, while popular clamour against the Cossacks was at its most intense.

The Cossack Brigade, set up by Russian officers in 1878 as a bodyguard for the shah, had always been closely identified with tsarist interests in Iran and with the most reactionary tendencies in Iranian society itself. Its notoriety had increased after it was used by Muhammad Ali Shah as the instrument of his coup against the majlis in 1908. During the War, it remained loyal to its Russian masters and it was increased to a Division under the terms of the never-ratified Sipahsalar Agreement of 1916. During the nationalist struggle in western Iran, there had been open armed clashes between the Russian-officered Iranian Cossacks and the pro-Democrat gendarmes.⁵⁵

The Cossack Brigade/Division had always been detested in nationalist circles because of the foreign domination and domestic reaction which it represented, and it was also deeply unpopular among the wider population due to its indiscipline and general lawlessness. There had been deeply felt, if ineffective, opposition to the growth of the Brigade before and during the War, and the establishment of new formations during 1917, as the collapse of tsarism was giving birth to a nationalist revival, produced a volatile reaction.

In early 1918, the new Soviet government officially recalled the Russian officers serving with the Iranian Cossacks and severed its links with the force, refusing to recognize it in any way.⁵⁶ Although Allied support made a new, White Russian Cossack leadership in Tehran secure, among Democrats in the provinces from 1917 onwards there was both an old desire and a new resolve that they should rid themselves of the Cossacks, and everywhere it was stationed the Division became a target of both popular and Democrat hostility. Iranian Democrats, having witnessed the disintegration of the tsarist armies, and apparently in touch with revolutionary Russian soldiers, began to try to win over the rank and file of the Iranian Cossacks⁵⁷ while agitating at a political and official level for the removal of the Russian officers. The conflict which developed in Mashhad

during 1917 was typical. It was not until early 1917 that Russian officers first arrived in Mashhad to raise a new Iranian Cossack formation. As soon as the new formation began to take shape, nationalists and Democrats inaugurated a concerted campaign against it.⁵⁸ Furthermore, revolutionaries in the Russian army added fuel to the flames by agitating among Iranians against the Cossack Division, saying that it would side with the oppressors against the revolutionary movement.⁵⁹ The Russians found recruiting for the force difficult. A boycott against the men of the regiment was organized, and they found themselves unable to buy bread or provisions or forage for their horses. After the senior Russian officer, Colonel Mamonov, threatened to allow his men to take what they needed by force, the Cossacks found themselves able to buy food, but were supplied with forage by the local authorities, secretly and with great obstruction by opponents of the Division. Large demonstrations, involving hundreds of townspeople, took place, with requests that the Governor-General ascertain from Tehran the status of the Mashhad Cossacks, the local Democrats knowing that the Sipahsalar Agreement, under the terms of which they were being raised, had never been ratified by the government. The Division's enemies also used more direct methods. The most senior Iranian Cossack officer in Mashhad received a letter threatening his life if he continued to identify himself with Russian interests and to wear Cossack uniform. Another Iranian officer also received a letter containing threats against the lives of the Russian commander and his officers. This letter called upon the officer to abandon the cause of the oppressors of Iran, and spoke of the determination of patriots to annul the Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907. The situation of the Iranian Cossacks in Mashhad became completely untenable, even the Governor-General withholding official recognition from the force and refusing to use it for local peacekeeping duties and, in early 1918, Colonel Staroselsky, the Russian Commandant, removed the Cossacks from Mashhad.

In Tabriz, as in Mashhad, there was bitter hatred and resentment between the Iranian Cossacks and the Democrats. The Iranian government had agreed to the establishment of the Tabriz regiment only under intense Russian pressure, in 1912. The Tabriz Cossacks were, from the start, entirely outside Iranian control, practically forming part of the Russian army of occupation,⁶⁰ and they were hated accordingly. They took their orders from the Russian military or consular authorities, and were mainly used on the lines of communication between the different Russian garrisons. So purely Russian was the character of the Tabriz Cossacks that in a review of the Russian troops held there towards the end of 1913, the Iranian Cossacks marched past with their Russian comrades.⁶¹ The Russian officers of the Brigade made no effort to conceal their indifference to Iranian sovereignty, openly proclaiming their allegiance to the tsar of Russia and repudiating any obligation to the Iranian government.

In Tabriz, the Cossacks were so completely identified with Russian domination that resentment reached the highest levels. In early 1918, the *vali'ahd* himself, by tradition resident in Tabriz, made an unsuccessful attempt to force the replacement of the Russian commander with an Iranian officer. Reviewing the Cossacks, the *vali'ahd* told them that the old despotism of Russia having disappeared, there was no longer any reason for their Iranian officers to be considered as inferior and of lower rank to the Russian officers, who were actually only instructors. He then obliged the senior Russian officer to hand over the keys to the Cossack stores of arms and ammunition to an Iranian officer.⁶² Within a short time, however, the new Russian commander at Tehran, Colonel Staroselsky, had re-established full White Russian control over the Tabriz Cossacks. Nonetheless, hatred of the force, among both the politically active and the population at large, remained intense, the more radical elements particularly aware of its reactionary potential.

Tabriz, Iranian social democracy and the Khiyabani revolt

Democrat and Social Democrat influence in Tabriz was profound and pervasive. Although the first Iranian social democratic organization had originally been established outside the country, among Iranian émigrés in Baku, its first home in Iran was in Tabriz. The proximity of Tabriz to the Russian empire, and the large emigration from Azarbayjan to the Baku oilfields, made the city naturally susceptible to the influence of Russian and Transcaucasian social democracy.⁶³ By 1906, a branch of the *Firqah-i Ijtima'iiyyun 'Amiyyun* (Organization of Social Democrats), founded in Baku the previous year, had been established in Tabriz under the name of the Secret Centre (*Markaz-i Ghaibi*). The Baku organization was itself an offshoot of the Muslim social democratic Himmat Party and its members had close links with the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. An Armenian social democrat grouping had also been established in Tabriz, even earlier, in 1905. The Secret Centre played an active role in providing political and practical support to the Tabriz *anjuman* and in creating a volunteer army of *mujahidin* to defend the new order, its programme radical but eclectic, "a melange of socialist and indigenous ideas".⁶⁴ After the shah's coup of 1908, Tabriz led the struggle to defeat the royalist forces and to restore the constitution, and so heroic was its resistance that the city's reputation as a constitutionalist stronghold was assured. After the constitutionalist victory in 1909, elements among the Tabriz Social Democrats were closely involved in the formation of the Democrat Party.⁶⁵

After the closure of the majlis in 1911, the Russian army, which had occupied Tabriz in 1909, put a brutal end to all constitutionalist activity. In a "reign of terror", all *mujahidin* were disarmed, many leading constitutionalists were arrested and summarily executed, and many civilians were

massacred.⁶⁶ After 1914, and the entry of the Ottomans into the War, Azarbayjan became a major battlefield, with widespread suffering from the ravages of military occupation and famine. It was only with the February Revolution of 1917 that political activity again became possible in Tabriz. The nationalist movement, in Tabriz as elsewhere, received a massive impetus from the February Revolution. The Democrats rapidly revived and began to fill the vacuum created by the political collapse and military disintegration of Russia after its seven-year occupation of Tabriz.

The leadership of the Azarbayjani Democrats was assumed by Shaykh Muhammad Khiyabani, one of the outstanding figures of Tabrizi radicalism. Khiyabani had originally acquired his reputation when, as a young preacher in Tabriz, he had joined the constitutionalist struggle.⁶⁷ Active in the Tabriz *anjuman*, he had entered the ranks of the *mujahidin* fighters during the civil war and was later elected as a deputy to the Second Majlis. Khiyabani had adopted radical ideas while studying in the Caucasus and was both a respected cleric and a powerful speaker. Reputedly a member of the Organization of Social Democrats in Tabriz, he had voted with the Democrats in the majlis.

From early 1917 onwards, the Democrats played an active role in running Tabriz, even though there were Governors-General appointed from Tehran.⁶⁸ They were well armed, having appropriated most of the weapons and ammunition left behind by the departing Russians and, in March 1918, Khiyabani publicly announced the re-establishment of the Democrat Party and began to publish a newspaper, *Tajaddud (Renewal)*. Around him developed a coterie of close supporters, including figures such as Isma'il Amirkhizi and Muhammad Ali Badamchi. Elements to the left of the Democrats were also reviving in Tabriz, as the 'Adalat Party in the Caucasus sent militants to various towns in northern Iran to reactivate the old social democratic organization.⁶⁹

In the summer of 1919, however, the Democrat ascendancy within Tabriz was interrupted by a renewed Ottoman occupation, and Khiyabani and some of his closest supporters were exiled. Embittered by what they perceived as the central government's collaboration with the Turks, the Tabriz Democrats became convinced of the immediate necessity of radical change at Tehran and of the necessity also of a degree of autonomy for Azarbayjan.⁷⁰ Khiyabani's revolt was inaugurated with the election campaign for the Fourth Majlis in August–September 1919. After the Democrats' success in these elections, relations between Tabriz and the prime minister, Vusuq al-Dawlah, whose government had been largely discredited by its negotiation of the Anglo-Iranian Agreement, deteriorated steadily, and in April 1920 Khiyabani took complete control. He set up his own government, the National Government (*Hukumat-i Milli*) and renamed the province Land of Freedom (*Azadistan*). His movement's objectives were, broadly, the establishment of Iranian national sovereignty and independence

through the agency of a constitutional regime. Although sympathetic to some degree of autonomy for Azarbayjan, he always rejected accusations of separatism.⁷¹

With the fall, in late June, of the deeply unpopular Vusuq al-Dawlah, and the subsequent formation of a government by the respected constitutionalist Mushir al-Dawlah, a serious split developed within the ranks of the Democrats. Some of the latter, fearing the centrifugal and disintegrative momentum which they perceived in Khiyabani's movement, openly aligned themselves against him and with the central government. Khiyabani, increasingly isolated, displayed an intransigence which contrasted unfavourably with Mushir's willingness to negotiate and his desire to resolve the conflict by consent.⁷²

Hatred between the Democrats and the Cossacks had continued unabated. In early 1920 the Democrats apparently even attempted to assassinate the Cossack Officer Commanding.⁷³ Nonetheless, the Cossacks and their Russian officers offered no resistance as the Democrats took control of Tabriz but withdrew to their barracks at Bagh-i Shumal on the northern outskirts of the city, where they were allowed to remain unmolested. Although, during Khiyabani's tenure of power, the Democrats established their authority throughout the city, the Cossack barracks remained outside their control. This was to prove fatal. The Cossacks were the instrument by which the Iranian government overthrew the Democrat regime and reasserted its authority in Tabriz, in this the Cossacks acting entirely in keeping with the traditions of the force.

In August 1920 the Iranian government appointed Mukhbir al-Saltanah Governor-General of Azarbayjan, but Khiyabani refused to recognize his authority. Khiyabani's own authority extended no further than the city gates, beyond which his tribal opponents had established themselves, and when Mukhbir al-Saltanah arrived as new Governor-General, he took up residence in the Cossack barracks where he found a force ready to support him.⁷⁴ The Russian Cossack commander and his senior Iranian officers, Zafar al-Dawlah (later General) Hasan Muqaddam and Isma'il Khan (later General) Amir-Fazli, assured Mukhbir that they were ready to act against the Democrats and were confident of victory.⁷⁵ Early on the morning of 13 September, Mukhbir sent the Cossacks into Tabriz, where they seized the *vali'ahd's* palace, the citadel and the Democrat strongholds. After four hours of fighting, the Cossacks succeeded in dispersing their opponents, killing 50 and wounding over 100, and in recovering all the guns and machine-guns, and most of the rifles and ammunition, which were in the possession of the Democrats, finally discovering and shooting Khiyabani himself.⁷⁶

With the Cossack seizure of Tabriz, Mukhbir al-Saltanah was able to establish himself as Governor-General, although Tehran's control over both the city and the province was still tenuous. The coup against Khiyabani did not inaugurate or imply any fundamental change in the relationship between

Tehran and the provinces, nor any substantial increment in central power. It did, however, leave a legacy of deep bitterness among the Tabriz Democrats. The re-established authorities were unable, and perhaps uninterested in, carrying out any systematic repression, and Khiyabani's Democrat supporters remained at liberty and politically active. Another element was also added to the cocktail of discontent in Tabriz in the form of a new Gendarmerie regiment.

During the months of his regime, Khiyabani had been greatly concerned with the need to establish order and security, through constitutional and legal mechanisms. In pursuance of this objective, he had taken steps towards organizing a Gendarmerie, just as had the Democrats of the Second Majlis. Having been impressed, when in Tehran, by the Government Gendarmerie, Khiyabani had decided to set up a similar force in Tabriz, under his orders, to be called the Azarbayjan Gendarmerie. He gathered together some individuals who had previous experience in the army and formed a battalion of gendarmes whose uniform and general structure resembled that of the Government Gendarmerie, placing the force under the command of a Major Mir Husayn Khan Hashimi. However, Khiyabani's Gendarmerie, which came to number about 400, both officers and men mostly locally recruited, apparently remained neutral when Khiyabani was overthrown and surrendered without taking any action. This force, however, was subsequently absorbed in its entirety by the Government Gendarmerie, becoming the nucleus of a new regiment. Major Hasan Khan Malikzadah, who had been sent from Tehran with a few officers to Tabriz to begin the construction of a Gendarmerie regiment as part of the central government's efforts to extend its authority, took over Khiyabani's gendarmerie *in toto*, this becoming the Fourteenth Regiment of the Government Gendarmerie. Major Mir Husayn Khan Hashimi became Malikzadah's second-in-command, and his rank, as well as the ranks of other officers, which had originally been given to them by Khiyabani, were officially confirmed.⁷⁷ This strongly pro-Democrat Gendarmerie regiment continued to grow, and by 1920–21, it had become an important element in the Tabriz government, replacing the Cossacks as the main instrument with which the local authorities were attempting to deal with the threat represented by the Kurdish tribal leader, Simko.

The Lahuti revolt

Although the central government had succeeded in suppressing Khiyabani's revolt, it had been unable to ease or resolve the worsening national crisis. In 1921, the Cossack officer Riza Khan cut the Gordian knot of Tehrani politics, marched on the capital and carried out a coup, inaugurating an entirely novel era in Iranian state-building, in centre-periphery relations and the centralization of power, and in political discourse.

The changed circumstances of post-coup Iran had an immediate significance for the Iranian Communist Party, the name adopted by the 'Adalat Party the previous year. From the spring of 1921 onwards, Soviet policy towards Iran was reversed, experiments in using Iranian communists and separatist movements abandoned in favour of consolidating relations with the Iranian central government, as expressed in the Soviet-Iran treaty of 26 February 1921. In the new diplomatic climate, and after the liquidation of the Jangali movement by Riza Khan's Cossacks, the controversy which had raged within 'Adalat and the Iranian Communist Party, between those who advocated an immediate communist revolution in Iran and those who believed in cooperating with the Iranian bourgeoisie in the struggle against the British, was resolved in favour of the latter.⁷⁸ This found expression at a meeting on 25 January 1922, actually immediately before the outbreak of Lahuti's revolt, when the Iranian Communist Party adopted a new approach consisting of the acceptance of, and operation within, the existing Iranian political framework, that is the new government dominated by Riza Khan, whom the Soviets recognized as "representative of the Iranian national bourgeoisie".⁷⁹

Bolshevik agitation among groups such as the Gendarmerie declined dramatically from the spring of 1921. However, it was clear that neither the Iranian Communist Party nor the Comintern, nor the Soviet state had very much influence, let alone control, over independent left-leaning nationalism in Iran. The *mélange* of revolutionary ideas which had made up 'Adalat ideology, and especially radical nationalism with a communist colouring, continued to find an echo among elements within the Gendarmerie, who took little notice of the changed diplomatic context. The continuing power of these inclinations, especially when allied to specific localized grievances against the direction of the new regime, was soon to be dramatically demonstrated by the evolution of certain trends among the supporters of the rebellion of Colonel Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan, and most clearly exemplified by the revolt of Major Lahuti in Tabriz.

The coup also transformed the position and the prospects of the Gendarmerie. Its senior officers, elements among whom had apparently been preparing a coup of their own, were well represented in the post-coup regime, initially occupying the posts of minister of war and military governor of Tehran, as well as providing military governors for several provincial capitals. During the following months, however, in tandem with the growing ascendancy of Riza Khan, the gendarmes were gradually supplanted by Cossacks, a process which accelerated rapidly after the downfall of Sayyid Ziya. The endemic political, ideological and professional hostility between these two forces, although overcome temporarily for the period of the *coup d'état*, soon resurfaced. Discontent and resentment among the gendarmes was widespread and, in one case, immediately provoked active resistance. Between April and October, the gendarme

colonel, Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan, held power in Mashhad, in increasingly open defiance of Tehran.⁸⁰ A charismatic individual with impeccable nationalist credentials and a personal reputation for honesty and courage, Pasyan was forced into rebellion by what he perceived as the return to power of the old, corrupt aristocracy after the fall of Sayyid Ziya, and the implacable hostility to himself of the new prime minister, Qavam al-Saltanah.

Pasyan himself, although concerned to alleviate the hardships of the poorer classes in Mashhad, consistently repudiated any sympathy for Bolshevism. Certain of his supporters, however, evolved views very close to the radical nationalism with an Islamic colouring which had been the stuff of Bolshevik propaganda towards the Middle East in the immediate past. One of his principal supporters, the gendarme Colonel Mahmud Nawzari, for example, in a speech in the Quchan *madrasah* before a public audience on 18 September, explained what he understood the principles of Bolshevism to be, and declared that these were of great utility inasmuch as they embraced the ownership of the land by the people and the abolition of a titular ruler. He concluded his speech with a denunciation of British influence in Iran.⁸¹ On another occasion, Nawzari stated that the objects of his party were to obtain freedom for Khurasan and "to further the unity of Islam and to break the chains of slavery which capitalists and rich landowners have placed upon the necks of the workers and the poor".⁸²

The gendarme regime in Mashhad, which found its political expression in a National Committee of Khurasan (*Kumitah-i Milli-yi Khurasan*), drew its support from a wide range of reformist political tendencies, including both local Democrats and Moderates, radical nationalists, including the *Ittihad-i Islam*, and also a socialist group. The Mashhad experiment, however, threatened the rising power of Riza Khan in Tehran. Pasyan's overthrow by a tribal rising instigated by Tehran removed a major political and military threat to Riza Khan and paved the way for the absorption of the Gendarmerie into the new, Cossack-dominated, army.⁸³

The process of constructing a new army out of the opposing gendarme and Cossack elements was not straightforward. Although the two forces were amalgamated formally on equal terms, by Army Order Number One, issued on 6 December, in fact the gendarmes were alienated by Riza Khan's personal ascendancy and were outraged by the way in which the new army was being constructed. Riza Khan trusted and relied upon his Cossack comrades, whom he placed in the positions of greatest power. Conversely, he distrusted the ex-gendarmes, whom he deprived of the pay and promotion which they felt commensurate with their training and experience. The ex-Cossacks received consistently preferential treatment in terms of pay and rank at all levels. In this way, friction between the two groups was perpetuated within the new army in every division and among junior as well as senior officers, and even within the rank and file. Cossack officers were put in command over gendarme officers of equal rank and, while Riza Khan

made every effort to provide funds for the ex-Cossack troops, the pay of the ex-gendarmes fell further and further into arrears.⁸⁴ By the end of 1921, the gendarmes appear to have been getting very little pay at all and resentment was widespread; the force in the capital was especially discontented and threatened disturbances. On 24 December, a deputation of ex-gendarme officers headed by Colonels Azizallah Khan Zarghami and Fath Ali Khan Saqafi Tupchi visited Riza Khan and stated that they would not answer for the actions of their men if they were not paid up to date.⁸⁵

This was the context in which the rebellion led by Major Abulqasim Khan Lahuti broke out in Azarbayjan in January 1922. Although Lahuti and many of his supporters, both military and civilian, had wider political aims, the spark for the rising was undoubtedly the anger felt by many gendarmes at the circumstances of their incorporation into the new army. Ever since the announcement of Army Order Number One, amalgamating the Gendarmerie and the Cossack Division, friction between the two forces in Azarbayjan had been growing, owing specifically to the fact that junior Cossack officers had, in several cases, been promoted over the heads of more senior gendarmes, and to the fact that the military authorities at Tabriz and elsewhere had issued pay to the ex-Cossacks in preference to the ex-gendarmes.⁸⁶ The gendarmes at Tabriz were, by January 1922, seven months in arrears and greatly resented the fact that their commander was no longer a gendarme officer, and that they were now subordinate to the Cossack general, Isma'il Khan Amir-Fazli, one of the commanders of the force which had overthrown Khiyabani.

The rebellion to which Lahuti gave his name broke out apparently spontaneously at Sufiyan on 31 January 1922, when the Gendarmerie detachment mutinied, cut the telephone wires and destroyed the railway. The gendarmes at Sharafkhanah joined the movement and arrested their commanding officer, Colonel Mahmud Khan Puladin, when he refused to join them.⁸⁷ The gendarmes from both places then marched on Tabriz. On the outskirts of the town, they encountered a Cossack force which had been sent out to stop them, but they forced the Cossacks to retreat and to take refuge in their barracks, where they were surrounded. Major Lahuti, who was then in Tabriz, put himself at the head of this movement and, on 1 February, took charge of all government departments, including the police. In Tabriz, the gendarmes were joined by local Democrats and together they formed a revolutionary committee called *Tajaddud* (Renewal), and this was where the real power lay during the insurrectionary period.⁸⁸ The only part of Tabriz which remained outside the revolutionaries' control was, just as in Khiyabani's time, the Cossack barracks, at Bagh-i Shumal.⁸⁹

The rebellion led by Major Lahuti was both more radical and more plebeian in character than the earlier gendarme movement led by Colonel Pasyan, having its origins among, and being based upon, the non-commissioned officers and the rank and file rather than the upper

echelons of the officer corps. That these strata provided the inspiration for the movement is confirmed by the recollection of Hasan Arfa that he was asked to join the rebellion by the non-commissioned officers and men of his squadron.⁹⁰ Lahuti himself, in the course of an interview with Hasan Arfa, in which he attempted to enlist the latter's support, harshly criticized the senior officers of the Azarbayjan Gendarmerie regiment. Indeed, the rebel gendarmes had not hesitated to arrest those senior officers who had declined to join them – Colonel Lundberg in Sufiyan, Colonel Puladin in Sharafkhanah and Colonel Shihab in Tabriz. Within a few days of the start of the rebellion, Lahuti had arrested half a dozen colonels and imprisoned them in the Tabriz citadel.

In fact Lahuti faced strong opposition from the most senior gendarme officers, many of whom, in Azarbayjan and elsewhere, had already thrown in their lot with Riza Khan. These officers, of whom Arfa was typical, were already beginning to find congenial positions in the new army and, fearing chaos and disintegration, had no hesitation in opposing Lahuti's movement, Arfa warning Lahuti that he was risking a bloody civil war which would end in catastrophe.⁹¹ Colonel Shihab, another senior gendarme officer in Tabriz, refused, like Arfa, to support the rebel gendarmes, and advised them either to obey the commanders appointed by the government or to resign and go home. He further warned them not to plunge the country into "wild and dangerous adventures".⁹² Arfa and Shihab actually attempted, although unsuccessfully, to collaborate with the Governor-General, Mukhbir al-Saltanah, and the Tabriz Cossack commander, Brigadier Amir-Fazli, in a plot against the rebel gendarmes, and the rebellion was in fact ultimately crushed by a force commanded by an ex-gendarme, Brigadier Habiballah Shaybani.⁹³

When the rebel gendarmes had reached Tabriz, they had found considerable support waiting for them. The local Democrats, who had again armed themselves, rallied to their side, apparently seeing the revolt as an opportunity for avenging the death of Shaykh Khiyabani. The name of the revolutionary committee, *Tajaddud*, clearly recalled Khiyabani's newspaper, and some of Khiyabani's closest supporters, including Isma'il Amirkhizi, Sayyid al-Muhaqqaqin Diba, Muhammad Ali Tarbiyat and Muhammad Ali Badamchi, assumed prominent roles in the movement.⁹⁴ The Democrats harboured particular enmity towards Mukhbir al-Saltanah, who still remained as Governor-General, and whom they regarded as responsible for the crushing of their movement in 1920. When the revolutionaries took control of Tabriz, Mukhbir al-Saltanah was guarded by Cossacks. Arfa has described how his house "was surrounded by two encircling forces, the rebellious gendarmes forming the outer and the Cossack guards the inner ring, watching each other with fingers on the triggers of their rifles".⁹⁵ The gendarmes quickly gained the upper hand and arrested Mukhbir al-Saltanah while General Amir-Fazli ordered the Cossacks to retreat to their barracks at Bagh-i Shumal.

Immediately on the gendarme seizure of power, the Democrats had gone to the telegraph office and begun discussions with various elements in Tehran, including the prime minister, Mushir al-Dawlah.⁹⁶ As at the time of Khiyabani's revolt, Mushir was again anxious to avoid a conflict. He accordingly officially recalled Mukhbir al-Saltanah and appointed an acting Governor-General, Ijlal al-Mulk.⁹⁷ The latter was *persona grata* with the Democrats, and he set about trying to arrange an accommodation between Tehran and the Tabrizis. Lahuti had also put himself in telegraphic communication with the central government and the majlis and had explained the grievances of the gendarmes, putting forward the immediate demand that the government pay the gendarmes their much-delayed salaries.⁹⁸ The rebellion had been sparked off specifically by the gendarmes' resentment at what they considered unfair treatment; in a proclamation, Lahuti declared that the gendarmes took over Tabriz because they had been ordered to remove their "sovereign uniforms" which were their "historical honour" and put on the uniforms of the "wretched Cossack executioners" that were a sign of the era of tsarism.⁹⁹ However, Lahuti himself, and many of his comrades in the force, immediately seized the opportunity to introduce their own political agenda. Calling the gendarmes partisans of freedom, enemies of despotism and devotees of the nation, Lahuti, in proclamations to the people of Tabriz, emphasized the Gendarmerie's desire to safeguard the independence of the country and the happiness of their compatriots. In his public statements, Lahuti acknowledged the authority of Tehran and placed great stress on his efforts to petition the majlis and the central government about the rights of the gendarmes and the people of Tabriz.¹⁰⁰ Yet the gendarmes also developed a plan of marching on the capital. In an attempt to win over Hasan Arfa, Lahuti declared that the country needed real reforms, that the people who then held power were incompetent, corrupt and devoted to foreign interests, and that he had decided to mobilize all the patriotic forces of Azarbayjan and march on Tehran.¹⁰¹ He repeatedly and publicly called for the establishment of a revolutionary republic with himself as commander of a national army.¹⁰² Lahuti made repeated efforts to reassure the people of Tabriz that their safety and security was in good hands and that no harm would come to them from the rebels.¹⁰³ Lahuti and his followers, unlike Khiyabani, made no appeal to Azarbayjani separatism; rather, Lahuti made vigorous efforts to convince the Azarbayjanis that the Gendarmerie was the true defender of the Iranian nation. But, with both senior gendarmes and many nationalists now supporting Riza Khan as offering the best hope for Iranian nationalism, Democrat opinion was again, as in the time of Khiyabani, divided, some of the Tabrizis ultimately joining the Cossacks to fight against the gendarmes.¹⁰⁴

Lahuti also found support among more radical elements in Tabriz. Although the initial mutinies had appeared to be spontaneous, there had been some contacts between rebel gendarmes and communists in Tabriz,¹⁰⁵

Lahuti himself claiming to have linked up with his old comrades-in-arms before the rising and to have launched a propaganda campaign among the gendarmes.¹⁰⁶ In "free Tabriz",¹⁰⁷ red flags appeared, the Shah's portraits were destroyed and the gendarmes were joined by some 270 local members of the infant Iranian Communist Party, many apparently of Caucasian origin,¹⁰⁸ under the leadership of Ali Asghar Sartipzadih, Husayn Bichiz and Haj Muhammad Ibrahim Shabistari.¹⁰⁹ In a clear echo of his earlier experiences, and indicating the movement's rapid radicalization, Lahuti's last two telegrams to Tehran were signed "President of the Committee of Free Soldiers and Gendarmes" ("*Ra'is-i Kumitah-i Sarbazan va Zhandarmha-yi Azadi*"); his proclamations to the people of Tabriz, exhorting them to assist the revolutionaries, were similarly signed.¹¹⁰

The Tehran government had wished to come to a negotiated settlement with Tabriz, Mushir al-Dawlah concluding that, after his recall of Mukhbir al-Saltanah, the crisis was passing its peak. It seems that the military suppression of the insurrection was the result of Riza Khan's personal initiative.¹¹¹ Riza Khan had, from the beginning of the rebellion, apparently decided to grasp the opportunity to crush opposition both within the politically turbulent and radical city of Tabriz and within the Gendarmerie. Realizing that the 200 Cossacks in Tabriz, facing as they did about 350 gendarmes and the armed Democrats, were helpless until reinforcements arrived, Riza Khan temporized, giving the impression that he was prepared to accept a negotiated solution based on an amnesty for the rebel gendarmes. But in fact, immediately upon receiving reports of the situation in Tabriz, he had ordered large contingents of Cossacks from Saujbulagh, Gilan and Tehran to move on the city. Although he had sent orders to Brigadier Amir-Fazli to obey Ijlal al-Mulk, he had also informed him that help was on its way, that whatever money he required could be supplied him and that he should not lose heart.

While negotiations were still proceeding, the Cossack force from Saujbulagh, numbering more than 1,000 men and commanded by Brigadier Shaybani, was approaching Tabriz. The city was becoming tense, and on 7 February, Lahuti posted notices announcing that the Cossacks were coming to fight against the people's rights and calling on all the inhabitants of the city to join him in resistance. In the last message between Tehran and Tabriz before telegraphic communication was cut, Riza Khan warned the rebels that if they did not submit, they would be attacked. Next day, the Cossack force under Shaybani reached Tabriz. They linked up with the Cossacks in the city at their barracks in Bagh-i Shumal and, after severe fighting, defeated the rebels. The gendarme Captain Turaj Amin, who was the real military commander of the insurrection, tried to organize a defence but was wounded, and the gendarmes, although holding all the tactical points in the city, could not long withstand the overwhelming odds. Gendarme casualties were large and many who were captured with their rifles were summarily

shot. However, Lahuti himself, for whose head a reward had been offered, accompanied by about 350 of his comrades, both gendarmes and civilian nationalists, managed to escape, fleeing across the Soviet frontier. "'Punitive' troops were ravaging the streets of Tabriz. Some of the insurgents scattered to the hills, the rest of us fought our way towards the frontier."¹¹² Lahuti and his band finally crossed the Araxes river into Soviet Azaybayjan on horseback.

The bulk of the gendarmes remaining in Tabriz surrendered over the next few days. Riza Khan appointed the ex-Cossack, General Amir-Fazli, military governor of Tabriz, placed the other most senior Cossack officer in Tabriz, General Zafar al Dawlah Muqaddam, in charge of the police, and the city was placed under martial law. There followed widespread arrests.¹¹³ The establishment of military government exercised through the agency of the ex-Cossack high command of the new army heralded a period of profound change. For the next twenty years, Tabriz was to find itself under ever tightening central control, sometimes civilian but often military, its population disarmed and conscripted, and publication in Azari Turkish banned.

Lahuti never returned to Iran. After his arrival in the Soviet Union, his radical but independent nationalism and his sympathies for what he understood of the Soviet Union rapidly crystallized into orthodox communism. He himself later described how, on his arrival in the Soviet Union, he "found a new path".¹¹⁴ He arrived in Moscow in 1923, worked as a compositor in the Central Publishing House of the Peoples of the USSR and soon began to publish. He became a literary worker at the publishing house, and it was there, on "an unforgettable day" in 1924, that he was admitted to the ranks of the Communist Party.¹¹⁵ He eventually settled in Stalinabad (Dushanbe), the capital of the (Persian-speaking) Soviet Republic of Tajikistan, where he became one of the founders of Soviet Tajik poetry. He was the author of the Tajik national anthem and of the Tajik translation of the Soviet national anthem.¹¹⁶

Lahuti's poetry clearly mirrored his ideological development, exhibiting a transition from progressive nationalist to communist themes. Only once in the Soviet Union did he acquaint himself systematically with the ideas of socialism; from then on, much of his inspiration came from the radical economic and social transformation of Tajik and Soviet society, and he acquired the soubriquet "*adib-i surkh*", "the red writer".¹¹⁷ One of his most important works from this period was the qasidah "*Krem*", published in 1923, the first poem in Tajik and Persian literature praising the October Revolution. With the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler, the anti-fascist struggle became the main theme of Lahuti's work, and he wrote in an heroic strain which appealed to patriotic sentiments.¹¹⁸ "*Dastan-i ghalabah-i Tanya*" ("Story of Tanya's Victory") was one of the great works of wartime Soviet poetry, celebrating the heroism of a woman partisan executed by the

Nazis. As well as composing many poems, Lahuti contributed greatly to the development of Tajik drama and was the author of the first original Tajik libretto. He also did important work as a translator, introducing to Tajik and Persian literature the work of Pushkin, Gorky, Mayakovsky, Shakespeare and other famous Western authors. Lahuti died on 16 March 1957.¹¹⁹

The Tabriz insurrection to which Lahuti has given his name erupted only fifteen months after the overthrow of Khiyabani's Democrat regime. It seems to have been initially largely a spontaneous affair, sparked off by the specific grievances of the gendarmes at the circumstances of their incorporation into the new army, and by the anger of both the gendarmes and the civilian Democrats at the imposition of the reactionary rule of the Cossack army officers, and in particular provided the Democrats with an opportunity to avenge themselves against Mukhbir al-Saltanah, still Governor-General, whom they held responsible for the murder of Khiyabani. A radical trend was imparted to the rebellion by Lahuti himself, certain tendencies among the gendarme officers which had been encouraged by Bolshevik propaganda, and the active participation of a significant number of members of the Iranian Communist Party. As is clear from his public declarations, Lahuti, in January 1922, still expressed himself in typical constitutionalist and left-wing Democrat terms. However, although there was little Bolshevik content in the declared objectives of the rebellion, the forms which the movement took, most notably Lahuti's own description of himself as leader of the soldiers' committee, clearly derived their inspiration from, and imitated, the Russian revolutionary example. For their part, the Tabriz communists themselves displayed an astonishing indifference to the newly adopted line of the Iranian Communist Party, which sought to accommodate itself to the "bourgeois" regime of Riza Khan. There is no evidence of Lahuti, while in Iran, having been in direct contact with the 'Adalat and Iranian Communist Party leadership, but, once settled in the Soviet Union, he became an orthodox communist of the period. He found in Soviet communism the ideal focus for his artistic and emotional energies, and for the next three decades gave consistent expression, through his poetry, to the concerns and struggles both of the Soviet state and of the international communist movement.

Notes

- 1 Referred to hereafter as "the War".
- 2 Abdulkasim Lahuti, "About myself," *Soviet Literature* 9 (1954): 138-144. This account of his early life in Iran was written many years after the events it describes and in completely changed circumstances, yet it is Lahuti's own version of his life and gives rise to no major discrepancies with what we know of the period from other sources. It is also the version which is reflected in official Tajik publications from the Soviet era. See, for example, M. Zand, *Abulkosim Lahuti* (Stalinabad, 1957). Evidence of leftist and radical nationalist activity from the

years between the Constitutional Revolution and the coup of 1921 is, of course, generally very sparse and fragmented.

Most of the biographical information which we possess about Lahuti's early life has been collected as a result of his later career as an important literary figure in the Soviet Republic of Tajikistan. There are several Soviet works about Lahuti in Russian and Tajik. Although these are mainly concerned with his literary role, they contain some biographical information. There are entries in Soviet encyclopaediae and the Persian language editions of Lahuti's poetry also include biographical introductions. See, for example, Ahmad Bashiri (ed.), *Divan-i Abu al-Qasim Lahuti* (Tehran, 1358); Bihruz Mushiri (ed.), *Kulliyat-i Lahuti* (Tehran, 1357).

- 3 Lahuti, "About myself," p. 138.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- 12 Munibur Rahman, *Post-Revolution Persian Verse* (Aligarh, 1955), p. 42.
- 13 See Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left: Social-Democracy in Modern Iran* (Surrey, 2001), pp. 191–2.
- 14 Kavih Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti, Tabriz, Bahman 1300* (Tehran, 1376), p. 17.
- 15 Jiri Becka, "Abulqosim Lohuti", in Jan Rypka (ed.) *History of Iranian Literature* (Prague, 1956; Holland, 1968), p. 564.
- 16 For biographical details of Amu Ughli, see Chaqueri, *The Russo-Caucasian Origins*, pp. 206–8.
- 17 H. Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 36.
- 18 Lahuti, "About myself," p. 140.
- 19 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, pp. 19–30.
- 20 Lahuti, "About myself," p. 140.
- 21 *Ibid.*, pp. 140–1.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 23 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, pp. 27–30.
- 24 *Who's Who in Persia*, Vol. 2, IOL/MIL/17/15/11/3.
- 25 Lahuti, "About Myself," p. 141.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 28 For Kolomiitsev, see Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh, 1995), p. 531, n. 46.
- 29 *Entsiklopediyai Soveti-Tojik* (Dushnbe, 1983), pp. 159–68.
- 30 Lahuti, "About myself," p. 141.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- 32 Vera Kubickova, "Literary reviews between 1921 and 1941", in Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, p. 383.
- 33 Abulqasim Lahuti, "Minalam", in Ahmad Bashiri (ed.) *Divan-i Lahuti* (Tehran, 1358), p. 66.
- 34 Muhammad Taqi Bahar, Malik al-Shu'ara', *Tarikh-i Mukhtasar-i Ahzab-i Siyasi-yi Iran* (Tehran, 1323), Vol. 1, p. 170. Lahuti had personal connections to the highest levels of the Gendarmerie. His first wife was Nusrat Aqavli, the sister of Farajallah and Fazlallah Aqavli, both Gendarmerie colonels, the latter committing

- suicide in 1919, apparently in protest at the Anglo-Persian Agreement and the military subjection of Iran.
- 35 Lahuti, "About myself," p. 140.
- 36 For the Government Gendarmerie, see Stephanie Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910–1926* (London and New York, 1997), pp. 17–53.
- 37 Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 9–19.
- 38 W. Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York, 1912), p. 190.
- 39 Cronin, *The Army*, p. 30.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–42.
- 41 Military Attaché, Tehran, to Director of Military Intelligence, 19 January 1918, WO/157/1250/84.
- 42 Meshed Intelligence Summary (IS) no. 21, 25 May 1918, WO157/1259.
- 43 36th Indian Brigade, IS no. 63, 20 June–4 July 1920, AIR20/581.
- 44 IS no. 30, 26 November 1921, FO371/7826/E1056/285/34.
- 45 In September 1917 in Hamadan, for example, the Democrats, growing in influence, set up a kind of militia. This militia was instructed by ex-gendarmes and apparently received some encouragement from the local Russian soldiers' committees. Cronin, *The Army*, p. 45.
- 46 J.C. Hurewitz (ed.), *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: A Documentary Record* (New Haven and London, 1975), Vol. 2, pp. 108–10.
- 47 Cosroe Chaqueri, "Communism, i. in Persia to 1320 S./1941", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 6 (1991), p. 95.
- 48 A translation of this document may be found in Meshed IS no. 24, 12 June 1920, FO371/4917/C4654/510/34. It is reproduced in Cronin, *The Army*, Appendix C.
- 49 Extract from *Bayraq-i 'Adalat*, 2 July 1920 (trans.), Meshed IS no. 34, 21 August 1920, FO371/4917/C9625/510/34.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Meshed Diary no. 26, 3 July 1920, FO371/4912/C5722/227/34.
- 52 Extract from *Tocsin*, 9 June 1920 (trans), Meshed IS no. 25, 19 June, 1920, FO371/4917/C4654/510/34.
- 53 Meshed IS no. 17, 24 April, 1920; no. 18, 1 May, 1920, FO371/4917/C510/510/34.
- 54 Meshed Diary no. 25, 26 June 1920, FO371/4912/C4655/227/34.
- 55 For the Cossack Brigade/Division, see Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 54–88.
- 56 Marling to FO, 23 January 1918, FO371/3264/14692.
- 57 Marling to FO, 21 December 1917, FO371/2988/242011.
- 58 Meshed IS no. 28, 14 July 1917, WO157/1258.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 W.A. Smart, Tabriz, to Townley, 18 November 1913, FO248/1079.
- 61 *Ibid.*
- 62 Consul, Tabriz, to Marling, 20 February 1918, FO371/3264/33414.
- 63 For the early history of Iranian social-democracy, see Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origins of Feminism* (New York, 1996); and Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Armenians of Iran* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); *The Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left: Social-Democracy in Modern Iran* (Surrey, 2001).
- 64 Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 84.
- 65 Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*; Chaqueri, *The Russo-Caucasian Origins*.
- 66 Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, p. 337.
- 67 For Khiyabani, see Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*; Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-century Iran* (London and New York, 1993); and Homa Katouzian, "The Revolt of Shaykh Muhammad

- Khiyabani", *Iran, Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* XXXVII (1999): 155–72.
- 68 Katouzian, "The Revolt", p. 160.
- 69 Chaqueri, "Communism", p. 95.
- 70 Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, p. 48; see also Katouzian, "The Revolt".
- 71 Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*, p. 50.
- 72 *Ibid.*, p. 50; Katouzian, "The Revolt", p. 167.
- 73 IS no. 58, 1–15 April 1920, 36th Indian (mixed) Brigade, AIR20/581.
- 74 Tehran Monthly Summary, Norman to Curzon, 11 September 1920, FO371/4930/C14858/34.
- 75 Katouzian, "The Revolt", p. 168.
- 76 Norman to FO, 19 September 1920, FO371/4927/C6811/6811/34.
- 77 Afsar, *Tarikh-i Zhandarmiri* (Qum, 1332), pp. 247–8.
- 78 Chaqueri, "Communism", pp. 96–8.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 80 For the Pasyan revolt, see Stephanie Cronin, "An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism: The Rebellion of Colonel Muhammad Taqi Khan Pasyan in Mashhad, April–October 1921", *Middle Eastern Studies* 33(4) (October 1997): 693–750.
- 81 Consul-General, Meshed, to Bridgeman, 18 November 1921, FO371/7802/E530/6/34.
- 82 *Ibid.*; Meshed Diary no. 43, 22 October 1921, FO371/6420/E14153/88/34.
- 83 Cronin, "An Experiment in Revolutionary Nationalism".
- 84 Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 145–6.
- 85 IS no. 35, 31 December 1921, FO371/7826/E3904/285/34.
- 86 IS no. 5, 4 February 1922, FO371/7826/E3815/285/34.
- 87 Hassan Arfa, *Under Five Shahs* (London, 1964), p. 129.
- 88 *Entsiklopediyai Soveti-Tojik*, pp. 159–68.
- 89 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 53.
- 90 Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, pp. 128–9.
- 91 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 92 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 93 For Habiballah Shaybani, see Cronin, *The Army*, pp. 250–1.
- 94 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 51.
- 95 Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, p. 128.
- 96 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 51.
- 97 *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- 98 Lahuti continued to write poetry during the Tabriz insurrection. "The unforgettable...days of free Tabriz...it was in those days, when we often had to forget completely our need for food and sleep, that there were born in me real poems, poems that would never have been born had it not been for those strenuous days". Lahuti, "About myself", p. 142. For an example of the Tabriz poetry, see "*Bisat-i 'Adl*", in Bashiri (ed.) *Divan-i Lahuti*, pp. 78–9.
- 99 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 125–6.
- 100 *Ibid.*, pp. 126–7.
- 101 Arfa, *Under Five Shahs*, pp. 129–30.
- 102 Manshur Garakani, *Siyasat-i Dawlat-i Shuravi dar Iran* (Tehran, 1326), p. 163.
- 103 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, pp. 126–7.
- 104 Husayn Makki, *Tarikh-i Bist Salah-i Iran*, 8 vols (Tehran, 1323) Vol. 2, pp. 14–22.
- 105 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 48.
- 106 Lahuti, "About myself", pp. 141–2.
- 107 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

- 108 IS no. 6, 11 February 1922, FO371/7826/E3815/285/34.
- 109 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 48.
- 110 See the proclamation reproduced in *ibid.*, pp. 128–9; see also Loraine to FO, 7 February 1922, FO371/7802/E1486/6/34; IS no. 6, 11 February 1922, FO371/7826/E3815/285/34.
- 111 Loraine to FO, 10 February 1922, FO371/7802/E1570/6/34.
- 112 Lahuti, “About myself”, p. 142.
- 113 Bayat, *Kudita-yi Lahuti*, p. 85.
- 114 Lahuti, “About myself,” p. 142.
- 115 *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 116 Jiri Becka, “Abulqosim Lohuti”, p. 564.
- 117 *Ibid.*; Keith Hitchens, “Modern Tajik literature”, in Ehsan Yarshater (ed.) *Persian Literature* (Columbia, 1988), pp. 454–75.
- 118 Rahman, *Post-Revolution Persian Verse*, p. 47.
- 119 A curious coda to Lahuti’s career occurred in the new context of the Cold War. In 1953, Iranian newspapers, apparently inspired by the CIA officer Donald Wilber, published reports that Lahuti had fled from the Soviet Union, and the following year a forged biography was published abroad. Wilber arranged this disinformation apparently because he feared that Lahuti was being groomed to act as a figurehead for a Soviet takeover of Iran. See Donald M. Wilber, *Adventures in the Middle East: Excursions and Incursions* (Darwin, US, 1986), p. 191. Lahuti replied with poems, newspaper and magazine articles, and radio broadcasts, and began writing his autobiography, *Sarguzasht-i Man*, although this remained unfinished at the time of his death. See Jiri Becka, “Abulqosim Lohuti”, p. 566. It was as part of Lahuti’s response to this campaign that he published his autobiographical fragment, “About myself”.

INCOMMODIOUS HOSTS, INVIDIOUS GUESTS

The life and times of Iranian revolutionaries in
the Soviet Union, 1921–39¹

Touraj Atabaki

With the Iranian economy in decline, the flourishing economy of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century had begun attracting many Iranian subalterns.² They moved, in search of work, by different routes, legally or illegally, to the southern region of the tsarist empire, especially the Caucasus. The early mass migration of Iranian labourers to the Caucasus and Turkistan corresponds to the free exploitation of the oil deposits in the Apsheron peninsula on the Caspian coast in 1872. The rapidly growing oil production of the Caucasus soon elevated the region to the supplier of 95 per cent of all of Russia's consumer oil and the holder of the second largest oil deposits in the world, next to the United States. Along with British, French and German companies operating in the region, it was indeed the Russian state capitals which anticipated benefiting from the underground resources of a territory which, on the eve of its occupation and annexation in the early nineteenth century, had been considered as a region with solely geopolitical and military importance.

The Russian, strongly state-oriented industrialization policy of the late nineteenth century paved the way for a massive expansion of domestic industries, the development of massive mining projects and a dazzling extension of railway networks into the southern regions of the tsarist empire.³ The construction of roads and railways such as the Trans-Caspian network connecting the Caucasus to Central Asia increased the labour migration, which resulted in an even greater population dislocation, as well as in the expansion of the ancient cities and the building of newly assembled industrial zones. As an example, one could cite Baku, where the population, as a result of the "oil rush", rose from 13,000 in 1859 to 112,000 in 1879 and to 300,000 in 1917, or the workforce in the oil fields, which rose from 1,800 in 1872 to 30,000 in 1907.

With such an increased tempo of economic activities, what soon became evident was indeed the labour deficiency. Not only were the labour-intensive industries facing serious labour shortages, but the growing agricultural lands and industries such as tea plantations were also affected by the same scarcity of working forces. Consequently, along with local people, hundreds of thousands of Russians, Armenians and Daghestanis migrated to the mining areas and oilfields as well as to other industrial regions. Nevertheless, soon it became clear that many branches of production in Russia still faced severe workforce shortages, and the import of foreign labour turned out to be the first task for the Russian authorities in the region.⁴ Perceptibly, Iran in the nineteenth century, with her declining economy and her long border with Russia, could supply the cheap working force needed for the fast-growing Russian economy.

Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, the rapid influx of Iranian subaltern crossing Russia's frontiers was constantly increasing. Russian consulates in Iran, especially in the northern provinces of Azerbaijan, Gilan and Khorasan, issued work permits and visas for thousands of Iranians who left their country in pursuit of work. Documents for the Russian consulates in the northern frontier cities of Tabriz, Mashhad, Rasht and Astarabad indicate that between 1876 and 1890, an average of 13,000 Iranians per year acquired working permits and visas to enter Russia legally. By 1896, this figure had reached 56,371. The number of work permits issued by the Russian consulate in Tabriz rose from 15,615 in 1891 to 19,639 in 1896, to 26,855 in 1898 and to 32,866 in 1900, an obvious increase of 110 per cent during some nine years.⁵ However, it should be realized that these figures do not cover those migrant workers who crossed the frontier illegally and naturally were not counted. If it is recognized that in nineteenth-century Iran, slipping over the frontier was, for those residing in the border regions, the most common practice, then the actual number of Iranian migrants definitely exceeds the recorded figures.

The process of migration was so solid that the Iranian emigrants constituted a large working force in the region. On the eve of the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Baku oilfields employed some 10,000 Iranian workers,⁶ and in the copper mines and industrial plants of Alaverdi in the north of Yerevan, there were 2,500 Iranian workers, who composed 70 per cent of the total employees. In the other industries in the Caucasus and Turkistan, Iranian workers constituted 30 per cent of the total number of labourers and formed the majority of the foreign groups residing there. In the city of Tbilisi, the number of Iranian labourers in 1910 reached 5,000.⁷

Throughout the Caucasus region, the Iranian subalterns, most of whom were Azerbaijanis or Azerbaijani-speakers from the north of Iran, were known as *hamshahri* (fellow countrymen), and they maintained a sense of separate identity, which marked them as different from the local population to the north of the Iranian frontier. Consequently, from the early days of

their mass migration to Russia, the Iranians endeavoured to establish a set of connections bringing them together. The first attempt was to set up Persian-language schools. In Baku, they founded Ettehad in the city centre and Tamadon in the Sabunchi district. The activities of these schools went beyond a conventional education for the migrant children, and they were soon turned into cultural clubs where the migrant Iranians could assemble and discuss social issues. For example, the Ettehad School had an active association called *Sanduq-e Ta'avon-e Madreseh-e Ettehad-e Iraniyan-e Baku*, which had weekly meetings.⁸

The political upheavals which followed the Russian defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05 also altered the political environment for the Iranian migrant subaltern. The Southern Caucasus, which was connected to the Russian Social Democrat network, hosted a leading community of Iranian political activists and offered an exceptional shelter for the headquarters of Iranian political groups. Next to local branches of all-Russian political parties and organizations, the Iranians too established their own parties and societies. The most important of these political organisations were the Social Democratic Party of Iran (SPDI, *Ferqeh-ye Ejtema'iyun 'Amiyun-e Iran*), founded with the help of the Social Democratic group of Caucasian Muslim *Hemmat* in 1904;⁹ the Social-Revolutionaries Party (*Ferqeh-e Ejtema'iyun-Enqelabiyun*);¹⁰ the Iranian Democrat Party (*Hezb-e Demokrat-e Iran*); the Edalat Party (*Hezb-e 'Edalat*), which later adopted the name of the Communist Party of Iran, and the *Jam'iyat-e Ma'aref-e Iran*, which was an Edalat Party front; and the Iran Independent Party (*Hezb-e Esteqlal-e Iran*), which was a pro-Iranian government party.¹¹

Of the various organizations which existed among the Iranian community living in Baku, the local branch of the Iranian Democrat Party was the most eminent and active.¹² However, when in May 1917 the Edalat Party of Iran was formed in Baku, some of the old Democrats joined the new organization.¹³ From its headquarters in Tamadon School in the Sabunchi district, the 'Edalat Party soon launched a widespread campaign among the Iranian subalterns. The dominant egalitarian inspiration, as an acknowledged outcome of the Russian Revolution, affected many Iranian subalterns. The party's first newspaper, *Beyraq-e 'Edalat (Banner of Justice)*, did not last very long. It was replaced by *Hürriyat (Liberty)* and *Yoldash (Comrade)*, which were bilingual Azerbaijani–Persian publications. The chief editor and one of the major contributors to these newspapers was Mir Ja'far Javadzadeh (Pishevari). It was during this period that 'Edalat Party activists occupied the Iranian consulate in Baku. In addition to their other demands, which included the abolition of a special annual tax which each individual migrant worker had to pay to the consulate, they wanted a permanent delegate in the Iranian consulate in charge of migrant workers' daily affairs.¹⁴ Finally, the Iranian consulate conceded to the protestors' demands and Asadollah Qaffarzadeh, a veteran Social Democrat with close ties to the RSDWP

(Russian Bolshevik Party), and later the first secretary of the 'Edalat Party, was chosen by the migrant workers as the vice-consul in Baku.¹⁵

In 1918, the 'Edalat Party sent a group of eighteen party members to Gilan, under the leadership of Asadollah Ghafarzadeh, first secretary of the party. Although the first attempt by the party to establish contact with Kuchak Khan, the leader of the Jangali movement in Gilan, was a failure, the party soon sent a second group of twenty members to Gilan. In June 1920, the 'Edalat Party held its first congress in Anzali, Gilan's major port on the Caspian.¹⁶ At this congress, consisting of fifty-one voting members, the 'Edalat Party was renamed the Communist Party of Iran (CPI), and the Minimum Programme, which had been drawn up by Heydar Khan 'Amoghlu two months earlier, was formally approved and adopted.¹⁷ Article 4 of the Programme called for the establishment of a "People's Republic of Iran, an independent and indivisible sovereign Republic".¹⁸

From the early period of its formation, the Communist Party of Iran considered the southern Caucasus and Turkistan as the one of the most significant areas for spreading its revolutionary programme and recruiting new members, targeting especially the Iranian workers of the oilfields and other industries in the Caucasus and Turkistan who composed the main bulk of the foreign groups residing there. The city of Baku was also particularly important as it was connected to the Russian Social Democrat network, hosted a leading community of Iranian labourers and offered the Communist Party of Iran shelter in which to base its headquarters. In the early 1920s, the Foreign Bureau of the Communist Party of Iran, in order to mobilize tens of thousands of Iranians in Central Asia and the Caucasus, adopted a variety of measures,¹⁹ including publishing newspapers and periodicals in Persian and Azerbaijani. In 1921, it published '*Edalat* in Tbilisi, and a year later, '*Azadi-ye Iran* was published in Baku. In Ashgabat, during the period 1925–27, the Communist Party of Iran published two newspapers, '*Hammal* (1925) and '*Zahmat* (1926–27).²⁰

Furthermore, the arrival in Baku of Ehsanollah Khan and some sixty Jangali activists, who fled Iran following the tragic fall of the Jangali movement, significantly added to the importance of the Caucasus's political stance towards neighbouring Iran. Upon his arrival in the Caucasus in 1921, Ehsanollah Khan, together with his companions Mohamad J'afar Kangavari, Ahmad Mosafer and Ashuri, founded a new party known as '*Komiteh-e Enqelab-e Azadkonandeh-e Iran* (Committee for the Revolution Liberating Iran). The headquarters of the new party was an old shop in the outskirts of Baku, where Ashuri, Ehsanollah Khan's personal aid and secretary, also took up residence. From this rather undersized headquarters, Ehsanollah Khan and his companions varnished their revolutionary venture aiming to bring changes in their homeland of Iran. Their low-profile activities were somehow tolerated and supported by some key figures in the

Communist Party of Azerbaijan, among them Nariman Narimanov, who had previously cooperated with the Jangalis.

In August 1922, a year after arriving in Baku, considering the gradual consolidation of Reza Khan's political power in Iran, Ehsanollah Khan wrote two open letters to Reza Khan, then the Iranian minister of war. In both these letters, Reza Khan was reminded of the very important historical moment when "the liberation movement is spreading all over the world and the superiority of the British Empire is coming to an end". He was encouraged to "benefit the most from the international political setting, and also the tactical support he receives from the Soviet government – as the Kemalists did in the Ottoman Empire"; join the army of change and revolution, by calling for "a national republic of Iran"; and put a seal to the most corrupt and tyrannical rule of the Qajars and the dominance of the religious establishment in Iran. Following this rather disreputable political endeavour, Ehsanollah Khan was asked implicitly by the Soviet authorities to observe silence while dwelling on Soviet soil. The five-year time span between 1923 and 1928 was a period when Ehsanollah Khan and his companions were gradually pushed by the Soviet authorities into acceptance of a type of political segregation. What is known of his activities during this period is his performance as an actor in an early Soviet propagandist film produced by Leo Mur. The story of *Gilan Qizi* (*The Daughter of Gilan*) was based on the Soviet interpretation of the Jangali revolt and the causes behind its tragic fall. While different actors and actresses played the roles of known personalities in this film, such as Kuchek Khan, Ehsanollah Khan appeared as himself.

However, the gradual consolidation of power by Reza Khan in Iran, which eventually paved the way for him to be crowned as the new king, was definitely not what someone like Ehsanollah Khan could accept, and this made him alter his earlier stance towards Reza Shah. For Ehsanollah Khan, Reza Khan was now no longer a soldier in whom Ehsanollah Khan could see another Mustafa Kemal, but rather "an agent of British imperialism, who could come to the throne by the command of his master". In 1928, Ehsanollah Khan broke his five-year silence and once more returned to the public political scene. This time, he produced some caricatures of Reza Shah, calling him the puppet of "British imperialism". A number of these lithographically printed caricatures were sent by post to different addresses in Iran, including to some officials in the Pahlavi establishment.

The immediate reactions of the Iranian authorities to these propaganda materials, including the caricatures, were furious. Taymurtash, then the minister of court and the most influential political figure of that time, called on the Soviet ambassador in Iran, Davtdzhan, and presented the Iranian government's official protest. Davtzhan in turn immediately contacted Moscow and Baku and informed Mirzayan, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, passing on the Iranian government protest. In his confidential letter to Mirzayan, Davtdzhan wrote that the

Iranian authorities, including Taymurtash, were convinced that Ehsanollaah Khan had been behind this new intrigue to endanger Soviet–Iranian relations. Davtzhan was convinced too that “these types of activities gravely harm the two countries’ diplomatic relations”. Moreover, in his letter to Mirzayan, Davtzhan argued, “If these political activists are sincere in continuing their revolutionary practice, would it not be much wiser to carry out their tasks from their own country and not from Soviet soil?” Finally, he called on the authorities of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan “to find a way out of this predicament and halt further deterioration in Soviet–Iranian diplomatic relations through Ehsanollah Khan and his group’s activities”. In Baku, the reaction to this call was instantaneous. Ehsanollah Khan and his companions were called to the NKVD and were ordered to stop their political activities at once.

In the late 1920s, the pressure on non-Soviet citizens residing throughout the Soviet Union was gradually escalating. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, by introducing a new diktat, called on all republics’ communist parties and the commissariats of internal and foreign affairs in each republic to take the necessary steps to persuade all non-Soviet communists living in the Soviet Union to accept Soviet citizenship. For the non-communist foreigners, the option of deportation was also considered. Regarding Iran, with political life becoming stabilized, regional movements gradually fading away and Soviet–Iranian relations finally being formalized, the importance of mobilizing the Iranians of the Caucasus and Turkistan had significantly diminished. Both the Comintern and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union concluded that in the Iranian political panorama, the likelihood of there being any kind of dramatic change in the near future was non-existent, and thus it was necessary to alter their previous policy and adopt a new one encouraging the Iranians of the Caucasus and Turkistan to leave aside the idea of being temporary in the Soviet Union, waiting to pack their bags and go back to Iran, and accept Soviet citizenship. The Communist Party of Iran was called on to “accomplish its revolutionary activities solely in Iran” and leave the task of working among the Iranians residing in the Soviet Union to the local communist parties. In Azerbaijan, all foreign bureaux of the Communist Party of Iran were closed down and all its properties were handed over to the Communist Party of Azerbaijan.²¹ Accordingly, all Iranians working in these bureaux were called to leave Iranian politics and join the Soviet government apparatus. At the same time, thousands of Iranian workers were encouraged to join the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and accept Soviet citizenship.

However, many Iranians were reluctant to adopt new citizenship. For years while working in the Caucasus and Turkistan, they had kept their Iranian nationality. Indeed, for a large number of Iranian workers, it was a common practice, at least until 1925, to cross the border and pay a visit to their family on the other side. Moreover, during the same period, the

Iranian consulate in Baku was still active and had a working programme of bringing Iranian nationals together. Thus, for many Iranians, adopting Soviet citizenship turned into an obstacle, hindering them from going back to Iran.

By the end of 1929, and following the inauguration of Stalin's new perception of class struggle, which effectively influenced the entire Soviet society and the Comintern, the implication of the citizenship diktat became even more solemn. For example, in a document from the Communist Party of Azerbaijan which had been classified as top secret, it is known that in one of the sessions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, on 15 May 1929, the Commissariat of Internal Affairs and the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs were explicitly asked to perform and take every necessary measure to ask all foreign nationals working in the high organs of the Soviet Union to change their nationality and accept Soviet citizenship at once.²² In the same meeting, it was decided that all foreign nationals working in the provinces close to the international borders were to be dismissed from their jobs.²³

Nevertheless, neither the Comintern nor the Soviet authorities observed total consistency in adopting this policy.²⁴ For example, in 1929, when the news of workers' strikes in the oil industries of southern Iran reached the Soviet Union, the Comintern once more endeavoured to mobilize the local Iranians. Salamollah Madadzadeh Javid, a member of the Central Committee of the Iran Communist Party and a close associate of the Comintern, was dispatched to Baku in order to mobilize and reorganize them. Amongst forty-nine participants who took part in a meeting in Baku on 10 July 1929, the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was represented by Antonov, while Bahram Agayev, Farajzadeh and Fataliyev represented the Communist Party of Iran. The meeting's main agenda was how to turn the existing Iranian Culture Society in Baku into an active communist front organization in order to mobilize the Iranian workers of the Caucasus. In order to recruit and educate new cadres for the Communist Party, Javid argued that the existing Cultural Society had to reorganize with the main task of educating young Iranians. In the curriculum, in addition to the history and geography of Iran, the Persian language should also be included. However, during the meeting, the participants gradually diverted from the agenda and began to debate the difficulties the Iranian community had been facing in Azerbaijan. Javid himself, later referring to the general mood of regret and pessimism among the Iranian community of the Caucasus, blamed the Communist Party of Azerbaijan and its leader Mirzayan for not conducting an appropriate policy towards Iranians. According to Javid, it was not those individual Iranians turning to the Iranian consulate in order to find a cultural shelter who should be blamed, but rather those who had not done enough to limit the activities of the consulate among the Iranians.²⁵

Following the meeting, Javid, in different letters to Ordzhonikidze, the Comintern Executive Committee, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, offered a descriptive picture of the conditions in which the Iranian community was living in Baku. By making reference to the early revolutionary role played by the Iranian communists and revolutionaries, he revealed his deepest regret that the living conditions of some of these old activists were enormously poor. Moreover, he criticized the conduct of local authorities towards Iranians as being "beyond anticipation". By referring to Iranian activities in the Caucasus, Javid argued in his letter that since 1917, the Iranian communists, while active in Iran, had also been engaged in activities in Azerbaijan and had received a high level of education and had held high positions in the early period of the Bolshevik takeover. He particularly referred to the activities of the Iranian Ettehad School in Baku, which since 1906 had gradually become a cultural magnet for the Iranian community living in the Caucasus. He regretted that the teaching of Persian had been dropped from the school curriculum, and that as a result, 60 to 70 per cent of the pupils had had to apply to the school run by the Iranian consulate in Baku, which obviously, in addition to teaching Persian, also engaged in promoting politics in favour of the Iranian government.

In his letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, Javid unequivocally criticized the Communist Party of Azerbaijan for implementing every possible measure in order to hinder the activities of Iranian clubs and societies, especially the Cultural Society, and for dropping the Persian language from the curriculum of the Iranian school in Baku. He explicitly described this final act as shameful and explicitly voiced his disappointment. Javid added in his letter: "now some Iranian communists are understandably comparing your policy with the ethnic assimilating policy of Reza Shah in Iran". Moreover, in his letter, he referred to the general perception in Azerbaijan, which in practice imposes discrimination not only between Persian-speaking Iranians and local Azerbaijanis, but also between Azerbaijanis of Iran and local people, by labelling them "foreign Turks". For Javid, such an attitude, which eventually "only helps Mosavatists and Iranian government agents to pursue their anti-Soviet propaganda and encourages Iranian nationals to leave the Soviet Union",²⁶ is in "sharp contrast with the international duties which the Communist Party of Azerbaijan was due to observe".²⁷

Finally, on the question of imposing Soviet citizenship on the Iranians, he argued that this policy was nothing but an act aimed at dispersing and pacifying the Iranians of the Caucasus. According to Javid, accepting Soviet citizenship not only endangered the Iranian communists' social acceptance within the Iranian community living in the Soviet south, but also caused some severe hitches preventing them from fulfilling their revolutionary task inside Iran.

Javid's letter to Moscow would not remain without a response. On the demand of the Comintern Executive Committee, Javid was replaced as the representative of the Communist Party of Iran in Azerbaijan by Naqi Taqiyev, a member of the Communist Party of Iran, who was at the time residing in Baku, and Javid was sent to Iran, where he was soon arrested and imprisoned.

For the second time, in mid-1931, the Comintern Executive Committee assigned Sayfi (Abdolazadeh), a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Iran, to Baku. In a secret letter sent directly to Polanski, a member of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, the Comintern described the agenda of Sayfi's mission to Azerbaijan as "to mobilize the Iranian workers and Communists" and ultimately "strengthen the Communist Party of Iran".²⁸

On his arrival, in December 1931, Sayfi called a meeting bringing together all Iranian communists and some non-communist political activists such as Mollazadeh, who was a close ally of Ehsanollah Khan. He also invited Sultanzadeh from Moscow to attend the meeting. The meeting lasted for three days. Although the meeting intended, according to Comintern guidance, to bring new blood to the Communist Party of Iran, it soon turned into a stormy session, critically reviewing the party's past activities and its leadership's record.

By assessing Sultanzadeh's performance in the Communist Party of Iran, the veterans of the party once more opened the Jangali book and tried to re-examine the causes behind its failure and the accountability of the Communist Party of Iran's leadership. In the process of the meeting, contrary to the Comintern's stand and expectations, the participants of the meeting explicitly and harshly accused and blamed Sultanzadeh, not only for being responsible for the very unfortunate destiny of the communist movement in Iran, but also for the deep crisis threatening to cause the disintegration of the party. He was accused of, "while being unfamiliar with Iranian society, employing his own willpower and determination, rather than that of the Party's collective leadership". He was also charged with adopting intrigues in order to disqualify those communists and revolutionaries, both in Iran as well as in the Soviet Union, who were not accepting his authoritarian rule. He was also blamed for "recruiting suspicious and non-committed personalities to the Party".

On the final day, Dadash Hoseynzadeh, one of the participants at the meeting, made an accusation against Sultanzadeh that despite letting the Baku delegation express their view during the so-called Urumia Congress of the Communist Party of Iran (which was actually held in 1927 in Rostov, a city close to the Sea of Azov), he had employed every possible measure to prevent them from casting their vote, an action which apparently had produced a rigorous protest from the Baku delegates. Furthermore, he put it to Sultanzadeh that in 1930, Sayfollah Ibrahimov, when he left Baku for

Iran, after having consulted with the members of the Central Committee of the party, Javadzadeh, Hasanov and Rezayev, in a letter had urged Sultanzadeh to mobilize the Iranian communists and workers in Baku and reorganize them. However, Sultanzadeh, who was at the time in Moscow, had not reacted favourably to this request. Indeed, all letters sent through Sultanzadeh to the Comintern by the Iranian communists had disappeared. Moreover, Sultanzadeh was blamed for refusing to meet with Iranian communists when he was passing through Baku.

Furthermore, the participants at the meeting regarded the departure of Sultanzadeh as the representative of the Iranian Communist Party in the Comintern as a symbol of his deficiency, and did not accept Sultanzadeh's argument that his departure from the Comintern had nothing to do with his alleged personal incapacity and was simply due to the fact that as the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Iran was non-existent, it could not be represented in the Comintern.²⁹ Finally, on the issue of the party's past history, Sultanzadeh was blamed for wiping out the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Iran, which was held in Baku in 1921, from the party's history.

During the three-day Baku meeting, such accusations were common, and this, more than anything else, demonstrated the mood of frustration and fatigue among the Iranian political activists in the Caucasus. While the rank and file of the Party was criticizing Sultanzadeh, the leadership of the party, including Sayfi and some others, endeavoured to soften the anti-Sultanzadeh climate by referring to Sultanzadeh's revolutionary background and his latest effort to publish periodicals during 1929–30 in Europe. However, the wound apparently was too deep for such an attempt to heal it. Even Sultanzadeh's final statement could not alter the meeting's outcome. Sultanzadeh affirmed his readiness to leave the party immediately, but even this stance too could not satisfy the participants. They rejected his resignation by calling on him first to reorganize the party and only thereafter to leave it.³⁰

At the end of the meeting, a statement consisting of nineteen articles was published. The statement dealt mainly with the activity of Sultanzadeh. Regarding the eleven-year history of the Communist Party of Iran, the statement criticized the performance of the leadership of the party in Azerbaijan for distancing itself from the Iranian communists and workers, for ignoring the importance of the Iranian Azerbaijan province in the country's political development, publishing the party's publications only in Persian, and for subsequently ignoring the need of the Azerbaijani-speaking members of the party. The leadership of the party was also accused of ignoring the needs of the Iranian community in Azerbaijan and leaving them in total pessimism and repentance. According to the statement, in such conditions it was quite predictable that some skilled Iranian labourers should leave the Soviet Union for Iran through Iranian consulate channels.³¹

Following this rather harsh criticism, the statement called on the leadership of the party to:

- officially recognize the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Iran;
- support the Iranian Cultural Society in order to contest the spreading sentiment of indifference and pessimism; and
- appoint a group of two to three Iranian communists from Baku and assign them to Iran in order to reorganize the party's cells throughout the country.³²

Finally, the statement, while praising the veteran Iranian revolutionaries and communists, both in detention and in exile, for their "revolutionary records", urged the leadership of the party not to deprive itself of utilizing their experience. Moreover, the statement voiced its innermost concern at the severe conditions in which these veteran activists were living and called on the leadership to look after their financial needs and to support their families who were still living in Iran. The leadership of the party was called on to take every necessary measure to ensure that this group, "who could still be considered as the potential leaders of any revolutionary upheaval in Iran", were adequately awarded. Although in the statement no reference was made to Ehsanollah Khan and his companions, it was apparent that those who compiled the statement had them clearly in mind.

The December 1931 meeting indeed holds a significant place in the history of the Iranian community of the Caucasus. It was indeed the first time that, in the process of a meeting, those Iranian communists living in the Caucasus frankly discussed their difficulties and displayed their concern about their future. Following the meeting, Sayfi, in a secret letter to the Comintern, presented his own appraisal of the meeting and its participants. According to his assessment, the Baku meeting "could not go according to the Bolshevik principles, and this was mainly due to the heterogeneous character of its participants". Sayfi divided the Iranian communists living in Azerbaijan into three different categories: "The first group are those working in the oil fields and industries, who have also followed different courses at the party school." According to Sayfi, "these communists, who could play an active role in the Iranian communist movement, should be immensely encouraged". The second group, Sayfi argued, "are those who are working in the industries but due to their illiteracy and lack of political and revolutionary knowledge, gradually have been pacified, thus could not be considered as the main mediator of the revolutionary tasks in Iran". And finally, the third group, whom Sayfi described as "Gilan Revolutionaries", was addressed. According to Sayfi's judgement, although "some of them even being members of the Communist Party of Iran", they lack political knowledge and revolutionary principles. Moreover, they were accused of

“conducting factionalism, intrigues, and counter-revolutionary propaganda”. Referring to their “destructive role” in the Baku meeting, Sayfi was convinced that the reason behind their “anti-Sultanzadeh hypocrisy” lay in the old enmities between two fractions in the Communist Party of Iran which had gradually evolved during the Jangali movement. The first fraction was lead by Narman Narimanov–Heydar ‘Amoghli and the second by Sultanzadeh–Agayev. According to Sayfi, the first group, by propagating rhetoric such as “Why those who took part in Gilan movement are not any more trusted?”, or “Why are you keeping us here in the Soviet Union as prisoners and not letting us to go back to Iran?”, was attempting to enlist the second group to their “anti-Bolshevik platform”. At the end of his report, Sayfi called on the Comintern and the Communist Party of Azerbaijan to pay special attention to the activities of this group, “since their Menshevik type activities could harm both the Communist Party of Iran and the Soviet Union”.

Following this meeting, Sayfi, in a letter to the eastern secretary of the Comintern, in addition to other demands called on the Comintern “to help the Communist Party of Iran in order to educate communist cadres and despatch them to Iran”. He argued that, “in order to fulfil our revolutionary task in Iran, we need a few young well-trained cadres”.³³

In reaction to Sayfi’s appeal in 1932, the Comintern sent some Iranian communists living in Baku to Moscow in order to undergo some necessary training. In Moscow, these young communists, after passing some party courses, were assigned to Iran for illegal party work. As is reflected in the Comintern documents, during this period it was extremely difficult to pursue any communist and revolutionary activity in Iran.³⁴ Some of those who were sent to Iran returned to the Soviet Union after experiencing severe difficulties, and there they compiled a long report for the Comintern, in which they provided a detailed account of the difficulties of fulfilling any revolutionary tasks in Iran.³⁵

The Yezhevshchina, or Great Terror: poised to leap

In Soviet history, the assassination of Sergey Kirov, the secretary of the Leningrad Committee of the Communist Party, on 1 December 1934, marked a turning point which paved the way for the institutionalisation and consolidation of what later became known as the Yezhevshchina, or Great Terror. Although there is no documented verification yet available, the common consensus among many Soviet historians refers to Stalin as the architect of Kirov’s murder. Nevertheless, whatever the function of Stalin in this episode, Kirov’s death gave the necessary pretext to Stalin and the Stalinist leadership to instigate their widespread campaign of purging genuine or imaginary opponents in the Communist Party, including many of the Bolshevik old guard.

In May 1935, as part of an all-Soviet initiative, an extensive inspection was initiated in the Caucasus³⁶ in order to update information on the membership of the Communist Party and assessments of the membership's background. In June 1935, Lawrientij Pawlowicz Beria, then a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in an address to party activists in Tbilisi, while complaining of existing irregularities in compiling membership archives, "revealed" that as a result, "many aliens and anti-Soviet elements by concealing their past records and presenting forged documents had penetrated into the party".³⁷ Following such official affirmation, a broad operation began to expel thousands of party members, among them many veteran Bolsheviks. By February 1936, some 19 per cent of the members in the Caucasus were expelled from the party, most of them also being detained.

The effect of this operation on non-Soviet members of the Communist Party was noticeably drastic. In 1935, the Stalinist leadership in Moscow called a wide-ranging census in all Soviet republics, registering all foreigners living on Soviet soil. Furthermore, the local branches of the communist parties in each republic began to pass detailed information to the Central Committee in each republic, on foreign workers of different departments throughout that republic.³⁸ Then, the communist parties throughout the Soviet Union unexpectedly decided to dismiss all those members who earlier had been encouraged to adopt Soviet citizenship. In the Caucasus and Central Asia, the Iranians became the first victims of this policy. As an example, one might refer to the district of Shaumian on the outskirts of Baku. In this district, over a single night, more than two hundred Iranians were expelled from the local branch of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. They were charged with "hiding their Iranian background when joining the party", "having relatives in Iran", or "accepting Soviet citizenship later than the time it was expected". In the cases where none of these allegations were applicable, they were accused of "keeping at home pictures of those ex-leaders of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union who were known as the people's enemies".³⁹

To achieve a completely homogenized ethnic society in each republic, in 1938 the Soviet authorities decided to adopt a new deportation policy, forcing all ethnic groups originally coming from neighbouring countries to Soviet lands to leave immediately. In Soviet Azerbaijan, the Commissariat of Internal Affairs launched a mass detention and expulsion of Iranian nationals living in Soviet Azerbaijan. The total number of Iranians expelled from the Soviet Union at this time is still unknown to us; however, according to only one file, on a single day, 12 May 1938, some 14,521 Iranians were deported to Iran. According to the same file, on the same day throughout Soviet Azerbaijan, some 8,979 Iranians were arrested and imprisoned. Those being arrested were Iranian communists and revolutionaries, workers in the oilfields, railways, steel industries and sectors related to the Commissariat of Defence, or those simply living in the border regions.⁴⁰

In a standard report to Mir Jafar Bagirov, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, the NKVD describes the charges against those Iranians who had been arrested as follows:

Being members of different British intelligence departments, working for different Iranian intelligence departments, being members of diverse destructive and counter-revolutionary organizations, members of Azerbaijani Musavatists and Armenian Dashnaktsutun parties, working independently for various Iranian secret services. And finally, being members of foreign anti-Bolshevik, destructive and fascist organizations.⁴¹

In another document, the alleged crimes of the individual Iranians were described in detail. These charges were exceedingly absurd and ludicrous. They included: passing information to the Iranian consulate on Baku's irrigation system; sabotaging the oil industry; and setting fire to mines. An Iranian baker was charged with planning to receive poison from the Iranian secret service in order to poison the Baku inhabitants should war break out. Iranian Bahais were accused of working for the Iranian secret service and of being engaged in fascist propaganda, keeping contact with the Bahai organizations in Britain, Germany, Iran and Palestine.⁴² Ehsanollah Khan and his associates, in one of these reports, were considered as the most dangerous and destructive group among the Iranian community of Azerbaijan. Ehsanollah Khan himself was accused of being

an agent of Iranian and British intelligence services, a committed fascist advocator, a propagator of poisonous propaganda among the Iranians in the Soviet Union, an agent who had handed over some Iranian revolutionaries to the Iranian authorities[?], an anti-Bolshevik element who, by organising a group of 30 Iranian workers in the oilfields, had been carrying out some destructive operations in Baku's oil fields. And ultimately he was considered as the people's enemy.⁴³

The Great Terror began as early as 1935. It affected not only hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens, but also tens of thousands of foreign communists and revolutionaries finding shelter on Soviet soil. The first group of Iranians, who were detained in 1935, were the so-called "Left communists". These communists were known as those who never "recognized the legitimacy of the Second Congress of the Communist Party of Iran", and, during the Baku meeting of 1931, as being closely associated with Sultanzadeh. They included Ali Akbar Aliakbarzadeh, Hamdollah Hasanzadeh, Molla Baba Hashemzadeh and Akbar Nasibzadeh. Shortly after their detention, they were executed.

A year later, in July 1936, the second group of Iranian "Left communists" were arrested. The key figure among them was Bahram Agayev, who was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Iran. Together with Bahram Agayev was Ne'mat Basir and two of Bahram's brothers, Imran and Muharram. The fourth brother, Kamran Agayev, was exempted due to his mental infirmity. At the time of his arrest, Bahram Agayev was director of a state enterprise in Baku. Together with his companions, he was labelled as an "anti-Leninist adventurist leftist", and was charged with being a member of a "Trotskyists ring" and with being engaged in "anti-Soviet activities". On 5 January 1937, he was sentenced to five years' hard labour in Uktepsh labour camp in north Russia. However, in 1938, during the trial of other Iranian communists, who were working at the same factory, the name of Bahram Agayev was often mentioned, and the accused gave some references to his activities. Consequently, he was called back from Uktepsh to Baku and, for the second time, was put on trial. In the second trial, he was charged with "working for the Iranian secret police and having links with Iranian nationalist circles". His rejection of all the allegations, and insistence on being still a committed communist, could not help him. The judge, "by realizing that his first sentence was inappropriate and too light", sentenced him for the second time, this time to fifteen years' imprisonment.

While the interrogation/trial of other Iranian communists such as Sultanzadeh, Rezayev, Sharqi (a Comintern agent), Zarreh, Ladbon and Morteza 'Alawi was proceeding in Moscow and Central Asia, in Baku, the authorities opened fire on the first group of non-communist Iranian revolutionaries. Led by Ehsanollah Khan Dustdar, the group also included members of the Gilan Revolutionary Committee and later the *Komiteh-e Enqelab-e Azadkonandeh-e Iran* (Committee for the Revolution Liberating Iran): Ashuri, Ja'far Kangavari, Reza Pashazadeh and Ali Hoseynzadeh.⁴⁴

On 15 December 1937, Ehsanollah Khan was arrested in Baku. He was accused of being: "engaged in anti-Soviet activities, a British and later a German agent, a member of Trotsky-Zinoviev circle, an anti-Comintern and anti-Communist Party of Iran activist". During the early interrogation, he was put under severe physical torture. However, he utterly rejected all charges. His interrogation in Baku lasted for almost five months. In April 1938, he was sent to Moscow for further interrogation. In Moscow, they repeated the same charges, and he again, as he had done in Baku, rejected all and insisted on his innocence.

From detention, he sent a letter to Mikoian,⁴⁵ an influential figure in the Soviet apparatus, whom he knew from Iran. He also sent letters to Yezhev, the director of the NKVD, and to Stalin.⁴⁶ In these letters, he referred to his background as a committed revolutionary and as one who had been entitled "Camarade Rouge". He called on all these leaders to intervene on his behalf and let him have a "fair and open trial". However, all these letters were left

unanswered. On 10 March 1939, he was eventually put on trial. By this time, he was in poor health. In the Moscow court, he once more rejected all charges and categorically denied having any connection with British or German intelligence services. His trial lasted only twenty minutes. The judge sentenced him to death. The same day, he was executed in Moscow.⁴⁷

Following the death of Stalin in 1953, and after the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956, a majority of those who were victimized during the Stalinist purge, including Ehsanollah Khan, were cleared of the charges of treason and were rehabilitated.⁴⁸ Some who were still alive and living in the labour camps, such as Bahram Agayev, were allowed to come back to Baku. However, the graves of those who were executed or who had died in the labour camps are still unknown to us.

Notes

- 1 The present study was made possible by the exceptional opportunities provided by the Azerbaijan Central State Archive of the History of Political Parties and Social Movements, and Azerbaijan Ministry of National Security. Here I would like to thank the staff in both these institutions for their generous support and understanding and for allowing me to have access to their archives. In developing this paper, I benefited from insightful comments by Hans Timmermans and Solmaz Rustamora-Tohidi. Needless to say, none of these individuals shares the blame for any shortcomings that remain.
- 2 My usage of the term “subaltern” is based on the description given by Gramsci in his *The Modern Prince* and *Prison Notebooks*. According to Gramsci, the subaltern classes are those subordinated by hegemony and excluded from any meaningful role in a regime of power. Although Gramsci himself has workers in mind, the term has later been used to describe other excluded groups who do not have a position from which to speak. See Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (New York, 1992); Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings* (New York, 1967). For a study on the life and times of the Iranian community in the Caucasus, see Touraj Atabaki, “Disgruntled guests: Iranian subaltern on the margins of the tsarist empire”, *International Review of Social History* 48 (2003): 401–26.
- 3 M.E. Fakus, *The Industrialisation of Russia. 1700–1914* (London: 1972), pp. 44–6, 64–6.
- 4 Republic of Georgia State Central Archive (RGSCA), record 13, dossier 1, file 267, p. 18.
- 5 V. Miller, Dvižeie persidskih rabočik v Zakavkaze. Sbornik konsulski donesenij Ministerstva Inostrannik, Vol. 3 (Saint Petersburg: 1903), p. 205.
- 6 N.K., Belova, “Ob otchodincestve iz severozapadnego Irana v konce XIX-nacale XX veka”, *Voprosi istorii* 10 (1959): 117.
- 7 RGSCA, record 13, dossier 1, file 267, p. 14.
- 8 Azerbaijan Central State Archive of the History of Political Parties and Social Movements (AHPS), record 13, dossier 27, file 533, 1907; record 15, dossier 1, file 78, 1908.
- 9 Salih Aliyov, *People of Asia and Africa* (1965).
- 10 Salamollah Javid, *Iran Sosyal Demoktar ('Adalat) Firqasi Haqina Khataralarim*, lithograph (Tehran: 1980), p. 11.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 11–17.

- 12 The Baku Committee of the Democrat Party was founded in 1914 and its members were recruited from the Iranian community in Baku and the adjacent regions. Mohamad Khan Tarbiyat was the founder of the Democrat Party, Baku Committee. He was the director of Iranian Ettehad School in Baku. Other members: Mirza Mahmud Khan Parvaresh, Mirza Abdollah Abdolazadeh, Shaykh Baqir Shirazi, Azhdar Alizadeh, Hoseyn Khayyat, Hoseyn Mahmuzadeh, Mir Hoseyn Motazavi, Mirza Aliqoli (from Ashgabat, who later became the editor of the newspaper *Azarbayjan, Joz'-e layanfak-e Iran* (Azerbaijan, an inseparable part of Iran), Mir Ja'far Javadzadeh Pishavari, Haji Mo'alem Ja'farzadeh Kalkhali, Mirza Aqa Valizadeh, Sayfollah Ibrahimzadeh, Ali Akbar Osku'i (founder of Iranian Guilds Labours Executive Committee) and Salamollah Madadzadeh Javid. Parvaresh, due to his political activities, had to leave Baku in 1916. He left illegally to Iran. After the Russian Revolution of February 1917, the Democrat Party began to operate legally. See Salamollah Javid., *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
- 13 On the formation of Edalat, see Taqi Abolqasimoghlu Ibrahimov (Shahin), *Iran Kommonist Partiyisinin Yaranmasi*, (Baku, 1963), p. 118. The name of the thirteen members of the 'Edalat Party's Central Committee were: Asadollah Qaffarzadeh, first secretary, Mirza Qavam, the deputy secretary, Bahram Agayev, Moharam Aqayev, Molla Babazadeh, Rustam Karimzadeh, Qardash, Seyfollah Ebrahimzadeh, Aqababa Yusefzadeh, Mohamad Fatollahoghlu, Hoseyn Khan Talebzadeh, Mir Maqsud Lotfi and Mohamad Ali Khanov: *Azhir* (1943).
- 14 Mohamad Sa'ed Maraghe'i, *Khatrat-e Siyasi* (Tehran: 1994), p. 59.
- 15 Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920–1921* (Pittsburgh, PA: 1995), p. 154.
- 16 Abdolhoseyn Agahi, "Shast Sal az Tarikh-e Ta'sis-e Hezb-e Komonist Iran Gozasht", *Donya* (1980): 48–9.
- 17 *Donya* (1971): 101–9.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
- 19 For the CPI's activities in Central Asia, see Touraj Atabaki, "Two programs of the Communist Movement in Khorasan in the early 1920s", *Utrecht Papers on Central Asia* (1987): 145–59.
- 20 Solmaz Rustamova-Tohidi, *Matbuat-e Komonisti Iran dar Mohajerat* (Baku, 1985).
- 21 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 88, p. 1.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 24 For a new and thorough study of the Comintern policy on Iran, see Solmaz Rustamova-Tohidi, *Komintern, Sharq Siyasati va Iran* (Baku, 2001).
- 25 AHPS, record 2, dossier 1, file 83, p. 3.
- 26 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 21, pp. 94–7.
- 27 AHPS, record 2, dossier 2, file 25.
- 28 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 21, p. 85.
- 29 *Ibid.*, pp. 67–82.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- 31 AHPS, record 2, dossier 88, file 21, pp. 64–6.
- 32 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 21, pp. 64–6.
- 33 AHPS, record 2, dossier 88, file 21, p. 63.
- 34 For example, one of those who were sent to Iran by the Comintern was Mohamad Taqi Reza'i. He passed illegally the border at Jolfa and made his way to Tabriz. After living in Tabriz for two months, he was arrested on the charge of "being suspicious of coming from the Soviet Union". He was released after six days, but some months later, in December 1933, he was once more arrested, this

time in Tehran, and was detained for three months. However, again, since the secret police could not find any document to charge him, in February 1934, he was released. But in early 1935, he was arrested for the third time, in Tabriz. Again, he could prove his innocence and was released. Finally, he decided together with another two Iranians, whom he had recruited, Hashem Nehzati and Mohamadzadeh, to leave Iran illegally and travel to the Soviet Azerbaijan.

- 35 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 21, p. 26.
- 36 Proverka.
- 37 Zaria vostoka, 24 June 1935.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 516.
- 40 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 515.
- 41 AHPS, record 1, dossier 88, file 400, p. 1.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 44 Azerbaijan Ministry of National Security, Archive of NKVD (NKVD), dossier Ehsanollah Khan Dustdar, pp. 22–6.
- 45 Anastas Ivanovich Mikoian (1895–1978), an Armenian Bolshevik, who from 1917 until 1920 was a journalist in Armenia and in Baku. He was engaged in combat as a brigade commissar in the Red Army. Later, he became head of the Bolshevik organization in Azerbaijan. Mikoian was part of the Soviet group which took power in Baku on 28 April 1920. He held a variety of positions during the ensuing months while serving simultaneously as the head of the Baku Party. Sergey Kirov, head of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan, and Sergo Orzhonikidze, head of the Trans-Caucasian Regional Committee and later a Politburo member, were his superiors in the Caucasus.
- 46 NKVD, dossier Ehsanollah Khan Dustdar, p. 126
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 156–9.
- 48 Letter issued by the Military Department of the USSR Supreme Council, 19 May 1956. In author's possession.

THE STRANGE POLITICS OF KHALIL MALEKI

Homa Katouzian

Khalil Maleki was an unusual phenomenon in modern Iranian politics and society. His ideas were so original for their time that they made him many enemies from the entire spectrum of Iranian politics. He is now being acclaimed by democratic parties and groups of both Right and Left as a sincere as well as an astute political thinker and activist, too advanced to be understood and appreciated before the recent lessons of Iranian history. Indeed, a growing number of former Marxist–Leninist groups and individuals who have turned to parliamentary socialism regard him as their outstanding precursor.

Maleki was a prolific writer, thinker and analyst, who was active in Iranian and world politics for more than forty years. He put forward many theories, ideas, manifestos and party programmes, and analyses of Iranian and world affairs. He was the first and most effective critic of Stalinism and Soviet communism, and founder of a parliamentary socialist movement in Iran. However, his politics looked particularly strange because of his altogether unfamiliar method, attitude and approach.

Beginning with a short political biography, this paper discusses Maleki's general theory of the Third Force and then proceeds to those aspects of his ideas and methods which were the basic roots of his alienation from other Iranian political groups and tendencies in the twentieth century, and which have been rapidly gaining ground in recent years.

A short biography

Maleki was born in Tabriz in 1901 and died in Tehran in 1969. His father – Hajj Mirza Fath'ali – was a well-to-do merchant and supporter of the constitutional movement. As a boy, Maleki witnessed the siege of Tabriz after Mohammad Ali Shah's coup, during which his home was more than once looted by the government forces. The death of his father and subsequent remarriage of his mother found the young Maleki in Soltanabad (later,

Arak), where he went to traditional schools, *maktab* and *madreseh*. In the early 1920s, he attended the German Technical College in Tehran and, following that, succeeded in the difficult competition for a state scholarship to Europe. He had already been attracted to politics and socialism in Tehran, and cites, in a series of unfinished autobiographical essays, his somewhat disillusioning meeting with Soliman Mirza, the then parliamentary socialist leader. This interest was to be widened as well as deepened because of the rising political conflict in Europe (which at the time was probably at its height in Berlin, where he studied chemistry), the rising autocracy in Iran, and his contacts with other radical students, notably Taqi Arani.

The much valued state scholarship was withdrawn after a student committed suicide and Maleki insisted on a full investigation, which the Iranian embassy staff were trying to avoid. They branded him as a communist (which he was not) and sent him back to Tehran, where he studied philosophy and education ('Falsafeh va Olum-e Tarbiyati') to become a secondary-school teacher in chemistry.¹

Early in 1937, he was arrested, tried and convicted as one of the 'Group of Fifty-three'. Like most of them, he was not yet a Marxist but became one in prison. By all accounts, notably that of Bozorg Alavi's *Panjah va seh nafar*, he behaved with exceptional courage and dignity while in jail.² But – as he later explained in numerous places – he was disillusioned and disappointed with many of his comrades. Hence his refusal to become a founding member of the Tudeh Party in 1941, when Reza Shah abdicated in the wake of the Allied occupation of the country. But within a year or so, some of the party's leading young intellectuals persuaded him to join the party with the express purpose of helping them to reform its leadership and programme. The party opposition thus became known as the Reformist Wing (*Jenah-e Eslah-talab*). They had increasing complaints, which they attributed (a) to the leadership's bureaucratic attitude within, and conservative policy without, the party, and (b) to its submissive tendencies towards the Soviet embassy in Tehran. The party somehow managed to survive its ongoing internal conflicts, notably those over the first party congress and the unsuccessful Soviet demand for an oil concession.³

But the Azerbaijan crisis brought matters to a head. As the head of the provincial Tudeh Party in Azerbaijan, Maleki had been critical of the attitude and behaviour both of the Soviet occupying forces and of Pishevari's Democrats. He opposed both the Tudeh Party's formal affiliation with the Democrats in Azerbaijan and its very short-lived participation in Ahmad Qavam's coalition government, in the latter case, simply because he thought Qavam would ditch them at the first opportunity, as in fact he did.

The catastrophic failure of these policies, and the internal party struggles which followed, heightened the conflict within less than a year of the collapse of the Azerbaijan Democrats. The young reformist intellectuals – led by Jalal Al-e Ahmad – were in contact both with the young and fiery

theorist Eprim Ishaq and with the 'elder' statesman of the party opposition, Khalil Maleki. It was they who persuaded Maleki to lead the famous split of January 1948.⁴

The Soviet Union immediately denounced the split and branded its leaders as agents of British imperialism. They therefore abandoned the idea of launching another party and decided to lie low for a time. The time for reflection enabled Maleki to discover the roots of the problem in Soviet Stalinism on the one hand, and the Marxist–Leninist ideology on the other. He openly denounced the former, and grew out of the latter by making it clear that he was no longer a Leninist nor did he subscribe to Marxist ideology, although he still used Marxian concepts wherever suitable.

The campaign, at the close of the Fifteenth Majlis, against the Supplemental Oil Agreement (better known as the Gass-Golsha'iyān agreement) quickly widened into a movement for free elections and democratic government, shortly to be known as the Popular Movement (*Nehzat-e Melli*). This happened almost at the same time as the banning of the Tudeh Party after the attempt on the shah's life in February 1949. The popular democratic forces closed ranks and began to form a broadly based coalition. Mosaddeq, who was not a Fifteenth Majlis deputy, was brought out of his self-imposed 'political retirement' to lead the Movement. The National Front was formed during the struggles for free elections in Tehran. Mozaffar Baqa'i was leading his very effective Action Group for Free Elections (*Sazman-e Nezarat bar Azadi-ye Entekhabat*) when, in September 1949, he launched his weekly newspaper *Shahed*.⁵

Shortly afterwards, Jalal al-e Ahmad joined its voluntary staff and persuaded Maleki to write for the newspaper.⁶ The immediate result was the series of articles later published in a volume entitled *The Conflict of Ideas and Opinions*, the Persian title of which (*Barkhord-e Aqayed va Ara*) was one of the many social and political terms and phrases coined by Maleki, later to become standard terms in the Persian language. The cooperation with *Shahed* continued until May 1951, when – in the wake of Mosaddeq's assumption of office – Maleki and the remnants of the Tudeh splinter group, and Baqa'i and his Action Group, formed *Hezb-e Zahmatkeshan-e Mellat-e Iran*, or the Toilers' Party. This was to become a serious rival to the Tudeh Party in attracting students, youths and working people – especially after Baqa'i's split and the creation of the Third Force Party – although it was inevitably a considerably smaller organisation.

The relationship between Baqa'i and Mosaddeq began to run into difficulty within the first year of Mosaddeq's premiership. But their public cooperation was to endure until after the successful revolt of July 1952 against Ahmad Qavam's short-lived ministry. Baqa'i's view at that time that the Toilers' Party should go into public opposition against Mosaddeq's government was rejected by Maleki's wing of the party, whereupon Baqa'i arranged the party split of October 1952, and the Maleki wing continued under the Third Force title.⁷

After that, the Third Force grew at a rapid rate, while the government's position tended to weaken, not least because of the split within the Movement's leadership, with Baqa'i, Kashani and a few others first criticising then opposing it. The conflict came to a head on 28 February 1953, when the splinter group supported the riots against Mosaddeq because of the announcement that the shah intended to visit Europe. In the event, the Third Force played a visible role in saving the situation, and Mosaddeq formally thanked them by inviting Maleki and thirty of the party activists to his home.⁸

When in July of that year Mosaddeq decided to hold a referendum to close the Seventeenth Majlis and hold fresh elections, Maleki and his party tried to dissuade him on the ground that the recess would offer a golden opportunity for the openly anticipated coup attempt. Many other Popular Movement leaders also thought that it was an unwise move. Mosaddeq disagreed, so that – in a meeting witnessed by Sanjabi – Khalil Maleki spoke the now famous prophetic words: 'The path which you are treading will lead straight to Hell; but we shall accompany you to it, none the less.'⁹

The coup of August 1953 saw Maleki in jail. He had been the leader of a lawful party with no responsibility in the government, and thus no charges could possibly be brought against him. He was therefore jailed without trial, and held (deliberately, he believed) along with a group of Tudeh leaders, workers and intellectuals in Falak al-Aflak, a medieval citadel in Khorramabad. He never ceased to complain of the mental torture that that experience had inflicted on him.¹⁰

In 1960, when both domestic economic problems and difficulties in foreign relations made political activity somewhat less restricted, Maleki led the formation of the Socialist League of the Popular Movement of Iran shortly after the formation of the second National Front. In the next four years, the League's criticisms of the Front's policies as the biggest organisation of the Popular Movement were increasingly echoed by others such as Bazargan's Freedom Movement, Faruhar's People of Iran Party, the highly effective and influential student movement, etc. Eventually, Mosaddeq himself intervened in the matter via secret correspondence from his internal banishment, and attacked the Front's leadership. They thus resigned their positions, while Mosaddeq and their other critics organised the third National Front.¹¹

But in August 1965, a few months after the formation of the new Front, of which the Socialist League was a member, Maleki, together with the three other leaders of the League who were still free, was arrested, tried in a military court on the familiar charge of 'planning to overthrow the regime of constitutional monarchy' and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. But he was released after he had served half of his sentence because of continuing pressure on the regime by human rights groups, the Socialist International, and European socialist parties and governments (including a personal intervention by the Austrian president with the shah). Two years later, he died in isolation and depression.¹²

Maleki's politics

Maleki's fame is especially due to the Tudeh split of 1948, his foundation of a socialist alternative to the Tudeh party, his campaign against Stalinism both in Iran and within the world context, his general theory of the Third Force, his organised and systematic, though not uncritical, support of Musaddiq's government, and his systematic persecution virtually by all the country's political power centres, including many of those in opposition. Yet there are deeper, less obvious but historically more important, sides to his politics which happen to be most relevant to Iranian politics in our time. Therefore, attention here will be focused on these aspects of his politics, except for the Third Force theory, as this is too important and too central to Maleki's political theory and practice not to be discussed in any study of his thought and activities.

The general theory of the Third Force

Maleki developed his Third Force theory almost at the peak of the Cold War, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A couple of years earlier, the world had held its breath over the Berlin crisis. In 1949, Mao and the Chinese communists had driven Chiang Kai-Shek out of mainland China and turned America into a bitter enemy. Shortly afterwards, the war in Korea was raging and that in Vietnam (then against France) creeping. India's independence had brought hope to the colonial and semi-colonial countries of Asia and Africa, but both the United States and the Soviet Union viewed Nehru and his team with suspicion. Since 1943, two main political camps had emerged in Iran, the pro-Western and the pro-Soviet. But when, from 1946, the Cold War winds began to blow – and this was reflected by the revolt in Azerbaijan – attitudes hardened such that each side literally believed that the others were paid agents of the West or East. Moreover, they regarded anyone claiming independence from both as naïve at best, but more often as an undercover agent of the other side.

Maleki's Third Force theory must be studied against this domestic and international background. He presented various parts of the theory first through his 1949 articles ('*Barkhord-e Aqayed va Ara*') in the weekly *Shahed*, which he then formulated into a coherent theory in 1951 and 1952. He introduced two principal concepts: 'The Third Word in General' and 'The Third World in Particular'. The 'general' concept referred to the desire and/or efforts to break free from the two (Western and Eastern) stereotypes everywhere in the world, outside the US and USSR. The 'Third World in Particular' described the specifically socialist roads to social and economic development, which were independent from the Eastern bloc and were discovered by each country on the basis of its own culture and historical experience.

The Third Force in the world context

At the time, the world political map was divided into two blocs: the 'socialist' and the 'imperialist' camp, 'the iron curtain countries' and 'the free world'. Maleki divided it into three: the West, the East, and the countries which many years later became known as 'the Third World'. These were countries which 'neither feel free in Mr Truman's free world nor do they see any sign of socialism in the Soviet Union's socialist camp. These masses of people in Asia, Europe, Africa and elsewhere wish...to cooperate with each other, and...*protect their own national and social character and identity*.'¹³ It was clear at the outset, then, that the Third Force theory went well beyond a mere articulation of the foreign policy of non-alignment, though this itself was quite an original idea at the time and formed a small part of Maleki's theory. According to this theory, the apparently solid and homogeneous front put forward by the West was misleading. Western Europe, in particular, was an advanced cultural and historical entity of its own which would soon recover its separate identity from the US, but without crossing over to Soviet communism:

The western [European] civilisation with its deep historical, economic, industrial and scientific roots will eventually recover from its [present] weaknesses, and will not surrender to either of these two simple civilisations which themselves have sprung up from Europe, but which have developed in the less advanced circumstances of Russia and America.¹⁴

This he described as the West European 'Third Force in General', which was represented by west European liberal democracy, *and was likely to lead to the formation of a Western European social and economic union*. But he also defined a European 'Third Force in Particular':

In Europe, 'the Third Force in Particular' finds expression in a socialist approach which is consistent with the progressive tenets of European democracy...¹⁵

Similar tendencies also existed within Eastern bloc countries, wrote Maleki, but Soviet suppression prevented their public expression and development:

Whenever the third force has dared raise its head in eastern bloc countries it has been condemned and destroyed as deviationist, and as agent and spy of imperialism. The only exception to this rule among the Balkan countries is Yugoslavia, because that country has not been conquered – or, as the Cominform would have it, liberated – by the Red Army.¹⁶

Maleki's regard for Yugoslavia was both because of its break with Stalin and (as part of that) because of its own independent approach to socialism. But he did not necessarily agree with the Yugoslav system even for that country, let alone for Iran, and he became more acutely critical of constraints on personal freedoms when the regime began to persecute Milovan Djilas, the anti-Stalinist theorist and party leader who was embarrassingly outspoken in his critique of Soviet communism. Indeed, much before then, and as early as 1949, Maleki wrote:

I am not concerned with the details of Tito's policies, nor even his major policies which may well be open to criticism and about which I know very little. [I am only concerned with the view] that having regard to one's national self-interest is not in conflict with healthy and proper international relations.¹⁷

The exclusive reference to 'the Balkan countries' in the above quotation was not accidental, for, surprisingly, Maleki also predicted a rift between Russia and China, despite the apparently solid bond that existed between them at that time, and for many years to come:

The movement which Dr Sun Yat Sen began on the basis of his three basic principles, and which Mao Tse-tung now continues, will not in the end remain a satellite of the Soviet Union. Indeed it can be confidently predicted that similar developments to those in Yugoslavia will also take place in China. The forms which these developments will take will doubtless be different from what happened in Yugoslavia. But their substance would be similar resistance against [Soviet] pressures and expansionist behaviour.¹⁸

So much for the Third Force in the Western and Eastern blocs. There remained 'the colonial and semi-colonial countries'. Here, the Third Force in general had emerged in the form of anti-colonial movements, which however did not wish to be dominated by the Soviet Union. The West's notion of 'freedom' for these countries meant little more than the continuation of the *status quo*, which included their own overriding influence. Soviet communism and its supporters in the Third World, on the other hand, argued that all efforts should be primarily put to the service of the Soviet Union, 'the headquarters of the world proletariat'. Thus, both East and West saw any independent movement as being covertly on the other side.

Yet, apart from the parties which supported one or the other bloc, the vast majority of these people and their leaders did not wish to be dependent on either of them. There was also a 'Third Force in Particular' in these countries, composed of the left wing of the wider popular movements, who

pursued social and economic progress through their own suitably adapted roads to democratic socialism.

The Third Force in Iran

The Popular Movement was Iran's example of 'the Third Force in General', and its left wing was the Iranian 'Third Force in Particular'.

The Third Force in Iran was not just a movement independent from the two international blocs; it was, at the same time, an alternative approach to national self-realisation and development. It was

an alternative social model, a mode of national and social living, distinct from both the American and the Russian models which they try to impose on us. The third force is the modern manifestation of the will of the freedom-loving men and women of Iran, itself reflecting a great deal of historical experience through centuries of Iranian civilisation.¹⁹

The National Front was neither an instrument of imperialism nor even a 'bourgeois or petty-bourgeois movement'. It was a broad coalition of various political tendencies who shared in the objectives of independence and democracy, and whose left wing had put forward a specifically Iranian road to economic development and social justice. The model did draw on Europe's experience of industrialisation, democracy and socialism, but it was not an imported blueprint, and it was firmly based on Iran's resources and capacity, past and present, for

it is conscious of the fact that real social progress must find its source and origin in the capacity and potential of the people themselves, and use that potential to produce a programme which is consistent with the country's resources and with its stage of social development.²⁰

Maleki's strange politics

As is evident, the Third Force theory was highly original, and became the basic model for Maleki's approach to domestic and international politics. Yet both this theory and Maleki's other important arguments and analyses were products of an approach to politics which was altogether rare and exceptional in Iran. Indeed, the 'strangeness' of Maleki's politics was more due to his *method and approach*, his *attitude, understanding and use of politics*, which are much more enduring, and without which, in fact, his theory and practice of politics would not have been the same.

Here we shall briefly discuss the principal aspects of Maleki's approach and method, which were not only very unusual for their time in Iran, but are

only slowly making an impact on contemporary Iranian politics, mainly because of lessons learnt from twenty years of revolution and strife, but partly also because the works and experience of people like Maleki were there to be used, once the new opportunities arose.

The main aspects of Maleki's 'strange politics' may be analytically discussed under two general headings, 'Rejection of the conspiracy theory of politics' and 'Dialogue, democracy and reform'.

Rejection of the conspiracy theory of politics

The conspiracy theory of politics in Iran is not just a product of modern colonial relations. On the contrary, it has deep roots in the country, running into the long history of arbitrary government. Arbitrary rule meant that there were no independent rules and procedures for the protection of life and property, even of the highest people in the land. It followed that there was no long-term aristocracy, nor any system through which the social classes and their membership could persist in the long run; hence this author's designation of Iran as 'the short term society' as compared with Europe's 'long term society'.²¹

Thus, arbitrary rule meant that life and property were extremely tenuous and unpredictable, depending on the wills and whims of rulers and local governors, pure chance or *kismet as well as the manipulative and conspiratorial skills* of the person concerned. Politics, therefore, was little more than scheming, manipulating, conniving, deceiving. Thus developed the social psychology that every event was the product of a conspiracy, sometimes of the least likely and most fanciful type, which was probably believed all the more for it. From about the middle of the nineteenth century, these were increasingly attributed to superhuman decisions and actions by the great foreign powers.

Those powers were there obviously to promote their own interest. But the magical powers attributed to them were more in line with the country's rich legendary and mythological culture than with reality. In time, this theory became a self-fulfilling philosophy: the foreign powers becoming far more influential in the country's politics than they might otherwise have been, by virtue of the fact that they were believed to be absolutely irresistible. Modern theories of imperialism tended to enhance this tradition later in the twentieth century, since beneath the intellectual veneer of such theories, the old conspiracy theory and xenophobia could be recognised at the point of application.

As early as 1949, and in the midst of the oil nationalisation movement and public indignation against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the raging Cold War, and international anti-imperialist movements, Maleki launched a campaign against conspiracy theory as a most destructive barrier to the country's social and political development. He said that he did not at all wish

to underrate the power, influence, interference and unequal position of the great powers past or present, in Iran or in other colonial and semi-colonial countries. But he opposed the view (a) that all the country's ills were due to colonialism and imperialism, (b) that all the (sometimes even minor) events in the country's affairs were due to the underhanded machinations of these powers, (c) that all the main actors in Iranian politics, the government and the opposition were agents of one or another great power, (d) that it was *not* possible for the country to develop and progress except by joining one or the other Cold War bloc, and (e) that all seemingly independent efforts and achievements were bound to be smokescreens motivated by a great power so as to throw dust into the people's eyes and get their way through the back door.

The contemporary reader without close knowledge and/or experience of this Iranian conspiracy theory, and its length, breadth, depth and coverage at the time, might find Maleki's views and arguments commonplace if not altogether bland. They must refer to the country's political literature, until not so long ago, to be able to appreciate the extraordinary nature of his systematic argument against conspiracy theory, which in part helped reinforce his detractors' heavy charges against him and his ideas.²² If there was one thing on which almost the whole of the country's political trends and tendencies – ranging from the shah through the conservatives to the Tudeh Party – were united, it was this theory, first as it affected the role of Russia and Britain, then Britain and the Soviet Union, and last but not least the US, although Britain was never quite lost sight of even until the revolution of 1979.

It is difficult to find any other political thinker, intellectual, leader or activist who led a campaign (albeit a largely futile one at the time) against this conspiracy theory from the late 1940s through to the late 1960s. In his 1949 article 'The nightmare of pessimism', Maleki described the conspiracy theory as the main cause of pessimism among the intelligentsia about the country's future prospects:

[They] have turned the British empire – which is in a process of decline, and is losing her bases one after the other – into an omnipotent, supernatural, and irresistible power. In our country's capital one can find intellectual politics-mongers who think it impossible to have a political movement independent from foreigners. If you mention India's freedom to them, they would immediately smile and express surprise at your naïveté not to realise that Nehru, Gandhi and the whole of the Indian freedom movement...are nothing but a farce. As we all know, some people also regard Hitler (certainly) and Stalin (probably) as stooges of the British.²³

In a following article, '*Maraz-e este'mar-zadegi*' ('The disease of imperial-struckness'), where, for the first time in the language of politics, he made use

of the Persian suffix ‘*zadegi*’ to indicate a pathological affliction, he said that a terrifying spectre had been made of British imperialism, and this had resulted in the Iranian people’s complete loss of self-confidence. The society was ‘struck’, he wrote, by the illusion of British omnipotence, and this had led to the belief that the Iranians were no more than puppets in the hands of foreign powers, utterly incapable of improving their own lot. The phobia had gone so far, he argued, that as soon as you suggested positive steps for social progress, most would react by saying, ‘But they would not allow it’, it being obvious that the third person plural refers to British imperialism:

There can be no doubt about the strength of imperialism. But we must find out where the strength lies that has penetrated so well down the veins and stems of our society and has thus become the turn of phrase of these gentlemen, who are struck by imperialism.²⁴

He went on to say that, in fact, much of this strength lay precisely in the illusion of its invincibility. It was a complex phenomenon consisting of two different – ‘objective and subjective’ – parts. The objective part corresponded to imperialism’s real power, presence and ability to interfere in the country’s affairs. But the subjective part was a figment of imagination and ‘has no counterpart in reality’. If those people who had given up all hope for fear of ‘the *illusion* of imperialism’ tried to overcome that illusion, assess its strength no more or less than it in fact was, and – at the same time – did not underrate the strength of the Iranian people, then it would be possible for Iranians to overcome the real and objective strength of imperialism:

Some...individuals who suffer from imperial-struckness...do not even think in terms of reform, let alone take any steps towards it. *This group of politics-mongers and intellectuals, who suffer from the paranoia of the omnipotence of imperialism and the impotence of Iranians (and similar peoples), must justly be called imperial-struck. It is very difficult to argue with those who suffer from this sickness.*²⁵

‘The aggrandisement of the strength of imperialism’, he wrote in the subtitle to his article, ‘today serves Britain’s interest and tomorrow the Soviet Union’s, but it will never serve the interest of Iran.’

As noted, Maleki published these articles on the subject in 1949. He was to continue in the same spirit for the rest of his life, in theory as well as practice, saying that unreasonable fear of the great powers would work against the country’s interest and its ability to improve its domestic and international situation. Hence, although he was critical of Soviet domestic and international politics, he nevertheless believed that the best policy towards the Soviet as well as the American bloc was to establish friendly but independent relations with both of them.

For example, at the end of January 1953, when Mosaddeq's government nationalised Caspian shipping, turning down the Soviet request for an extension of their expired concession, the Tudeh press condemned the decision while the daily *Niru-ye Sevvom* published several articles supporting it. Yet, on the day the former Caspian Fishing Company passed into Iranian hands, *Niru-ye Sevvom's* leader, written by Maleki, ran the following headlines:

The Iranian government's refusal to renew the Soviet fishing concession must not be put down to an unfriendly attitude [towards the Soviet Union]. The Iranian people (*mellat*) wish to have friendly relations with the Soviet people, and to maintain their political, economic and cultural links with them...The Soviet government can be absolutely sure that the Iranian people have no wish to break up their friendship with the Soviet Union. But this friendship must not be based on the old lines. If the Soviet government does not respect the freedom and independence of the Iranian people, it should not expect a friendly attitude from them.²⁶

Maleki's anti-xenophobia, and his distrust of conspiracy explanations and analyses, and of the use of libel and defamation in politics, went further than may be conveyed by the above. After his last term in jail in the 1960s, and shortly before his death, a book on Iranian Freemason societies and their membership virtually exploded in Tehran. SAVAK documents published in the 1980s have revealed that they had secretly aided and financed that project, in all probability in order to discredit those named, and often also pictured, in the three volumes, most of whom belonged to the social and political establishment. Freemasonry – at the time – was universally regarded as a den of the most hardened and corrupt British spies. Maleki's view of the subject was more realistic as well as fairer to Iranian Freemasons. In a letter he wrote at the time, he incidentally mentioned the publication of that book, saying:

In the last two months, the publication of *Faramushkhaneh ya Framasonry in Iran* (in three volumes)...has been the topic of conversation in the social and political circles of Tehran. In Iran they attach more importance to this organisation than it in fact has, and show its members in a worse light than they deserve.²⁷

Both during Maleki's lifetime and after it – certainly as late as the early 1990s – almost all Iranian political leaders who were somehow associated with the former regime were branded as being an agent or spy of Britain or the US. But Freemasonry was perhaps the worst charge that could be levelled against anyone, although in some cases it did not even have a basis in fact.

The xenophobia was such that while the former regime's opponents thought that it was no more than a puppet of the US, the shah and his entourage – and, later, many who themselves had supported the revolution – believed that the revolution of February 1979 was engineered by the Americans. There was even suspicion by some poets committed to the old style of Iranian poetry that modernism in Persian poetry had been a product of foreign conspiracies.²⁸ There were few men of public affairs such as Taqizadeh who did not believe in the conspiracy theory, but they were (albeit reluctant and unhappy) members of the establishment, and – in any case – were themselves unjustly believed to be foreign agents. Putting those very few aside, it would be difficult to think of anyone – certainly anyone in opposition – apart from Maleki who did not see foreign agents almost everywhere in Iranian politics.

Dialogue, democracy and reform

Maleki's political paradigm was complex and largely of his own making. He was a socialist, but no longer a Marxist, although he did make use of some Marxian concepts and categories in his approach to social and economic development. But he firmly believed in personal freedoms, the people's free vote in parliamentary elections and parliamentary democracy itself. Early in 1951, in the wake of the nationalisation of Iranian oil, he wrote that oil nationalisation had been a great achievement, but that it was just the beginning for fundamental political development:

The popular forces must be organised in order to establish real parliamentary democracy based on political parties, so that the people would really and genuinely be able to govern the country through their parliamentary deputies...This is an important function of the National Front coalition, and to succeed in this historical duty, its leaders and progressive members must not simply follow the existing regional and international trends, but must rely on their own initiatives...The people must be taught and educated so as to be able to earn and protect both bread and freedom. In other words, measures must be taken to enable every cook to learn the art of government and of participation in government.

And he went on to add that a system had to be created where it would be possible to have both bread and freedom, and to serve the society's interest without sacrificing the rights of individuals:

In my view, the National Front's most important historical duty is to create...a civilisation in which neither the society shall be sacrificed to the individual nor shall it be forgotten that the society is not an abstract entity, but is the sum of its individual members.²⁹

In September 1952, in an article whose central point was the need for public order and political discipline (which had been very rare commodities since Reza Shah's abdication in 1941), as well as social and economic legislation for development, he wrote that 'democratic discipline must replace the chaos and indiscipline'. 'Yet', he went on to emphasise,

the great difference between disciplined work based on social planning and priorities suggested by us, as compared to totalitarian systems, is its democratic nature. We must not sacrifice individual freedoms to public institutions, nor must we allow absolute dominion of such institutions over personal liberties.³⁰

Years later, he was to write on the front page of an issue of *Elm va Zendegi*: 'Communists sacrifice freedom for bread, while reactionaries sacrifice bread for freedom; we hold that bread, freedom and social welfare are not mutually exclusive.'³¹

This was in 1960, when the post-coup regime was at its weakest point, and radical idealism was exceedingly rife among its opponents. But Maleki still believed that the country's best chance was in the establishment of the rule of law and peaceful political and economic reform. Here is a short selection from Policy Point IV of the Socialist League's manifesto published in September 1960:

It seems that the substance of a social system is more important than its form...The League shall respect the present constitution and try to establish the rule of law. With land reform and abolition of the remnants of the *moluk al-tavayefi* system it may be possible to create social stability and equilibrium, and give real meaning to the right to vote. If we succeed in securing the essence of parliamentary constitutionalism by obtaining the [true] right to vote for all the people of both town and country, we shall be able to hit major targets through its use.

But democracy and freedom, the manifesto emphasised, were far from chaos: 'Some people confuse libertarianism with lawlessness and chaos. *The Socialist League regards this kind of freedom as a necessary prelude to dictatorship.*' On the other hand, there must be serious respect for individual freedoms, and decentralisation of administration across the country:

While the League regards as necessary government intervention in the economy and elsewhere, it also puts a premium on personal freedoms and private initiative. Government intervention or control should never be at the expense of individual freedoms. For the same reasons,

the League...believes that, gradually and as far as possible, central government functions must be relegated to the local authorities...³²

In the period 1951–53, when Mosaddeq was prime minister, Maleki led a systematic campaign for major social reforms. The political atmosphere then was such that almost no other political force or leader – either pro- or anti-Mosaddeq – offered concrete proposals (as distinct from millenarian slogans) for long-term reform. The Tudeh Party looked forward to radical and comprehensive change achieved by an imminent revolution led by themselves. Other National Front parties were preoccupied with the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute, and were not so concerned about long-term social development.

Maleki was conscious of the fact that as long as the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute continued – indeed, went on escalating – there would simply not be sufficient domestic peace and strength to make major reform possible. Therefore, both in the interest of domestic peace and stability and for the sake of long-term political and economic progress, he advocated the best *possible* settlement of the oil dispute, even though this would inevitably be short of the ideal. But even before such a settlement, he thought it necessary to remind both the state and the society of the urgency of such reforms. They included a number of fundamental measures, but the two most important from his own point of view were land reform and equal rights for women.

He advocated a comprehensive reform of Iran's land tenure system – 'the liberation of 80 per cent of the population from bondage and deprivation' – both for reasons of justice and morality, and in the interest of social and economic development. On the question of women, he did not miss an occasion to advocate (a) the full franchise and integration into the civil society of 'the one-half of the society which brings up the other half on its lap', and (b) the need to mobilise the country's full capacity by bringing its women into the sphere of public life and social activity.³³ Indeed, in his long and important open letter to Ayatollah Kashani, written in October 1952 just after some of the latter's activists had helped Baqa'i's men to evict the Toilers' Party cadres forcefully from the party premises, he wrote:

I seek honour in what I have written about women's rights, and state with utmost courage that – in our time, and in the prevailing conditions of the world – it will not be possible to keep more than half of the society in a state of paralysis. Every nation in the world is now using the whole of its human resources, whether for peace or war. If we do not manage, or do not want, to involve women in social life, with regard to all aspects of the management of the society, we shall not be able to defend our independence.³⁴

When, in January 1953, Mosaddeq was considering the enfranchisement of women through a comprehensive election reform, and some very influential ulama let it be known that they would not tolerate it, Maleki and the Third Force launched a relentless and vociferous campaign in favour of the vote for women. Indeed, the government had to shelve the proposed bill because it lacked the strength to face a populist opposition to it on religious grounds.³⁵

As noted, the arguments and programmes for women's rights, land reform, parliamentary democracy, personal liberties (*as opposed to licence and chaos*) and social welfare continued after the 1953 coup, and into the early 1960s, despite the fact that the public attitude towards the regime had become very uncompromising, and this, as we shall soon see, was a strong factor in supplying more cannon fodder to Maleki's detractors.

In 1956, he suggested a comprehensive political programme to Iran party leaders (who later organised the second National Front in 1960). At the time, they thought that there would be no hope of political activity for years, perhaps even decades, to come.³⁶ Maleki believed that the opportunity would arrive sooner or later, and they had to be ready for it. He put forward a comprehensive set of proposals regarding domestic politics, foreign relations, and social and economic reform.

In domestic politics, he wrote, they should enter a 'life-and-death struggle' against corruption, strive for the establishment of the rule of law, and promote 'constitutional and parliamentary democracy based on a welfare state'. However, they should accept the existing system of constitutional monarchy. This would not mean 'unprincipled politicking' but striving for 'revolutionary aims by the use of peaceful means'.

The proposed social reform programme contained a fairly detailed land reform policy, and an industrial policy based on planning and state participation which explicitly rejected *étatisme*. In foreign policy, they should establish friendly relations with both East and West without compromising the country's independence.³⁷

To many members of the Iranian intelligentsia, intellectuals, political parties and groups, and leading reformers, this should *now* look like a very reasonable and progressive package of reforms, and a responsible attitude towards politics and society. Yet, at the time, to most of them, it smacked of collaborationism and opportunism at best, but more often of betrayal. Indeed, within the couple of years that separated the publication of the two above-mentioned documents, Maleki and his colleagues were showered with a barrage of political abuse.

Yet, and in spite of all that, Maleki was to supply the seemingly most convincing evidence for the charges against him in 1960. In October of that year, Asadollah Alam met him a couple of times and repeated an invitation by the shah for the two men to meet. Maleki had once met the shah (also at the latter's bidding) early in 1953, after obtaining the full consent of his

party's central committee and the support of Mosaddeq. But this time things were different, and his meeting with the shah could be used – as in fact it was – as evidence of the ‘collaborationism’ etc. of which a growing circle had already begun to accuse him.

This time too Maleki obtained the unanimous agreement of his colleagues and the support of Gholamhossein Sadiqi and Karim Sanjabi, two of the most prominent and respected leaders of the second National Front. Two years later, in his long letter to Mosaddeq, he briefly described how he had met the shah again, and what they had talked about:

[In October 1960,] Mr Alam visited me three times, each time for two hours, and tried to convince me to have a meeting with the shah...In those days the ruling regime was weak and was prepared to give many concessions to the [second] National Front. The very insistence that I should go and see the shah was evidence of that weakness.

To the question why ‘a few other Popular Movement leaders’ had not been likewise invited, Alam had answered that he (Maleki) had ‘made clear [his] respect for the constitution’, and that his attitude ‘towards the Tudeh party was well known’. Alam had explained that the others would also be invited once they had clarified their positions with regard to those two questions, and that the meeting with Maleki was intended to clear the way for a wider meeting. ‘In the end’, wrote Maleki in his letter to Mosaddeq, ‘I visited the shah, with the agreement of our [Socialist League’s] executive committee, and after direct consultation with Messrs. Sadiqi and Sanjabi’:

In this meeting, just like the previous meeting which had taken place after informing and consulting with your excellency about it, I obtained permission to speak – with respect to the substance of my talk – as one human being to another, and not according to courtly protocols. At least insofar as it concerned me, the [one-to-one] conversations [which took three hours] were plain, clear and direct.

In the end, the shah said it did not make any difference to him who ran the government, including ‘the Salehs’ and ‘the Sanjabis’. He must, however, be assured on two points:

They must, first, make their position clear regarding respect for the constitution (by which he meant respect for the monarchy) and, second, towards the Tudeh party.

Maleki then went on to complain bitterly to Mosaddeq that, as a result of the Front leaders' lack of response, the whole Movement had suffered a great setback by the time that he came to write his letter:

At the time when the establishment was considerably weak, and all sorts of concessions could have been extracted from them in favour of the Popular Movement, the announcement of a couple of words about the constitution and the Tudeh party could have clarified the Movement's position both from the domestic and from the foreign standpoint. But the [second National Front] leaders maintained silence over these two subjects until they themselves became defenders of the constitution and constitutional monarchy, and – in response to the charges which SAVAK was levelling against them – they found it necessary, many times, to issue public statements against the Tudeh party and the Persian radio broadcasts from Eastern Europe. Whereas, had they first clarified the position, they would not have been forced to respond to such charges [to the extent that they were later obliged to].

Maleki concluded this part of his long letter by referring to further developments when – he argued – once again the Movement's leaders had made a fatal mistake by adopting a sentimentalist, non-compromising, attitude, this time towards Ali Amini's government:

During Dr Amini's premiership [April 1960–July 1961] there was a different kind of opportunity. There was a split within the ruling establishment, and it was quite possible [for the Popular Movement] to succeed Amini. Yet, with their amazing mistakes, the Front's leaders likewise threw that opportunity away.³⁸

The argument over Amini's government is yet another important episode of Maleki's 'strange politics'. Ali Amini was a loyal establishment politician with a major land reform policy who also believed that the shah's extra-constitutional powers should be trimmed. The shah neither liked nor trusted Amini. Yet he took advantage of the shah's domestic and foreign troubles and became prime minister.

Briefly, Maleki's analysis of the situation was that Amini represented the regime's reformist wing, that he was serious in his land reform policy, and that he was prepared to grant more freedom to the Popular Movement vis-à-vis the shah and the landlords. The second National Front should therefore take advantage of the new situation and organise itself into a shadow government by putting forward a more progressive social and political programme and acting as constructive opposition to Amini's government. However, the Front led a purely negative campaign against

Amini until his fall in July 1962, and this led to their own failure and defeat shortly after.³⁹

It was no wonder, therefore, that – given the country's political underdevelopment – Maleki was isolated, attacked and vilified by government and opposition alike. Thus, when he was arrested for the last time before his death, the official report of his arrest looked like reports of the arrest of men like Bukharin in Stalin's times. The long report's conclusion is fully representative of its entire text:

The above-mentioned person showed in the end that he is a born adventurer and anarchist who would abuse the susceptible sentiments of the country's youth in order to achieve his dirty ends, and would not stop at using any ugly means.

It is unfortunate that the country's security agencies sometimes adopt a forgiving attitude towards such traitorous and subversive elements, and only begin to prosecute them when a number of innocent young people have been struck by their poisonous spell.

It is to be hoped that, henceforth...the security authorities and responsible agencies will not give such elements so much opportunity that, using their poisonous ideas, they might instil deviant, motherland-destroying and anti-religious thoughts in the simple-minded youth as well as others...⁴⁰

Concluding remarks

Whatever one may think of Maleki's thoughts and actions, there may be little doubt that he was a very original political intellectual, theorist and activist. For example, hardly any political theory has been put forward in twentieth-century Iran which, in originality or rigour, may compare with Maleki's general theory of the Third Force. Likewise, he was the first Iranian intellectual to understand the nature of Stalinism and put forward a systematic critique of Soviet communism, beginning as he did just after the Second World War when it was at the height of its popularity in Europe, Asia and elsewhere. The examples are indeed numerous.

Yet much of this was due to his mature and advanced outlook and approach to politics. This led him to the advocacy of parliamentary socialist democracy, respect for individual freedoms and rejection of *étatisme* in planning for development. Furthermore, he advocated and practised political dialogue, and campaigned for major social and political reforms – mainly democracy, land reform and women's rights – by peaceful means. No wonder that he was rejected, denounced and persecuted by various political power centres – whether in government or opposition – until 1990. No wonder that he has been coming into political vogue since then.

Appendix: report of the arrest of Khalil Maleki, Kayhan, 5 August 1965

It has been announced that, during the last few days, Khalil Maleki and some of his colleagues have been arrested by the security authorities on the charge of spreading Marxist and collectivist (*eshteraki*) ideas, poisoning [the people's] minds and being active against the country's security...

According to the background, Khalil Maleki has been one of the promoters of the *eshteraki* ideology in Iran, and along with fifty-two other leaders of the Tudeh party [*sic*] has launched that party [*sic*]...and afterwards, when, because of his ambitiousness, he ran into conflict with that party's leaders over party positions, managed to persuade a group [of party members] to split with the party under his leadership.

The above-mentioned person, while sticking to his [old] ideology, had been looking for an opportunity to implement his malicious ideas until during Mosaddeq's government – especially towards its end when various destructive factions were acting against Iran's territorial integrity – his clique was the first group to demand the declaration of a republic during the dark days of 16 to 19 August [1953], and, following the national uprising of 19 August, he was imprisoned and banished for that reason.

After a while, according to the [Arabic] expression 'public amnesia is my shield' (*nisyan al-nasu hisni*) he took sinister advantage of the forgetfulness of some people, especially the young, and in the name of sympathy for the labouring classes, securing public welfare and extending social justice, he injected dreams and mirage-like ideas in the minds of a small number of people who were prepared to work with him, so that he would thus acquire some power, and in the end manage to satisfy his passion for, and his cult of, high power.

At this juncture, Iranian society was led towards an opulent standard of living as a result of the 6 Bahman [January 1963] White Revolution and [other] progressive projects, and consequently [Khalil Maleki's group] lost its deceitful propagandist weapon.

Khalil Maleki who had one day promised the reform of the workers' and peasants' living standards as a dream, and believed that it would only be possible through a series of revolutionary actions involving devastation and massacre, when he realised that [even better reforms have been carried out without any bloodshed and] the Iranian people look forward to a hopeful and brilliant future, and henceforth they would not pay any attention to the balderdash put out by Khalil Maleki and his friends, in the hope of achieving his perverse and power-seeking wishes, he looked for a new instrument, and following that, he declared the subversive riots of 5 June [1963] – which caused much financial and spiritual damage to the motherland – a national [or, popular] revolt.⁴¹

Following that, he collaborated with other subversive cliques – whose nature is known to all the compatriots – in and out of the country, and at

the same time, taking advantage of the radical sentiments of some young people, he decided to use certain Marxist theories in order to spread the seeds of anarchism, terrorism, chaos and turmoil in the [people's] minds, and, so to speak, lead them towards a red revolution.

The above-mentioned person showed in the end that he is a born adventurer and anarchist who would abuse the susceptible sentiments of the country's youth in order to achieve his filthy ends, and would not be shy of using any ugly means.

It is unfortunate that the security agencies of the country sometimes adopt a forgiving attitude towards such traitorous and subversive elements, and only begin to prosecute them when a number of innocent young people have been struck by their poisonous spell.

It is to be hoped that, henceforth, and considering public expectations, the security authorities and responsible agencies will not give such elements so much opportunity that, using their poisonous ideas, they might instil deviant, motherland-destroying and anti-religious thoughts in the simple-minded youth and elements whose existence will certainly be worth while for the reconstruction of Iran.

Notes

- 1 There are no known written sources on Maleki's childhood and youth, the available basic information being due to oral accounts by himself and his half-brother Hossein Malek. Fortunately, however, he wrote a series of articles about his public life experiences in the 1920s in a column entitled '*Trazhedī-ye qarn-e mā*' ('The tragedy of our century') in the weekly *Elm va Zendegi* (1–11, 1960–61), which was permanently banned in the latter year.
- 2 See Bozorg Alavi, *Panjah va seh Nafar*, Tehran: Ulduz, 1978 (also his memoirs, *Khaterat-e Bozorg Alavi*, ed. Hamid Ahmadi, Sweden: Nashr-e Baran, 1997); Anvar Khomeh'i, *Panjah Nafar va seh Nafar*, Tehran Entesharat-e Hafteh, n.d.; Khalil Maleki, *Khaterat-e Siyasi-e Khalil Maleki*, ed. and intro. Homa Katouzian, 2nd edn, Tehran: Enteshar, 1989.
- 3 See, for example, *ibid.*, Maleki's text as well as Katouzian's Introduction, and the text of Maleki's letter to Abdolhossein Nushin in the appendices; Khalil Maleki, *Barkhord-e Aqayed va Ara*, ed. Homa Katouzian and Amir Pichdad, Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, second impression, 1997; Anvar Khomeh'i, *Forsat-e Boyzorg-e az Dast Rafateh*, Tehran: Hafteh, 1983; Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.
- 4 For full information on the arguments and events, see Khalil Maleki, *Daw Raves̄h baray-e Yek Hadaf*, Tehran: Jam'iyat-e Sosialist-e Tudeh-ye Iran, Tehran, 1948, *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, text and introduction, and *Barkhord-e Aqayed*; Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Dar Khedmat va Khiyanat-e Roshanfekran*, Tehran: Ravaq, 1978, Ch. 6, reprinted in Homa Katouzian and Amir Pichdad, *Yadnameh-ye Khalil Maleki*, Tehran: Enteshar, 1991; Anvar Khomeh'i, *Az Ens̄he'ab ta Kudeta*, Tehran: Entesharat-e Hafteh, 1984; Eprim Eshaq, *Cheh Bayad Kard*, Tehran, 1946, and (under the pseudonym Alatur) *Hezb-e Tudeh dar sar-e Daw Rah*, Tehran, 1947 (and his conversations with Homa Katouzian in Oxford over many years); Katouzian, *Musaddiq and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, 2nd edn, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1999, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend*

- of an Iranian Writer, London: I.B. Tauris, 1991, Ch. 9, and *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, London and New York: Macmillan and New York University Press, 1981; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982; Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1999; Babak Amir Khosravi, *Nazar az darun beh Naqsh-e Hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran*, Tehran: Ettela'at, 1996, Ch. 8.
- 5 See Katouzian, *Musaddiq, Political Economy*, and Introduction to Maleki's *Khaterat-e Siyasi*; Khameh'i, Az Ensheh'ab; Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*; Fakhreddin Azimi, *Iran: The Crisis of Democracy, 1941–1953*, London: I.B. Tauris and St. Martin's Press, 1989; Nikki Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981.
 - 6 See Al-e Ahmad, *Dar Khedmat*, Ch. 6, and Katouzian and Pichdad, *Yadnameh*.
 - 7 See Katouzian's Introduction to Maleki, *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, and Maleki's open letter to Ayatollah Kashani in the appendices of the same source; Katouzian, *Musaddiq*; *Niruy-e Sevvom* (daily), 14 and 18 October 1952; *Shahed*, 15 October 1952; Amir Khosravi, *Nazar az Darun*.
 - 8 *Niru-ye Sevvom* (daily), various issues after 28 February 1953 for a couple weeks, which include a report on the meeting with Mosaddeq and a large photo of the two leaders among Third Force activists at Mosaddeq's home; Muhammad Musaddiq, *Musaddiq's Memoirs*, ed. and intro. Homa Katouzian, London: Jebbeh, 1988, Book II, Part I, Appendix, and Katouzian's Introduction; Azimi, *Crisis of Democracy*; Amir Khosravi, *Nazar az Darun*.
 - 9 Sanjabi related this to the present author in October 1960 in Tehran: see Maleki, *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, Introduction, p. 103.
 - 10 See his unfinished articles on the Falak al-Aflak experience in the weekly *Ferdawsi*, several issues, 1956, and his long letter of March 1953 to Mosaddeq, published in *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, pp. 412–29. See also his 'Letter to the Establishment' ('Awliya'-e Omur'), in *ibid.*, pp. 433–8.
 - 11 See Katouzian, Introduction to Maleki's *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, and *Mosaddeq*, chs 16 and 17.
 - 12 See Katouzian, Introduction.
 - 13 See his *Niru-ye Sevvom Piruz Mishavad*, Tehran: Zahmatkeshan Party Publications, 1951, p. 3, emphasis added.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
 - 16 See Maleki's *Niru-ye Sevvom Chist*, Tehran: Zahmatkeshan Party Publications, 1951, p. 11.
 - 17 See Maleki, *Barkhord-e Aqayed*.
 - 18 See his article, 'Nehzat-ha-ye Melli-ye Iran va Asia', *Elm va Zendegi* 1, December 1951–January 1952.
 - 19 *Niru-ye Sevvom Chist*, p. 9.
 - 20 See Khalil Maleki, *Niru-ye Moharrekeh-ye Tarikh*, Tehran: Zahmatkeshan Party Publications, 1952, pp. 28–9.
 - 21 For a detailed account of the theory of arbitrary rule, see Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2000. See, further, 'European liberalisms and modern concepts of liberty in Iran', *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 16(2), 2000; 'Iran's fiscal history and the nature of state and society in Iran', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (11)2 (3rd series), 2001; 'Towards a general theory of Iranian revolutions', *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 15(2), 1999; 'Problems of democracy and the public sphere in modern Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 2(18), 1998;

- 'Arbitrary rule: a comparative theory of state, politics and society in Iran', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24(1), 1997; 'Problems of political development in Iran: democracy, dictatorship or arbitrary rule?', *ibid.* All of the above – and other relevant – articles are reprinted in Homa Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- 22 Examples abound. For three famous historical sources, all of them showing visible symptoms of the conspiracy theory, domestic and – especially – foreign, see Hossein Makki, *Tarikh-e Bistsaleh-ye Iran*, various editions; Mahmud Mahmud, *Tairkh-e Ravabet-e Siyasi-ye Iran va Inglis*, various editions; and Khan-Malek-e Sasani, *Siyasatgaran-e Dawreh-ye Qajar*, Tehran, n.d. (date of Preface, 1959).
- 23 See Khalil Maleki, 'Kabus-e baddini: Ancheh mured darad va ancheh bimured ast', in *Barkhord-e Aqayed*, p. 41.
- 24 'Maraz-e Esti'mar-zadegi', in *Barkhord-e Aqayed*, p. 43.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 44, emphasis added.
- 26 *Niru-yi Sevvom*, 31 January 1953. For the reaction of the Tudeh press, see, for example, *Mardom*, the official party organ, 11 February 1953. For further discussion of the subject, see Katouzian, *Musaddiq*.
- 27 Maleki (Tehran) to Pichdad (Paris), 26 June 1969, this author's copy.
- 28 At least three poets – two of them prominent – made such a claim, two of them attributing it to imperialism, one to international communism.
- 29 'Vazifeh-ye tarikh-ye Jebbeh-ye Melli', in *Barkhord-e Aqayed*, p. 230.
- 30 See 'Sarnevsh-e tarikh-ye liberalism dar daw qarn-e akhîr', *Elm va Zendegi* 7, September 1952, reprinted in Khalil Maleki, *Nehzat-e Melli-ye Iran va Edalat-e Ejtema'i* (essays, select. and ed. Abollah Borhan), Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 1999, p. 37.
- 31 See *Elm va Zendegi* (second series) 9, August 1960.
- 32 See the Socialist League's manifesto, *Bayaniyeh-ye Jame'eh-ye Sosialist-ha-ye Nehzat-e Melli-ye Iran*, Tehran, September 1960, pp. 42–3, reprinted in Borhan, *Nehzat-e Melli*, pp. 195–246.
- 33 See, for example, 'Sarnevsh-e tarikh-ye'; 'Sharayet-e edama-ye piruzmandaneh-ye nehzat-e melli', *Elm va Zendegi* 8, October 1952, reprinted in Borhan, *Nehzat-e Melli*; 'Alami az naw bebayad sakht', *Elm va Zendegi*, reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 53–69; 'Daw rah-e hal bary-e keshavarzi', *Barkhord-e Aqayid*. Note that these examples refer to the period 1950–53, not the following period, which contains more extensive as well as intensive material on the subject of land reform and the vote for women. See *Nabard-e Zendegi*, 1955–57; *Elm va Zendegi* (second series), 1958–61; *Elm va Zendegi* (weekly), 1960–61; *Ferdawsi*, 1961–62; *Bianiyeh-ye Jameh'eh*.
- 34 *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, Appendices, p. 442.
- 35 See, for the evidence, Katouzian, *Musaddiq*, and the sources cited therein.
- 36 See his long 'Letter to Mosaddeq', March 1963, in *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, p. 419, and Katouzian, *Musaddiq*, p. 217.
- 37 See 'Tashkil-e jamieh'eh-ye sosyalist-ha ra mitavan mured-e motaleh'eh qarar dad', *Nabard-e Zendegi*, May 1956, reprinted in Borhan, *Nehzat-e Melli*; see, further, *Musaddiq*, pp. 217–18.
- 38 See Maleki, 'Letter to Mosaddeq', in *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, pp. 412–29.
- 39 See, further, on Amini's government, and Maleki's and the second National Front's attitudes towards it, Katouzian, *Musaddiq*, Ch. 16, *Political Economy*, Ch. 11, and Introduction to Maleki's *Khaterat-e Siyasi*; the long analysis of the Socialist League in *Sosialism* 5, November 1962; Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*; Keddie, *Roots of Revolution*.

- 40 The report, almost certainly written by some intelligence authority, was published in the newspaper *Kayhan*, 5 August 1965, two weeks after his arrest. See the Appendix for the full text.
- 41 As a matter of fact, Maleki had been undergoing a heart operation in Austria before the June revolt, and returned to Iran a few months after it. See *Khaterat-e Siyasi*, 2nd edn, Introduction.

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION AND THE LEGACY OF THE GUERRILLA MOVEMENT

Maziar Behrooz

During the early 1970s, the National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT) began broadcasting a new American TV series named "The Guerrillas." The series was a not-too-well-produced story about Allied commando operations behind Nazi lines during the Second World War in Europe. It was dubbed in Persian, but then the name of the series was translated as "*gurilha*," which in Persian can only mean "gorillas." What possible relation there might be between commando operations and the mighty ape was left to the imagination of poor Iranian viewers. Such was the sensitivity of the imperial regime of Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi to the term "guerrilla" ("*cherik*" in Persian) that the NIRT had to resort to such ridiculous innovation. The sensitivity of the imperial regime was accompanied by a touch of respect for the guerrillas. In 1976, the shah went on record praising the guerrillas by saying: "The determination with which they fight is quite unbelievable."¹ Who were these guerrillas of the 1970s and how did they come to be both feared and respected by the imperial regime?

The years 1970–71 constituted a turning point in the shah's perception of his place in history and in his regime's relationship with the opposition. During the course of this period, Iran's imperial navy occupied three islands in the Persian Gulf, signaling the beginning of the shah's attempt to assert Iran's domination of the region in relation to the Persian Gulf's Arab states on the eve of the British evacuation. The latter year, 1971, was the year in which the imperial regime celebrated 2,500 years of Persian empire in Persepolis-Shiraz. Here, the shah opened the ceremonies by standing in front of Cyrus the Great's tomb at Pasargad (near Shiraz), asking him to rest assured as all was well with the empire under the shah's leadership. The celebrations were a grand and expensive ceremony, before the eyes of world leaders, attesting to the shah's majesty at the peak of his power. A year earlier, in one of the seminaries of the holy city of Najaf in Iraq, not far from Imam Ali's tomb, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah al-Musavi al-Khomeini

had given a series of lectures arguing for an Islamic state under the guardianship of the ulama, thus making a clear break between his movement and those who still supported a return to a constitutional monarchy in Iran.² A few months before the shah's celebrations, in February 1971, a team of guerrillas had attacked the Siyahkal gendarmerie post in the northern province of Gilan, signaling the opening of an intense eight-year period of armed activity against the imperial regime.

Hence, 1970–71 signals a clear radicalization and the beginning of a violent phase of oppositional struggle against the imperial regime at the height of the shah's power. In this, the guerrillas played a pivotal role. The birth of the guerrilla movement in Iran heralded the opening of a new chapter in the anti-shah oppositional activities. The imperial regime of the shah had closed the 1960s by crushing the secular nationalist, religious, and Marxist political opposition. By allying his regime to the West and establishing a modern dictatorial regime, based on a violent secret police, the shah had declared his intention of implementing his version of modernization with or without popular consent.

By making their existence known, the guerrillas were addressing three audiences. First, they were letting the people, or *khalq*, their preferred term, know that reality was not as the shah presented and that resistance to his rule not only had not ceased but had been reinvigorated. Secondly, they were addressing the regime by letting it know that its seemingly total control was but an illusion. Thirdly, they were addressing the previous generation, nationalist, Islamist, and Marxist, by letting them know that bygone methods of purely political opposition had been a failure and that a new, violent phase had begun, if only because the regime had left no other choice.

This chapter re-examines the historical role of the guerrilla movement of the 1970s. In doing so, a re-evaluation will be presented of the movement's contribution to the anti-shah opposition, to the revolutionary overthrow of the imperial regime, and to the re-emergence of radical leftist politics (both communist and otherwise) in post-revolution Iran. What were the motives and legacy of these mostly young and educated men and women who took up arms against a well-organized repressive state? How much did they accomplish and what were their flaws and failures? The study will argue that while the movement was unsuccessful in its ultimate goal of leading the revolution in the overthrow of the shah, it played an important role in challenging the shah's regime, in keeping the spirit of resistance high, and was a determining factor in popularizing and redefining the politics of the radical Left after the revolution.³

In a discussion of the guerrilla movement, three organizations stand out as dominant, both quantitatively and qualitatively. There were other, smaller groups, but these three played a clear hegemonic role. The three were: The Organization of People's Fada'i Guerrillas (henceforth

Fadaiyan), the Mujahedin Khalq Organization (henceforth MKO), and the MKO (Marxist–Leninist) (MKO(ML)), an offshoot of the latter established in 1975.

Established in 1971, the Fadaiyan was the more important among the three, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Some of its prominent members, and major contributors to the guerrilla movement, were Bizhan Jazani, Mas'ud Ahmadzadeh, Amir Parviz Puyan, and Hamid Ashraf. It was the Fadaiyan which attacked the Siyahkal police post and opened the guerrilla chapter of the anti-shah movement. Between 1971 and 1979, the organization engaged the imperial regime in intense, mostly urban, armed activity. It gave many casualties, including its entire original leadership, and was greatly damaged by the security forces in 1976. Nevertheless, at the point of the 1979 revolution, the Fadaiyan was the most able guerrilla organization then operating. The Fadaiyan was a Marxist–Leninist revolutionary and independent organization with no ties to either the Soviet or Chinese Communist Parties. The dominant line in the organization was Stalinist, and the organization was critical of aspects of Soviet and Chinese foreign and domestic policies.⁴

The MKO was established in 1965, and was a revolutionary Moslem guerrilla group. Some of its prominent members were Muhammad Hanifnezhad, Mohsen Sadeq, Muhammad Bazargani, Sa'id Mohsen, Ali Asghar Badizadegan, and Mas'ud Rajavi. The MKO represented a genuine attempt by young Moslem revolutionaries to reinterpret traditional Shi'i Islam and infuse it with modern political thinking in order to turn it into a viable revolutionary ideology. In doing this, the leadership of the MKO spent the 1960s reinterpreting Shi'i Islam by freely borrowing from Marxism. The final result was a Shi'i Islam which viewed history as a process of class struggle, armed action as the only path to confront the regime, and the revolutionary, modern, educated Moslem intelligentsia (and not the ulama) as the natural leaders of the upcoming movement. Hence, the MKO was intellectually close to Ali Shariati, the pre-eminent Moslem intellectual of this period. The MKO did not take any armed action against the regime until after the Fadaiyan had made their move. In the summer of 1971, the organization was dealt blows by the security forces and most of its leadership was wiped out. It managed to reorganize and continued to engaged the regime in an effective manner until 1975.⁵

The MKO(ML) came to life after a substantial portion of the Moslem MKO changed ideology and accepted Marxism in 1975. Some of the main personalities of the organization were Muhammad Taqi Shahram, Bahram Aram, Hosein Ruhani, and Torrab Haqshenas. The beginning of the new organization was bloody, as Marxist members purged the Moslem members and killed a number of its key leaders. This development weakened the Moslem MKO. The Marxist MKO then continued on the path of armed activity against the imperial regime until 1977. At this time, the organization came to reject armed activity in favor of more politically oriented activity.

The MKO(ML) was a Maoist–Stalinist organization from its inception and was hostile to the Soviet Union.⁶

Iran in the 1960s

The imperial regime had closed the 1950s by consolidating its rule following the CIA/MI6-led coup of 1953 and the toppling of the nationalist government of Dr. Muhammad Mosaddeq. Except for severe repression, the establishment of a number of military alliances with the US and the acceptance of American grants and military aid, and the resolution of the Anglo-Iranian oil dispute, little else changed in the country. Iran's agrarian economy remained stagnant, and the country continued to lack infrastructure, and was plagued with maladministration and corruption.

The 1960s opened with a three-year period of turmoil: a partial lifting of political repression and reform, followed by the reinstitution of repression. By 1963, the shah had started a process of reform which helped change Iran from an agrarian-based, pre-industrial, pre-capitalist society to a semi-industrialized, capitalist society ready to be integrated into the world economic system. The centrepiece of the shah's reform program, which he liked to call the "White Revolution" or the "Shah–People Revolution," was land reform.

At the grass-roots level, 1960–63 were years of struggle between the opposition and the imperial regime, which had been forced to relax the repression of the previous decade. The opposition to the shah at the beginning of this period was headed by the Second National Front, founded in July 1960 by some former colleagues of Dr. Mosaddeq. The strategy of the Front was to demand free elections and call for reforms. University students, professional unions such as the teachers' union, and some Islamist and Marxist activists and intellectuals joined the Front to oppose the shah. Revolutionary Marxist activists played a secondary role in this period as their traditional political organization, the Tudeh Party of Iran, was effectively crushed by 1958 and had been unable to reorganize itself by the early 1960s. The shah, once he was confident of US support and armed with his reform program, moved decisively against the National Front and had suppressed it by 1963.

Another opposition front against the shah came from ulama-led circles. Headed by grand ayatollahs who represented the top Shi'i religious leaders, the religious opposition confronted the shah on a number of issues, including land reform and the proposal for women's suffrage. The most vehement opposition came from Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, who opposed the shah on a number of issues centred on the influence of the US in Iran.⁷ The religious opposition to the shah came to a bloody end on 5 June 1963, when the shah ordered the army to suppress any and all opposition. Subsequently, the repression was executed effectively and Ayatollah Khomeini was sent into exile the next year.

For the rest of the 1960s, the shah ruled as a confident authoritarian ruler, depicting himself as a reform-minded king, a close ally of the US and the West, with normalized relations with the Soviet Union. When he confidently crowned himself, and, for the first time, his empress, in 1967, he could see no serious opposition to his rule or his design for Iran. The foreign press seem to have agreed with this when they depicted the shah as a progressive ruler who had made Iran a modern miracle.⁸

The state of the opposition

The opposition to the imperial regime in the 1960s went through a generational change. The older generation had received its political training and experience in the 1940s, starting in the wake of Reza Shah's overthrow by the Allies in 1941 and continuing to the overthrow of Mosaddeq in 1953. This was a period of the return of relatively constitutional rule and open and free political activity. As such, the generation of the 1940s became well versed in political activity under legal and semi-legal conditions. The political parties of this period, however, proved unable to sustain their activities during the period of intense state repression which followed the 1953 coup.

The political opening of 1960–63 only served to confirm the above observation. All the political groups of this period proved unable to function once repression was reinstated. These included the second and third National Fronts, the Liberation Movement of Iran (which was made up of religious figures associated with the Front, prominent among them Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani), the political group formed around Khalil Maleki known as the Third Force, and finally the opposition religious movement formed around Ayatollah Khomeini.

During the second half of the 1960s, various attempts by underground oppositional groups to establish themselves in Iran were frustrated by the SAVAK. One such group was the Coalition of Islamic Associations (*Hey'atha-ye mo'talefeh-ye Islami*), which functioned in association with the movement ignited by Ayatollah Khomeini's confrontation with the regime.⁹ The group was established in 1963 and was in fact a merger between three smaller groups with close links to the bazaar and to the Ayatollah Khomeini-led ulama. Among its key members, Mahdi Araqi, Asadallah Lajevardi, Habiballah Asgaroladi, and Sadeq Amani may be mentioned.¹⁰ The group's activities after the 1963 events focused on using political violence as a means to confront the regime. Its high point was the January 1965 assassination of Prime Minister Hasan Ali Mansour by Muhammad Bukharai. After this episode, the group was discovered and some of its key members executed. By the group's own admission, its activities had come to a halt by 1971, and its remnant began to cooperate with the guerrilla group MKO between 1971 and 1975.¹¹ After the revolution, the remnant of the group were instrumental in establishing the Islamic Republican Party.

The Tudeh Party of Iran was another group attempting to establish itself in Iran in this period. The party was perhaps the biggest loser of the 1953 coup as its network had been decimated in the 1950s.¹² By the late 1950s, the Tudeh had essentially become an oppositional party in exile. Because of the blows and internal difficulties of the 1950s, the party did not have a significant presence in the country during 1960–63. But, in the middle of the decade, backed by the Soviet Union and its allies, the party made a number of attempts to send in operatives in order to re-establish its network inside Iran. The idea was to attempt to reorganize the party along the line of its former network.

The party viewed itself as the working-class party of Iran. As a vanguard-Leninist party, the Tudeh's main aim was to organize the working class against what it called the coup regime. The party's policy at this point was not to overthrow the monarchy but to end the shah's dictatorship. As such, the use of violent means was not a priority of the Tudeh. However, all these efforts were frustrated as what the party leadership perceived as its reliable network inside Iran was in fact infiltrated by the SAVAK.¹³ A number of Tudeh operatives sent to the country were compromised and were either killed or received long jail sentences. By 1971, the Tudeh's attempts to reorganize inside the country had come to nothing.

Another group attempting to organize for the first time inside the country was the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party of Iran (ROTPI). The ROTPI was made up of young Tudeh members – mostly in Western Europe – and was a Maoist offshoot of the Tudeh established in February 1964. Some of the key members of the organization were Mohsen Rezvani, Mehdi Khanbaba-tehrani, Iraj Kashkuli, and Kurosh Lashai. Besides differences with the Tudeh leadership along the lines of the Sino-Soviet split, these young members had many grievances against the party leadership on account of its past and present performances.¹⁴ The organization envisioned itself as a nucleus of a future, vanguard working-class party. But as a Maoist party, the ROTPI used violence and propaganda to rally the Iranian peasantry in a classic Maoist encirclement of urban areas through rural uprisings. The organization was unfazed by the shah's land reform program and refused to accept that it was about to change Iran from an agrarian society to a semi-industrial urban one.

The ROTPI was involved in three episodes in the 1960s which point to its attempt to establish a network inside the country. First, in 1964, it sent a few members to join a rebellion in south-central Iran led by Bahman Qashqai. Bahman had been a student in Britain and a ROTPI sympathizer who had returned to his famous nomadic tribe to start an uprising in the province of Fars.¹⁵ The operation had less to do with the ROTPI's organizational strength than with the Qashqai support for Bahman and other ROTPI tribal members sent to help him. The uprising, nevertheless, was small, and was crushed by the end of 1965, with Bahman executed. Secondly, a group

of returning Iranian students affiliated with the organization abroad attempted to assassinate the shah in 1965. The group had entered Iran a few years before and was under the leadership of Parviz Nikkhah. The assassin was killed on the scene and the group was promptly arrested by the SAVAK. Thirdly, the organization sent a number of operatives to join a rebellion in Iranian Kurdistan in 1967. However, by the time the ROTPI members reached the Iran–Iraq boarder, the rebellion was already crushed and its leaders killed.¹⁶

As with the Tudeh and the Islamic Coalition, all attempts by the ROTPI to establish a network inside the country had been frustrated by the end of the 1960s. Indeed, establishing a durable underground network inside the country became a clear preoccupation of the opposition. In the light of the failure of both non-violent and violent attempts at independent political organization, the key question of how to organize and survive became a pressing problem. One legacy of the guerrilla movement was its ability to provide an answer to this question.

The political climate of the 1960s

An important aspect of the political environment of the country and one which created an imposing problem for the opposition was the seeming invincibility of the imperial regime. Not only had the regime managed to crush all independent political parties, associations, trade unions, and any other independent gatherings, but it had also been very successful in frustrating any attempt at reorganization. The fact that the opposition was not even able to establish a network inside the country, let alone challenge the shah, pointed to the power of the state.

This reality of the post-1963 political environment generated a depressive mood for the opposition, which can perhaps best be described as apathy and despair. There was a feeling of being unable to reason with a violent regime which was confident of its strength and unwilling to listen or tolerate any kind of opposition whatsoever. This meant it was imperative to find suitable ways to re-establish organized opposition in a sustainable manner. Sustainable meant not only survival but growth under the new socio-political circumstances. Establishing a firm and stable connection to the people and leading them to a successful overthrow of the regime became the ultimate goal of the new generation.

The radicalization of the international environment in the 1960s contributed to the radicalization of the new generation of activists in Iran. The success of the Cuban and Algerian revolutions, the flaring up of the Vietnamese and Palestinian struggles, and the radical student movement in Europe and the US all helped to direct the new generation toward a new more militant solution to the problem of confronting the imperial regime. Mehdi Bazargan, a major opposition figure of the time

and a future provisional prime minister of the Islamic Republic, prophetically captured the spirit of the coming age in his military trial in the 1960s: "We are the last ones who are struggling politically in accordance with the [monarchical] constitution. We expect the head of this court to convey this point to his superiors."¹⁷ Hence, under the new circumstances, the use of violence against state violence became the centrepiece of the new generation's activities.

Accordingly, an important aspect of the new generation's concerns regarding political activity, and indeed another legacy of the guerrilla movement, was a psychological one. The challenge had become, partially at least, how to overcome the state of despair and apathy, as well as how to begin organizing under intense state repression.

Amir Parviz Puyan's *The Necessity of Armed Struggle and a Refutation of the Theory of Survival* best captures the mood of the new generation and is a road map for future steps.¹⁸ As a founding member of the Fadaiyan, Puyan approached the problem as a Marxist–Leninist revolutionary who had already come to conclude that armed struggle was the path to overcoming the state of apathy and organizing the opposition. Written in the late 1960s, Puyan's short but powerfully written pamphlet argued that the problem of absolute despair on the part of the people was compounded by the perception of the absolute invincibility of the regime. Armed action of the vanguard would challenge this perception and change the two absolutes of the equation, thus paving the way for a victorious revolution.

Iranian politics and the use of violence

The guerrilla movement of the 1970s is often associated with the use of violence as the prime means of confronting the imperial regime. This observation is correct with the following clarifications. First, the use of violence in the politics of this period was a development initiated by the imperial regime. The 1953 coup and the events of 1960–63 clearly shows that it was the regime, and not the opposition, which opted for the sustained and severe use of violence to promote its socio-political agenda. Indeed, the state repression of 1963 seems to have had a determining role in the resort to violence by a younger generation of political activists. During his interrogation, Bizhan Jazani, a major thinker of the guerrilla movement, made this clear. After writing on the opposition and the state repression in 1963, Jazani wrote: "There is no doubt that once the government decided to respond to the opposition (be it university students, or bazaaris and others) with armed military force, it came to us that what can bring victory to the nation is resorting to violent means of struggle."¹⁹

Secondly, the use of violence had been part of Iranian politics long before the guerrilla movement was launched in 1971. Many political groups used violent methods in order to further their aims before the 1970s. The Tudeh Party of Iran had an extensive network within the imperial army

before 1953 and used it for violent as well as more peaceful, intelligence-gathering purposes. Islamic activists too used violence to further their political agenda. The activities of the Islamic Fadaïyan and the Coalition of Islamic Associations attest to this fact. To these may be added the activities of political groups during the Constitutional Revolution, the Jangal movement and other similar movements of the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, the use of violent means for political ends in all of the cases mentioned above were either random or unsystematic, and, at any rate, tactical rather than strategic. The goal of the guerrillas was not to conduct a simple, single act of violence followed by the danger of exposure to the SAVAK and possible decimation. Other experiences in the 1960s had shown the futility of such acts. The fact that neither open nor underground political activity seemed possible only added to the urgency of finding a solution. The goal was (and here the movement can be separated from the others) to initiate a violent means of struggle from point zero and sustain the movement under severe repression. This is another legacy of the movement. The guerrilla movement's use of violence was highly influenced by developments among liberation movements internationally as well as by current socio-political developments in Iran. Hence the use of the term "armed struggle" to distinguish the guerrilla movement's use of violence from violence as used before.

"Armed struggle" was used for a number of purposes. It was used as self-defence against the regime's security forces. It was used in an offensive manner in order to establish the vanguard-underground organization. Furthermore, it was used as a propaganda tool to declare the existence of the organization and attract others. It was used as a means of punishing the regime for its harsh dealings with different segments of society, particularly the working people. It was used to render support to acts of civil disobedience. And finally and ideally, it was to be used to create a people's army to overthrow the regime in a successful revolution.

For the guerrilla movement (both Islamic and Marxist), justification of violent means of struggle had several layers.

First, it was argued that the regime had left no other means of activity by shutting down all legitimate political parties, independent trade unions, and free associations, and had made a mockery of Iran's constitutional rule and its parliament. In his memoirs, Mohsen Nejat-hoseini, a member of the MKO, captured the sentiments of the guerrillas by noting: "In a situation where the shah's regime was suppressing the nationalist and freedom-seeking forces by relying on its armed mercenaries, talk of political [manner of] struggle was adventuresome. Combating the shah's regime empty-handedly was a type of suicide."²⁰

The starting point for this line of thinking was the 1953 coup, and its final turning point was the 1963 repression and the shah's reform program. In their polemics against those who rejected armed struggle (e.g. both Tudeh and non-

Tudeh activists), the proponents of the guerrilla movement argued that not resorting to armed struggle was tantamount to passivity, i.e. not taking any steps and waiting for future developments. There was some justification to this claim. After all, there is no evidence that any purely political movement was able to be active inside Iran during 1963–77 in any meaningful manner.

Secondly, the imperial regime's victory in the wake of the 1963 events resulted in decimation of all political parties. Those who had attempted to re-establish themselves were unsuccessful throughout the 1960s. Therefore, an important aspect of the justification for armed struggle was the creation of a vanguard organization to fill the vacuum. Armed struggle was to provide military/underground discipline for the vanguard; declare the existence of the vanguard to both the regime and society at large; and begin growing by engaging the regime and recruiting new members.²¹

Thirdly, it was argued that after the establishment of a well-organized, sustainable, and militant vanguard organization, in due time, the limitless power and resources of the *khalq* could be tapped, opening a revolutionary process culminating in a final victory.

Finally, it should be noted that reorganization and the use of violent means needed a degree of self-assurance. The new generation was unique in this sense. It was ready to declare war on the imperial system even while it had to start from point zero. With boldness and sheer courage as their only capital, without expecting aid from the outside, with little or no experience in armed action, this generation challenged the imperial regime at the height of the shah's power and simply stunned the older generation, who were mostly residing outside the country. This was at a time when the older generation's attempts to re-establish its foothold inside the country had been frustrated more than once, and it was forced to remain as opposition parties in exile or inactive inside the country.

Problems of reorganization

In terms of reorganization, the guerrilla movement had a monumental task ahead of it. As noted, all independent political, and even non-political, associations had been smashed by the imperial regime or had come under its control. Furthermore, the prevalent political culture of the opposition was more adapted for legal or semi-legal political activity. There was no clear blueprint of how to organize under harsh repression. In terms of how to start up an armed vanguard revolutionary organization, there was even less experience. Hence, a major challenge was how to organize the movement from zero and develop a mass base among the working class and the masses under relentless repression.

Other problems were theoretical in nature. The movement needed a clear view of why and how the defeats of 1953 and 1963 had come about. Another challenge was the clear need for an analysis of an Iranian society

which was going through profound changes. In this context, an analysis of the shah's reform program, the nature of the shah's rule, and the role played by foreign powers in Iran's internal affairs became significant issues.

In providing answers to the above problems, the MKO and the Fadaïyan, independently from each other, developed many similar responses, but also some different ones. They both agreed that the imperial regime was a reactionary dictatorship sustained by foreigners (i.e. imperialism). Both viewed the shah's reform program as inherently reactionary and designed to co-opt Iran in the world capitalist system. Both had concluded that Iranian society was going through a transformation from a pre-capitalist "feudal" society to what was termed dependent capitalism.²²

In terms of armed struggle and how to go about it, the MKO provided fewer writings than the Fadaïyan. Both groups initially agreed that the shah's reforms had not decreased the people's opposition to the regime. Hence, an absence of spontaneous movements on the part of the people was due to repression. In this context, the vanguard organization could use its minimum resources to attack the regime and ignite a general revolutionary movement leading to victory.²³ The MKO's vision of a vanguard organization was similar in structure to an underground communist organization, except that its guiding ideology was its version of revolutionary Islam. The examples of the Palestinian movement of al-Fatah and the Algerian liberation movement were the MKO's models. The Fadaïyan looked to the rich history of the international communist movement and the liberation movements of Latin America, as well as the Palestinian and Vietnamese experiments.

Among the Fadaïyan theorists, there was a clear difference of opinion on how to start and what to expect from armed struggle. The difference was between Masud Ahmadzadeh and Puyan's perception and that of Bizhan Jazani. Both Ahmadzadeh and Puyan believed that the reform program had intensified class contradictions in society. Therefore, in analyzing the causes of an apparent lack of a spontaneous opposition movement, they both pointed to the role of repression as being fundamental. Ahmadzadeh believed that the lack of a spontaneous movement was due to violent and long-term repression and the weakness of the revolutionary forces.²⁴ Hence, in Ahmadzadeh's view, while the objective revolutionary conditions did exist, the only other factor needed to start a successful revolution was a consistent attack on the dictatorship. Such an attack would gradually result in the creation of a People's Army and would bring the spontaneous revolt into the open.

Jazani saw the situation differently. He believed that the land reform programs had eased class conflict in society for a period of time and that objective revolutionary conditions did not exist. On the basis of this analysis, he suggested the "Armed Propaganda Theory". Jazani divided the process of armed struggle into two phases. The first phase, he suggested,

would be that of the establishment of the vanguard organization. In this phase, the vanguard would attack the dictatorship, declare its existence to the people, and organize the revolutionary elements who were ready to take arms and join the struggle. In the first phase, armed actions would have the form of armed propaganda and would prepare the vanguard in terms of military, organizational, and political experiences for the future revolutionary participation of the people. The second phase would be one of a mass-based revolutionary movement. In this phase, a people's army would be formed.²⁵ Jazani saw armed struggle as both a military and a political process. Although he saw armed action as the axis of all other tactics and strategies, he indirectly criticized Ahmadzadeh and the Fadaiyan for not paying enough attention to the political side of the movement, and warned them of the dangers of sectarianism and adventurous policies.²⁶

A factor which worked against the guerrillas in Iran, and one which they did not take note of, was Iran's social class formation. In many Third World countries, where a dictatorship leaves no other avenue of open political change short of violent means, it is often the case that class formation provides the necessary conditions for protracted armed resistance in rural areas in support of, or as a part of, an urban resistance movement. Many victorious liberation movements (e.g. Vietnam, Cuba and China) were supported by a revolutionary peasantry which was willing and able to lend support, for a prolonged period of time, to a vanguard, urban, armed movement. The movements which were successful were usually active in societies where the majority of the population was rural, and, more importantly, where the population was highly susceptible to political and revolutionary agitation.

Twentieth-century Iranian society has shown two general tendencies. First, urban areas have always been the determining factor in any major political change, violent or otherwise.²⁷ Secondly, the Iranian peasantry lacks significant revolutionary potential and has remained, for the most part, politically passive. According to Nikki Keddie, Iran's inactive peasantry mainly results from arid geography, which produces a poor and scattered peasant population with much control by landlords.²⁸

To the above elements must be added the fact that the guerrillas had almost no experience in underground warfare and organization. This meant that the movement had to start from zero and was able to acquire experience only gradually and in practice. The above factors forced the inexperienced but highly motivated guerrillas to concentrate their struggle in urban centres, where the state was better able to exert political control. Consequently, from the very beginning, the guerrilla movement in Iran had a much more difficult task and less opportunity to organize on a mass basis when compared to other movements around the world. An analysis of the movement's ultimate failure in leading the 1979 revolution needs to take these factors into consideration.

As mentioned, Marxist activists were largely unsuccessful in their attempts to organize the rural population in the 1960s and 1970s. The ROTPI's attempts to organize the peasantry on the Maoist model and the Fadaiyan's attempts to organize in both urban and rural centers clearly failed. Furthermore, unlike some other Third World countries, Iran had had very little experience in independent trade union activity. By the end of the 1960s, the imperial regime had managed effectively to control all trade unions, thereby closing them to political activity by the opposition. This lack of any meaningful avenue for expressing political dissent, coupled with a total lack of means for organizing the working class or the population as a whole, combined to convince younger Marxists to take up arms themselves and to develop the "armed struggle" theory.

Critiques of the guerrillas

Those who criticized the guerrilla movement did so from various perspectives. The ulama-led Islamists who supported Ayatollah Khomeini were hostile to the Marxist guerrillas but were initially supportive of the Moslem guerrillas (i.e. the MKO). But the relationship between the two deteriorated steadily during the 1970s. The MKO's free borrowing from Marxism, its view of revolutionary Islam as being free of clerical leadership, and its emphasis on armed activity as the only path toward victory were the causes of this deterioration. The Islamist followers of Ayatollah Khomeini were suspicious of the MKO's Marxist leaning and of course were opposed to its anti-clerical perceptions of revolutionary Islam. But the two groups maintained a cordial relationship as long as the MKO remained a unified organization. Nevertheless, by the early 1970s, Ayatollah Khomeini was already developing his views on the rule of the ulama as the best form of an Islamic government. This notion ran against what the MKO stood for. When, in 1972, the opportunity presented itself for the MKO to solicit Khomeini's support, the latter refused to endorse the MKO. From this point on, the relationship between the two began to cool down.²⁹ According to a key member of Ayatollah Khomeini's movement, the ulama-led Islamists did not have much faith in the guerrilla movement, although it was viewed as a positive element in the anti-shah struggle.³⁰ In 1975, the MKO began to disintegrate from within, which further damaged the relationship between the two groups. In the same year, a substantial portion of the MKO cadres switched to Marxism and gave birth to the MKO(ML). This episode was accompanied by a violent purge of key members of the MKO who refused to switch ideologies.³¹ The change in ideology followed by the killing of Moslem members who refused to join in was a turning point and badly damaged the relationship between Moslem supporters of armed struggle and the ulama-led Islamists who led the 1979 revolution.

Another angle of criticism of the guerrillas came from the Tudeh party whose main focus was the Fadaïyan. The main point of the Tudeh's criticism was that the Fadaïyan's theories on armed struggle were alien to Marxism-Leninism. The Tudeh argued that the only time armed activities could become prominent in any organization's tactics was when an objective revolutionary situation existed. Short of such a condition, armed activity as the Fadaïyan were planning was, according to the party, wrong. Of course, the Tudeh criticized the Fadaïyan while itself had only been uprooted by the SAVAK but proved to be utterly unable to establish any meaningful presence in the country.³²

The legacy

Iran's guerrilla movement was first and foremost a generation's response to the shah's repression and arbitrary rule. It clearly had a romantic and heroic aspect, which at points even gave birth to myths. The significance of the movement is not in its professed revolutionary alternative (be it the Marxist or Islamist versions) or in its inability to reach its ultimate goal of securing state power. In both of the above cases, they clearly failed. The guerrillas were not able to organize the *khalq* under the banner of a revolutionary movement, they failed to lead the revolution, and their revolutionary alternative seems irrelevant today. The legacy of the movement and its significance in the modern history of Iran lies elsewhere.

The movement played a pivotal role in overcoming the atmosphere of despair which followed the shah's consolidation of power after 1963. This was a time when all open and semi-open political and even civic associations were either outlawed or taken over by the state. Furthermore, the events of the late 1960s showed that traditional modes of organization had become redundant when faced with the shah's mighty security forces. The guerrillas not only overcame the atmosphere of despair, they also managed to show the path of reorganization and continuation of the struggle. In this the movement was successful. By overcoming the atmosphere of despair, the movement showed that the regime was not as invincible as it claimed. Furthermore, the guerrillas managed to boost the morale of the anti-shah movement, which had some influence on the revolutionary movement that overthrew the shah in 1979. In the final analysis, because of the guerrillas, the shah's imperial regime could never claim total control over the country.

The cadres of the guerrilla movement were representatives of a restless generation. Studies show that while the guerrillas were unable to organize the masses, they were successful in attracting the young, educated middle class to their cause.³³ Universities were a main source of recruitment for the movement. This young, educated generation was a main beneficiary of the shah's reforms and theoretically should have provided the regime with the social support it needed. But, instead, it turned against the regime and

chose to rebel against it. The rebellion began with a few and attracted many others. By the middle of the 1970s, the guerrilla movement had already created a reputation for itself and had managed to break the barriers of state censorship and repression and reach an audience among the university community. A look at the memoirs of those who were associated with the movement or directly involved in it shows a high degree of restlessness among the rebellious young men and women of 1970s Iran.³⁴

Perhaps the most important aspect of the guerrilla movement's legacy is its redefinition of the politics of the radical Left in the post-revolutionary period. After 1979, the organizations associated with the guerrilla movement posed the most significant challenge to the new Islamic Republic. Although they were all defeated eventually, the challenge of these radical groups consumed much energy and time. Indeed, it is difficult to see how radical Left political groups could have posed any serious challenge to the Islamic Republic had there not been the guerrilla movement of the 1970s.

Without the emergence of the guerrilla movement in the 1970s, the politics of the radical Left would have been left to other groups to define. On the Marxist side, the task would have been left to the pro-Soviet Tudeh and its Maoist offshoots, none of which managed to establish their networks inside Iran in any meaningful manner. A look at these groups' networks and the number of their followers after the revolution suggests that their popular appeal was rather insignificant.³⁵ The post-revolution Marxists whose history was rooted in the guerrilla movement of the 1970s, the Fadaiyan in particular, soon became popular mass organizations and were viewed as a serious threat by the new Islamic leadership.

Among the Islamists, without the MKO and its brand of radical Islam, the ulama-led Islamists would have been the sole interpreters of revolutionary Islam. Furthermore, the MKO's popularity, which soon posed a major challenge to the Islamic Republic, was based on its radical reputation of the 1970s.

Notes

- 1 Amir Asadollah Alam, *The Shah and I: The Confidential Diary of Iran's Royal Court*, ed. Alinaghi Alikhani (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p. 146.
- 2 Michael M.J. Fischer, "Imam Khomeini: four levels of understanding," in John Esposito (ed.) *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 150–75.
- 3 The term "radical Left" as used in this paper is meant to mean those Marxist and Islamic groups which sought a revolutionary violent overthrow of the imperial regime and its replacement with a revolutionary regime that would then seek to implement reforms which would benefit the *khalq*.
- 4 For a history of the Fadaiyan, see Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1999), and "Iran's Fadayan 1971–1988: a case study in Iranian Marxism," *Jusur* 6 (1990): 1–39.
- 5 For more on the MKO and its activities, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989).

- 6 For more on the history of this organization, see Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, pp. 145–70; Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 70–4. The terms “Stalinist” and “Maoist” are used throughout this chapter in a loose manner. By Stalinist, it is meant to denote dictatorial, arbitrary, and repressive modes of conduct by left-wing individuals, political organizations, and regimes. The main features of Stalinism were established in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union during the reign of Joseph Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s. It was subsequently emulated by other communist and non-communist political movements. Maoist is meant to refer to any political organization which followed the guidelines of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao Zedong. Two features of the CCP guidelines are particularly relevant here: first, the belief that the peasantry makes up the principle revolutionary force, and, secondly, that the Soviet Union was a social-imperialist state. Any organization believing in either or both of the above is referred to as Maoist.
- 7 For more on Khomeini’s role in this period, see Baqer Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), pp. 92–107.
- 8 See, for example, *US News and World Report*, 27 January 1967, or *Time Magazine*, 25 May 1970.
- 9 Asadollah Badamchian and Ali Bana’i, *Hey’atha-ye mo’talefeh-ye Islami [Coalition of Islamic Associations]* (Tehran: Owaj Publications, 1983), pp. 2–74.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 12 For more on the Tudeh in this period, see Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 3–26, and “Tudeh factionalism and the 1953 coup in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33(3) (August 2001): 363–382.
- 13 Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 37–43.
- 14 For a history of the ROTPI, see Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 74–91; Hamid Shokat, *Negahi az darun beh jonbesh-e chap dar Iran: goftogu ba Iraj Kashkuli [A Look at the Left Movement in Iran: Interview with Iraj Kashkuli]* (Saarbruecken, Germany: Baztab Publishers, 1999), pp. 15–109; Hamid Shokat, *Negahi az darun beh jonbesh-e chap dary Iran: goftogu ba Kurosh Lash’i [A look at the Left Movement in Iran: Interview with Kurosh Lasha’i]* (Tehran: Akhtaran Publishers, 2002), pp. 49–175.
- 15 Shokat, *Interview with Iraj Kashkuli*, pp. 41–103.
- 16 For more on ROTPI’s involvement in Iranian Kurdistan during this period, see Shokat, *Interview with Kurosh Lasha’i*, pp. 124–138.
- 17 Mehdi Bazargan, *Modafe’at dar dadgah-e gheir-e saleh-e tajdid-e nazar-e nezani [Defence in the Illegitimate Review Military Tribunal]*, as quoted in Gholam Reza Nejati, *Tarikh-e bist va panj saleh-ye Iran [The Twenty-Five-Year History of Iran]*, Vol. I (Tehran: Rasa Cultural Institute, 1992), p. 373.
- 18 Amir Parviz Puyan, *Zarurat-e mobarezeh-ye mosalahaneh va rad-e te’ory-ye baqa’ [The Necessity of Armed Struggle and a Refutation of the Theory of Survival]* (n.p.: Iran National Front Publications Abroad, 1976).
- 19 As quoted in Sayyed Hamid Rohani, *Nehzat-e Imam Khomeini [The Movement of Imam Khomeini]*, Vol. 3 (Tehran: Center for Islamic Revolution Archive, 1993), p. 338.
- 20 Mohsen Nejat-hoseini, *Parvaz bar faraz-e khalij [A Fly Over the Gulf]* (Tehran: Nai Publishers, 2000), p. 64.
- 21 Mas’ud Ahmadzadeh, *Mobarezeh-ye mosalahaneh ham esteratezhi ham taktik [Armed Struggle Both as Strategy and Tactic]* (n.p.: OIPFG Publications, 1977), pp. 72–80; Bizhen Jazani, *Cheguneh mobarezeh-ye mosalahaneh tudeh’i mishavad? [How Does Armed Struggle Become a Mass Movement?]* (n.p.: OIPFG

- Publications, 1978), pp. 2–10; *Mojahed* (publication of MKO) 4 (December 1974): 1–18.
- 22 For the MKO argument, see *Eqtesad beh zaban-esadeh* [*Economics in Simple Language*] (n.p.: Mujahedin Publications, 1972); for the Fadaiyan point of view, see Bizhan Jazani, *Jam'bandi-e mobarezat-e si saleh-ye akhīr dar Iran* [*A Summation of the Recent Thirty-Year Struggle in Iran*], 2 vols (n.p.: 19th of Bahman Publications, 1975).
- 23 See, for example, Ahmadzadeh, *Armed Struggle*, and Nejat-hoseini, *Parvaz bar faraz-e khali*, p. 340.
- 24 Ahmadzadeh, *Armed Struggle*, p. 73.
- 25 Bizhan Jazani, *Cheguneh mobarezeh-ye mosalahaneh tudeh'i mishavad* [*How Armed Struggle Becomes a Mass Movement*] (n.p.: OIPFG Publications, 1978), pp. 16–26, 66–83.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 40–6.
- 27 Nikki Keddie, *Iran and the Muslim World: Resistance and Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), pp. 73–95.
- 28 Nikki Keddie, “Stratification, social control, and capitalism in Iranian villages,” in Richard Antoun and Iliya Harik (eds) *Rural Politics and Social Change in the Middle East* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 365–72.
- 29 Khomeini refused to endorse the MKO after hearing its representatives explain their view of Islam and struggle against the shah. The accounts of the encounter were published after the revolution by the participants in the encounter: see *Ittela'at*, 26 June 1980; *Paykar* 67–9 (11–25 August 1980), 70–84 (1 September–23 November 1980).
- 30 Ali Akbar Hashemi-raftsanjani, *Doran-e mobarezeh* [*The Age of Struggle*] (Tehran: Zarreh Publishers, 1997), pp. 249–50.
- 31 See Abrahamian, *Radical Islam*, pp. 145–70; Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 70–4.
- 32 For Tudeh–Fadaiyan disputes, see Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 76–9; for Tudeh's views on the armed struggle, see F.M. Javan, *Cherika-ye khalq cheh muguyand?* [*What Do the People's Guerrillas Say?*] (Stassfurt: Tudeh Publishing Centre, 1972).
- 33 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 328.
- 34 See, for example, the memoirs of the following two activists who had ample chances of securing good jobs and a stable future for themselves after college graduation but chose to join the guerrilla movement: Lotfollah Meisami, *Khaterat: az nehzat-e azadi ta Mujahedin* [*Memoirs: From the Freedom Movement to the Mujahedin*] Vol. 1, (Tehran: Samadieh Publications, n.d.); Abbas Ali Samakar, *Man yek shureshi hastam* [*I am a Rebel*] (Los Angeles: Shekat-e Ketab, 2001).
- 35 Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, pp. 124–30.

Part III

THE IRANIAN LEFT AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

Contemporary critiques

TROUBLED RELATIONSHIPS

Women, nationalism and the Left movement in Iran¹

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Women were the subject of the first major post-revolutionary political conflict in Iran. With the anti-veil protest marches, begun a day after the Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncement on Hejab on 7 March 1979, women emerged as the first open, progressive opposition to the fundamentalists' political project, and posed a major challenge to Khomeini's personal authority. For the first time, no political organization or party was able to take credit for the mobilization of women.

This novel and powerful women's movement against the Islamization policies of the new regime, starting with the anti-veil protests, and developing into sit-ins and work stoppages in ministries, hospitals, government agencies and girls' high-schools, leading to the formation of tens of women's associations and groups in public and private institutions and agencies, and in every university² might have provided the key impetus for the development of an effective democratic movement in defence of human rights, social justice and democracy – the three major goals of the 1979 revolution. However, in the political mood prevailing in post-revolutionary Iran, feminist demands for women's autonomy and the right to choice were irrelevant. The women's uprising could not move the increasingly acquiescent, populist Left to a defence either of women's rights or of other democratic rights and individual liberties. While a handful of left-inclined men supported the protesting women and stayed with the marchers to the end, the community of secular intellectuals as a group did not endorse the sustained women's protest. For them, the issues raised by women were peripheral to the goals of the national and anti-imperialist struggles. The Left's anti-imperialist rhetoric put the women's cause at the bottom of its list of revolutionary goals; it discouraged and confused thousands of young, secular, urban women who had spontaneously and courageously risen up against fundamentalism. Soon, un-veiled women were used by the clerics as symbolic representatives of an imperialist plot against Iran.

The militancy and continuity of the women's movement was negatively affected by this political climate. Nationalist, Left and liberal women, who had initially participated in the protest marches, began to doubt their actions and political judgement, fearing that the anti-veil movement – perhaps, even the mere voicing of women's special concerns and needs – would jeopardize the 'more important' goals of the anti-imperialist revolution. In fact, the absence of an autonomous women's organization, and the lack of political experience and of historical knowledge of the experiences of pioneers in the fight for women's rights, contributed directly to the demise of the women's movement and, eventually, to the collapse of the socialist-feminist movement.

In this paper, I argue that despite the formidable and systematic suppression of the women's movement by the new regime, the women's cause was damaged not only by the ruthless policies and actions of the Islamic state and the Hezbollah. It was also the Left's unconditional support for Khomeini's anti-imperialism, and the incorporation and subordination of the women's movement in a male-defined anti-imperialist movement, which contributed to the silencing of Iranian feminists and other progressive forces. The betrayal by democratic forces of the women's struggle against the new state's Islamization policies signalled, early on, the impending abandonment of all the major goals of the democratic revolution. The regime's success in discrediting and silencing women paved the way for silencing all other secular voices which supported the revolution, and thus furthered the consolidation of the Islamic regime and its totalitarian clerical leadership. Once consolidating their power, the Islamists quickly wiped out all effective dissenting voices, including, of course, those voices on the Left which had consented, perhaps unknowingly, to the assault on women's rights.

It can, of course, be argued that due to Khomeini's enormous personal popularity and his hold over the masses, any resistance against clerical rule was a battle already lost. In this view, nothing that the Left and the nationalists did would have changed the direction of political events in Iran. This is a defeatist reading of the revolutionary events which takes the fate of the revolution as predetermined. It disregards two important historical facts. First, it overlooks the enthusiasm and respect enjoyed in the initial stages of the revolution by Left organizations outside the Tudeh Party and by other secular forces – teachers, university professors, lawyers, writers and poets, and physicians. Indeed, by lending their support to the Ayatollah, these groups gave the revolution more credibility. This is the reason why Ayatollah Khomeini, while still in Paris, repeatedly assured Iranians that neither he nor any of the clergy aspired to holding any state position in post-revolutionary Iran. Secondly, the fatalistic view forgets that the clerics assumed state power and re-established the state's coercive apparatus through a violent, protracted process directed against its secular contenders. As it unfolded, the constituent factors in this destructive process included

desensitization of the people through a celebration of terror, starting with the summary 'trials' and the gruesome 'revolutionary execution' of officials of the *ancien régime* and of Left activists, such as Taghi Shahram (former Mujahed leader in the anti-shah movement turned communist) and Parviz Nikkhah (former anti-shah activist turned pro-shah); the presentation of pre-revolutionary demands for political freedoms and democracy as claims aiming to divert attention from the main enemy, imperialism; the (mis)representation of Islamists as the only true revolutionary force, particularly after the takeover of the American embassy; and, finally, the demonization of 'intellectuals' and 'liberals' who continued to insist on the liberation goals of the pre-revolutionary period.

Perhaps most important, political and theoretical divisions among liberal and Left oppositional forces, and particularly within the Left, developed into irreconcilable conflicts. These fierce political and ideological divisions, more than anything else, allowed the clerics to separate and suppress each group, one at a time, and to emerge as the paramount power under Khomeini's sacrosanct leadership. Left organizations participated in this process through their active support of Khomeini or through an equally affirming silence and complicity. Confused about clerical xenophobia, they mistook the regime's 'anti-non-Islamism' for anti-imperialism. The regime, for its part, through its appropriation of the socialists' anti-imperialist theory and revolutionary rhetoric, stripped this language of its distinctive character, eliminating the socialists as a political alternative.³ In this context, Left populism converged with Islamic populism to undermine the struggle for democracy, civil liberties, and the rights of women and ethnic and religious minorities.

What were some of the main elements of post-revolutionary populism? The Left's nationalist discourse stressed the relations of national subordination and domination, and the Left's opposition to economic development under the auspices of foreign capital. The Islamists' appeal to authenticity, to revitalizing the indigenous culture and past traditions against Western values and cultural models, was articulated through religion. But both the Islamists and the Left blamed all the social, economic and political problems of Iran on foreign domination. Both the Islamists and the Left appealed to 'the people' – simple, ordinary people from various classes – to unite against imperialist domination. They both idealized the poor, the 'Dispossessed' ('*Mostazaf*' for Islamists and '*Zahmatkeshan*' for the Left), and they both shared a hostility towards traditional politicians, liberal democracy and intellectuals. It is these similarities between the populist revolutionary goals and priorities of the Left and the Islamist which can explain post-revolutionary events and how they assisted the consolidation of Khomeini's power.

Indeed, there are reasons to believe that, at least in the initial stages of the revolution, a determined and united front of secular and non-fundamentalist religious forces could have defended the democratic

achievement of the 1979 revolution and pushed back effectively the fundamentalists' offensive. The retreat of the Islamic government after the women's protest marches in February 1979; its attempt to pacify protestors by interpreting the Ayatollah's declaration on Hejab as a recommendation, not as a command; the retreat of Hezbollah and the government in the face of progressive opposition in the conflict (May–June 1979) over closure of the Tehran daily *Ayandegan* – all are cases in point. Only a few months later, however, the paper was closed down and members of its editorial board were arrested without major resistance on the part of the opposition, reflecting the disunity of anti-clerical forces. The Fedayeen and the Mujahedeen, the two strongest oppositional organizations, refrained from supporting the National Democratic Front's protest march against the strangulation of the free press. The Fedayeen and the Mujahedeen simply could not see that *Ayandegan* and its supporters were needed to reinforce their united front and to mobilize forces to halt the advance of Islamic fundamentalism. This episode, widely referred to as a clerical *coup d'état*, extinguished the relative freedoms of the press and of expression still surviving after the revolution, and constituted a decisive turning point in the post-revolutionary democratic struggle.

A year later, in the summer of 1980, after all oppositional forces had been effectively suppressed, the Kurdish regions had been bloodily suppressed by the armed forces, and major Left political organizations were experiencing divisive internal conflicts leading to their splits, wearing the Islamic veil was made mandatory for all women in the workplace and in educational institutions. The women's movement, by exposing the issues and conditions of female oppression, and, specifically, by revealing the conservative, patriarchal character of the revolution and post-revolutionary developments, could have mobilized secular forces in defence of civil liberties and personal freedoms. But it was not to be. The Iranian case provides a dramatic example of the troubled and troubling relationships between feminism, nationalism and socialism caught in the tide of a partial and uncompleted 'national' liberation – the process of claiming national and cultural identity at the expense of the female citizenry.

Nationalism seems to have failed women almost everywhere. At some point in their development, many, if not most, post-colonial, nationalist and anti-imperialist movements take on a distinctively gendered character, in that the reproduction of traditional gender roles becomes central as the symbolic representation of national identity and indigenous culture. This curious phenomenon has been most clearly observed in the new social movements in the Middle East, where, under the pretext of preserving an authentic cultural heritage against foreign influence, the most reactionary practices have been preserved, sexist traditions have been reactivated and dissenting voices have been silenced. Apart from Iran, a case in point is the experience of women in the Algerian national liberation movement and in post-independence

Algeria, where no structural remedies were adopted to address women's special needs and concerns.⁴ Egyptian women, the pioneers of feminist ideas and politics in the Middle East, have not done much better. Even the most modest demands of Egyptian feminists for improving the lot of women in marriage, divorce and child custody remained disappointingly unmet by the post-independence nationalist state.⁵ The same pattern can be seen in post-socialist Afghanistan, where each Islamic faction tries to outdo the other in restraining women's lives in order to demonstrate to its followers the 'true' face of Islam, and in the Palestinian women's struggle to find a protected space to voice their distinct concerns, particularly against the fundamentalists' campaign to impose the Islamic dress code.⁶ Perhaps the most recent playing of the gender card in Middle Eastern politics is occurring in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan), where the two competing parties, the PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and the KDP (Kurdish Democratic Party), have each issued strict rules for the conduct of women.

The Left and the women's movement

Despite their political disagreements on such issues as the class character of the new regime or relations with the former Soviet Union, the politics of various Left organizations in post-revolutionary Iran did not differ fundamentally on the 'women's question' or the women's anti-veil protests. When women protested against forced veiling (Hejab), for example, many socialist men thought they were misled and feared that women's protests might endanger the unity of anti-imperialist forces. After all, the veil was not a concern to the 'toiling women' who were already always veiled; the women's protests would divert attention from the 'real' and more urgent problems of the anti-imperialist movement. Almost all political organizations and parties advised their 'sisters' to pull together and not allow the 'reactionary forces' of the royalists and American imperialists to break the unity of the anti-imperialist forces. Even those Left organizations whose leaders and activists had spent years in North America and Europe and which considered themselves non-traditional and more radical than the Tudeh Party and the Organization of Iranian People's Fedayeen (OIPF) joined their voices in this swelling anti-feminist song of the populist Left organizations. The *Ettehadieh-e Kommunistha* (Association of Iranian Communists), for example, in its weekly, *Haqiqat* (Truth), condemned women who had 'left all their work and other responsibilities behind and are turning this insignificant issue [of veiling] into a major affair, as if it is as important as democracy and the country's independence'.⁷ Underlying such statements was an unstated, deep-seated contempt for women's intelligence and cognitive capacity. Women did not know what they were doing; they were acting, not from an intellectual and political assessment of post-revolutionary events, but from their 'emotions'.

As the largest and most popular Left organization at the time, OIPF's political stand and revolutionary practice had a particularly determining impact on the politics of other Left organizations. The National Union of Women (NUW), the women's organization affiliated with the OIPF, represented the strongest voice in the women's movement. However, the populist ideology that infiltrated NUW, through the socialist women functionaries appointed to its leadership, obstructed the growth of gender consciousness and stifled women's struggle for equal rights.

The OIPF consistently sought to prevent the women's movement from deviating from the anti-imperialist goals of the revolution. Its position against compulsory veiling, for example, as expressed in the organization's official publication, *Kar*, was that the equality of rights between men and women must be achieved, but that 'excessive preoccupation' with issues of women's rights should be avoided. The continued agitation among women, the article asserted, was a conspiracy of reactionary forces and imperialists to divide the revolution.⁸ This unsympathetic attitude never changed. Despite the concerns of many women, it never occurred to the OIPF leadership that forced veiling or the exclusion of women from certain educational fields and occupations were unacceptable infringements of women's rights and of individual liberties. The OIPF never analysed gender issues in the light of new conditions, nor did the women's issue ever present itself to the party leadership as a serious problematic.⁹ It was from this theoretical vacuum that the Fedayeen faced the challenge of how to respond to issues of gender relations in the post-revolutionary period. The leaders of the Fedayeen had no theoretical or practical understanding about how to mobilize forces around the immediate interests of women and women's issues. More precisely, beyond the usual socialist rhetoric and the practice of forming women's 'democratic' organizations – to be used as recruiting grounds for the parent organization – they saw no need to address issues of concern to women living under Islamic rule. Hence, if the Central Committee took up topical issues for discussion, such as women being banned from the judicial profession, the dominant view was that these were 'deviationist' (*sic*) points – they would twist our cause towards the demands of intellectuals and a few well-to-do women (*Zanan-e Bi Dard*). For example, they would say: 'How many women are judges? Twenty or thirty. Nothing would happen if these few are removed from the bar.'¹⁰ At the same time, no political organization could afford to ignore the burgeoning women's movement. Women were potential recruits for all political parties and organizations. Many other Left organizations had already formed their own women's groups or organizations. The Fedayeen could not afford to ignore this fact. Moreover, they were under pressure from their supporters to become more active in the women's movement, or, rather, to capture the leadership of that movement, notwithstanding the fact that the organization did not consider that women's issues were important at that point.¹¹

Giving in to the temptation to recruit this potential new force, the OIPF finally decided to establish a women's organization. A few trusted sympathizers were instructed to start a democratic organization and try to attract women from various ideological tendencies. Originally, the understanding was that the Fedayeen did not have a cohesive plan for a women's organization, and that although the women activists would have the Fedayeen's support, they would be on their own. This was the view that informed the formation of the NUW. But the policy changed overnight. Immediately after the formation of the NUW, the OIPF began to harness 'their' women's organization to the service of the central organization.

For the Fedayeen sympathizers in the NUW and the Fedayeen functionaries who were assigned to the NUW to serve as go-betweens linking the two organizations, the NUW was simply an appendage of the Fedayeen, providing a short-cut to working with and for the Fedayeen. They lacked both a commitment to and a familiarity with feminist issues and the intellectual or organizational skills required to lead a socialist-feminist organization. They followed unquestioningly the theoretical and practical guidelines set forth by the OIPF Central Committee, and took obsessive care to work strictly within those guidelines – that is, in making the NUW a 'democratic' front for the organization.

For its part, the OIPF openly denounced feminists as 'bourgeois' and even slapped together a cautionary pamphlet on the role of bourgeois women (the so-called 'pots and pans' movement) in assisting the 1973 *coup d'état* in Chile, neglecting entirely the progressive role that Chilean women had played in defending workers' communities and in mobilizing support for Allende. This attack was no coincidence. It demonstrated how little the Fedayeen valued the women's rights struggle either in Iran or abroad, and assisted the regime in its goal of discrediting women's resistance, at both the practical and the ideological levels. Neither was it a coincidence that the religious mob and Hezbollah gangs, whose members were, mostly, functionally illiterate and lacking any political education or experience, became overnight experts on the Chilean situation. They chanted rhythmic slogans against the Left and against women's rights activists supposedly inspired by the Chilean example. This was an important moment in the political struggle in post-revolutionary Iran. The Islamic movement successfully incorporated the Left's anti-imperialist discourse into its own rhetoric, discredited all pre-revolutionary legal and social reforms in favour of women, and put forth the Islamic solution as the only viable alternative.

Towing the NUW along the Fedayeen line did not go smoothly, and the decisions reached in party cells within the NUW were not accepted unquestioningly by other women. Hence, from beginning to end, and despite the fact that the NUW was under the virtual control of the party functionaries, continuous debate, conflict, plots and counter-plots dominated the NUW's activities, preventing a coordinated and sincere effort towards working on

the issues of women's rights and how to best fend off the offensive of the new regime.¹²

In some sense, the women themselves undermined their own intellectual and personal capabilities by accepting a male leadership, however disguised as a female front of the OIPF. Why did women who were more gender-conscious and critical of the populist tendencies of the OIPF go along with this intervention? It was for the same reason identified by Sheila Rowbothan in the early years of the contemporary Women's Liberation Movement:

Women have come to revolutionary consciousness by means of ideas, actions, and organizations which have been made predominantly by men. We only know ourselves in societies in which masculine power and masculine culture dominate, and can only aspire to an alternative in a revolutionary movement which is male defined. We are obscured in brotherhood and the liberation of 'mankind'.¹³

For this reason, even gender-conscious women, under the influence of a male-centred culture that promoted the belief that women's desires and interests were trivial, did not resist the undemocratic decisions of the Fedayeen. For others, it was an ideological and emotional roller coaster. The regressive and exclusionary character of the Islamic revolution and the role of women fundamentalists in that revolution demonstrated the need to work with women to raise their consciousness and make them aware of an alternative to the 'Islamic solution'. NUW activists were torn between their feminist ideas, the reality of their day-to-day experiences on the streets and their socialist-populist ideology. In private meetings, there were often fierce disputes between them and OIPF functionaries over policies dictated by the parent organization. The opposition, however, was usually silenced by the Fedayeen functionaries, who 'delivered' the leadership's views. Many founding members of the NUW, myself included, regretfully admit now that most political positions we took during our involvement with the Fedayeen conflicted with our genuine feelings about the political situation in Iran. This was the case, for example, when the NUW, following the Mujahedeen's initiative, endorsed Ayatollah Mahmood Taleghani as a presidential candidate. The Fedayeen did not want to endorse a cleric, but did want, at the same time, to appease the Mujahedeen. They found it convenient to use the NUW for this political purpose. The NUW supported the 'radical clerics' against the liberal government of Bazargan, even though women's interests required the opposite. Bazargan's liberal government was relatively more tolerant of secular views and ways of life, and was more prepared to accommodate the inevitable adjustments in religious institutions and instructions that the economic, social and political realities necessitated. In the dominant political mood of the time, however, common sense no longer prevailed. Nor

was there any room for reflection on historical experience. For most of the women, the political and even moral principles they had always believed in were replaced by organizational and ideological tenets dictated by the Fedayeen. Indeed, political ideology turned some previously free-spirited women into thoughtless populists to the extent that wearing the black chador, participating in predominantly religious demonstrations, and supporting a regime whose most urgent 'revolutionary' goal was to curb both individual and intellectual liberties and women's rights and freedoms did not seem at odds with their feminism or their socialist beliefs. Political loyalty replaced logical thinking and common sense¹⁴ and an attachment to a political organization or party overtook the cause. Commitment to the organization or party became an end in itself.

The Left's dilemma: gender and anti-imperialist struggle

Why did a group of dedicated revolutionaries who for more than a decade had fought for democracy and individual and political freedoms play such a destructive role in the post-revolutionary democratic struggle of women and of the pro-democracy movement? Two sets of theoretical/ideological and socio-cultural factors can explain the non-responsiveness of the Fedayeen to the women's rights struggle. First, there was the dominance of populist tendencies and ideologies and the preoccupation with foreign aggression which made the struggle for democracy and individual liberties and women's concerns appear peripheral. The Fedayeen, like the Tudeh Party and most other groups of the organized Left, were cajoled into a strange self-negating and self-deceiving political strategy, whose central core was support for Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary ideas. Khomeini's populist-radical rhetoric and his huge mass support intoxicated, or, perhaps, paralysed, the populist Fedayeen. Instead of adopting a strong and active critical position against the obviously reactionary and violent policies of the new regime, the OIPF emphasized its allegiance to the leader of the masses, Khomeini, and its intention to cooperate with Islamic forces to rebuild the country.

Furthermore, the commitment of the traditional Left to women's liberation has everywhere been predominantly and, perhaps, exclusively centred on their social and political liberation. A good part of the analyses of women's oppression by socialist theorists, most notably Lenin, centred on criticism of feminists who paid, it was felt, 'too much' attention to marriage and sexual matters. Lenin's comments were repeatedly invoked by Iranian socialists to oust 'bourgeois feminist' tendencies. This was a somewhat selective invocation of Lenin, of course, who also criticized the 'ideological backwardness' of his Bolshevik comrades for their failure in promoting sex equity.¹⁵ The one-sided emphasis on class relations and on working-class women, and the consequent failure to address other dimensions of women's oppression, has meant that socialists, historically, have been suspicious of

activities aimed at improving women's rights where these rights have been grounded in a gender analysis. For example, European socialist theorists and activists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries defined the task of socialist women as preventing the infestation of working-class women with bourgeois feminist ideas.¹⁶ For them, no 'special' women's question existed which required a 'special' women's movement. Any alliance between working women and bourgeois feminism, it was thought, would weaken the forces of the proletariat, thereby delaying the great hour of the full emancipation of women.¹⁷ European socialist women, generally, had great difficulty overcoming the anti-female prejudice of their parties to gain 'permission' to organize working women.¹⁸

The reluctance of the Fedayeen to discuss issues connected with women's individual liberation and personal freedoms and relations between men and women within the family were not unique to the Fedayeen. Gender politics of socialist movements everywhere fit all too well with the socialist legacy. Sondra Hale, for example, in her study of the gender strategies of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP), has noted the dominance of patriarchal ideology and structures within the SCP and the failure of its cadres adequately to understand 'the connections between personal relations and public political organization', or the issues of sexuality, let alone directly to address these issues.¹⁹

Indeed, socialist and national liberation movements, characteristically, 'encourage women to subordinate their interests as women to their interests as members of an economic class or particular subculture in the course of their participation in revolutionary movements'.²⁰ This is how women's activism and revolutionary energies were used, for example, by FRELIMO, in Mozambique, where the clear message of the leaders of the revolution was that 'to liberate herself, a woman must assume and creatively live the political line of FRELIMO'.²¹ The same familiar pattern was also present in Angola during the national liberation struggle, where gender relations were reconstructed based on the masculinist image of a public and private divide.²²

The Iranian Left simply followed in the footsteps of the European socialist 'fathers'. Closer to home, the Tudeh Party had set the example, through its women's organization, *Tashkilat-e Zanan*, which for years had acted as an appendage of the Tudeh Party. Maryam Firooz, the head of the *Tashkilat* for over thirty years, in her memoirs provides many examples of the manipulation of the women's organization by the leaders of the Tudeh Party and in party politics. On one occasion, for example, the Tudeh general secretary suddenly brought a woman to the *Tashkilat* and introduced her as the new head of the organization, replacing Firooz (whom he disliked), and his decision, according to Firooz, was unquestioningly accepted by the women of the organization as the party's 'order'.²³

Secondly, and more importantly, the Left's theoretical orientation reflected and amplified the force of Iranian patriarchal culture and mascu-

line values which informed the personal and political lives of Left activists. The hegemonic influence of Shiite/Iranian concepts and perceptions of female sexuality, as well as sexist beliefs and values, shaped the consciousness of men and women in Iran. These were inculcated through socialization, reproducing and sustaining gender hierarchy in political life. Thus, the Islamists had no monopoly on male-centred visions of female sexuality and sex-roles. Rather, these were shared by, and had a determining influence on, the ideological formation, political culture and practical activities of many secular nationalist and socialist forces. In fact, in what Western feminists have called sexual politics, the commonalities between the socialists and the Islamist forces overlapped more than either would ever admit. In their moralistic views towards women's dress, manner and, particularly, sexual conduct, the differences between socialist and Islamic populists were only a matter of degree. In fact, the Left contributed to the saliency and acceptance of Islamic populist themes. This political culture helps to explain why, at different historical junctures, women have been highly praised for their unflagging contributions to the goals of national liberation and, at the same time, resented and ignored when they raised issues of women's autonomy and individual rights. It also explains why Iranian socialists, historically the most consistent advocates of women's democratic rights, did not support women's struggles for autonomy in personal and political life during the post-revolutionary period.

All intellectuals, with rare exceptions, religious or secular, politically active or not, held images in common of women and female sexuality and moralistic conceptions of appropriate gender roles. These images help explain the hostility of Iranian political culture towards women's struggle for autonomy and choice in both private and public life. Praising self-denial in women and excusing self-centredness in men, they promote authoritarianism and an exaggerated collectivism, deepening gender-based notions of rights and responsibilities. In Iran, as elsewhere, men's images of women and women's perceptions of themselves are formed in the family, a crucial site of male authority and sexual oppression. In the post-revolutionary period, these images justified and legitimized women's subjugation, not only in the private sphere of the family, but also in politics.

It is reasonable to suppose that the authority of the Iranian/Shiite culture over a great many intellectuals explains the remarkable uniformity in the views, rhetoric and politics of the organized Left on the 'women's question'. A culture that consciously or unconsciously perceives women as incapacitated by nature, that encourages, maintains and justifies the rigid social boundaries separating women and men, that does not see women as full persons but undervalues, instead, women's wisdom and intellect – such a culture must create a mindset that marks whatever a woman achieves as peripheral, according it less value than the achievements of men. On this fertile soil, the anti-feminist seeds of traditional socialism could only

flourish, compounding the effects of entrenched religious values and explaining the remarkable harmony among Marxist organizations and groups when women have tried to voice their concerns and interests as women, and not, simply, as female members of this or that party.

The Fedayeen's culture had been formed through an articulation of elements from the patriarchal Iranian culture which worshipped male values, such as physical strength, aggressiveness, emotional control, 'bonding', dauntlessness and independence, which were then idealized in the macho guerrilla culture. In this blend, the cause of 'serving the masses' and 'fighting for liberation' focused especially on 'masculine' values, roughness in behaviour and clothing, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and rejection of any kind of pleasure or individual self-fulfilment. A guerrilla organization, by nature, is an ascetic movement (*Riazat-kesh*); it does not approve of anyone who fails to practise self-discipline²⁴ and who does not wish to be simply a fish in the sea of the masses. Like most populist movements, the Fedayeen lacked the intellectual and analytical potential to reassess old traditions and social customs and to identify their patriarchal, sexist and undemocratic character. Instead, they glorified the masses and popular culture and tried to follow the masses in their manner, clothing, interests and tastes. At its core, this culture could not be reconciled with women's claims to individual rights, autonomy and self-determination.

The Left's full support for Ayatollah Khomeini's 'anti-imperialism' originated from this set of ideological orientations, embedded in its embrace of nationalist and patriarchal values and its inherited suspicion of 'bourgeois' gender politics. Once the revolutionary priorities were determined, every other concern was defined as a deviation from the main struggle against imperialism. From this perspective, women's demands were secondary, at best, to the 'anti-imperialist' struggle of the Iranian people under the leadership of the 'father of the nation', Imam Khomeini. In other words, women's rights were sacrificed for 'more important' political goals in the interests of (an imaginary) unity of anti-imperialist forces. Hence, the Left supported women's rights – but only timidly, to avoid controversy – on such crucial personal status issues as equal rights to divorce, child custody, polygamy, temporary marriage and control over reproduction, as well as on other issues involving women's individual liberation and their personal freedoms. Meanwhile, the theoretical and political disagreements between the contending factions in the OIPF, which eventually led to a major split, centred on the class nature of the Islamic state and the revolutionary strategy and tactics of the communists. Both the majority (*Aksariat*) and the minority (*Aghaliat*) tendencies evoked Marxist 'testaments' in support of their analyses of the regime as 'revolutionary petty-bourgeois' and 'anti-imperialist', or merely 'bourgeois'. But what did these analyses have to do with the women's question or the appropriate strategy of the NUW as a women's organization apart from its role as an auxiliary to the OIPF?

Bourgeois or petty-bourgeois, the ruling clerics continued their determined march towards the Islamization of Iranian society, stifling civil society and silencing dissenting voices.

In the end, Islamic Hejab was forced on women without effective resistance from women's organizations or other progressive forces. The OIPF's position in this instance displayed, again, the limited understanding by its leadership of women's rights, as well as its political ignorance about the strategic significance of compulsory veiling for the democratic struggle. Both the *Aksariat's* and the *Aghaliat's* implicit positions resembled the messages dominant in Islamic culture – that women were the source of men's corruption, that women's sexuality was potentially destructive to social order. They also reinforced the fit between the populist socialism of the Fedayeen and the Islamic discourses of Dr Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Morteza Mutahhari by pointing to the role of women in promoting Western consumer goods and, thus, facilitating 'imperialist cultural penetration'. Populist rhetoric called upon 'women toilers' to reject 'looseness' under the name of liberation.²⁵ Thus, compulsory veiling was politically wrong only because it threatened 'the unity of the people and added grist to the mill of American imperialism'. But women should also join the 'struggle to destroy the causes and roots of social corruption'.²⁶ Hence, if a woman objected to the commodification of her body, she should out of duty comply with the imposition of Hejab. To be 'revolutionary', a woman should surrender her interests and her individual rights as a woman. Individual liberties, the right to choice and self-expression, were 'bourgeois' values. Women should not aspire to them. The point of consistency in this tortured line of thought was: surrender your individuality; surrender your body and soul for the 'general goals' of the revolution.

The first major split in the OIPF in the summer of 1980 had direct consequences in the NUW and was translated into political inconsistency and inaction for the women's organization. The conflicts between the two factions, by then out in the open, basically paralysed the NUW. Women's issues became increasingly irrelevant as the point of common struggle. The NUW, for example, did not fully and unconditionally support the spontaneous protest marches by independent women against compulsory veiling. In addition, the intensification of the regime's attack on opposition forces speeded the disintegration of the NUW. Political conflicts from within and political repression from without pulled the organization apart, as political activities became more reactive than proactive. Still, before the police and political repression made impossible all democratic and intellectual activities, theoretical disagreements and internal party-line conflicts tore the NUW apart. Each faction tried to pull the organization, its members and its limited resources to its side.

Naturally, the lack of an effective, organized resistance helped the new regime to carry out Islamization policies. The Family Protection Act was

suspended.²⁷ The marriage age (*Senne-e bolugh*) for girls was lowered to 13 (and later to 9).²⁸ Girls' technical and vocational high schools were closed.²⁹ But during this crucial time, the NUW, as an appendage of the OIPF, was consumed with internal political strife. These conflicts ended in the fall of 1980, when the *Aksariat* faction left the NUW. Afterwards, the Fedayeen *Aghaliat* kept the NUW office for a short while, but the Fedayeen women's concerns were no longer related to women's issues. The Iran-Iraq war, and the dilemma of the *Aghaliat* as to how to define and deal with the war, preoccupied the remaining NUW leaders.³⁰ With the outbreak of war, political repression and the surveillance of progressive opposition forces increased. Officially, the NUW ceased to exist in early 1981. Yet, even before political repression put an end to the NUW, it was already doomed as an autonomous women's organization.

The fate of the OIPF, and of the Left generally, in post-revolutionary Iran bears witness to the importance of a realistic analysis of the constraints on progressive change and development in Third World societies. The Fedayeen faced neither an easily manageable political situation nor a clear choice in post-revolutionary Iran. A core of professional revolutionaries from a small guerrilla organization, released from the prisons by the revolution, faced the enormous challenge of organizing and leading a political movement which was born almost overnight. Of course, it is much easier now, so many years since the revolution, when political realities leave no room for false hopes and delusions, to propose what could have been a more well-defined, sound and effective political strategy. Yet it is reasonable to argue that the support of a majority of the Fedayeen for the clerics against democratic forces and liberals could have been avoided. This fatal mistake assisted the fundamentalists to isolate the liberals and discredit liberal reforms.

The first object of the Islamic onslaught was women, even before the regime's attack on Kurdistan. The first force that resisted the regime was also that of women, in their spontaneous protest against Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncement on veiling immediately after the revolution. Women who, from the Left's viewpoint, were 'apolitical' poured into the streets with great enthusiasm and revolutionary passion. The 'political' women with party affiliation, such as those of the NUW, who had assigned themselves the task of leading the masses of women, under the spell of Left political culture and gendered nationalist and socialist goals, succeeded only in blocking women's will to resist the regime.³¹ True, by itself, the NUW did not have the ability to change the course of events, stemming the tide of Islamic theocratic power. But as an independent women-centred organization, it could have played an important role. The NUW could have challenged the leadership of the OIPF to allow women-generated strategies, developed by gender-conscious women, to lead the organization. It could have refused to carry out the strategies handed down by the OIPF leader-

ship. At the very least, it could have used the limited freedoms still available in the post-revolutionary political atmosphere to publicize the plight of women, rallying independent Left male and female intellectuals into resisting the Islamic regime. This could have prevented women's concerns and gender interests from being marginalized and women's voices from being muted.

The essential precondition for such actions, and for the NUW's success, however, was independence from party politics.³² This would have also made possible cooperation among various women's organization on issues which related to women's immediate interests and concerns. But the lack of organizational and ideological autonomy impeded in a profound way cooperation among women. The quasi-religious dogmatism of the Left groups undermined any possible inter-organizational relationships among various socialist women's organizations. By accepting the male-defined revolutionary strategy of the OIPF, the NUW placed its central emphasis on national liberation and the struggle against class exploitation, marginalizing the issue of sexual oppression and, in effect, women's resistance against fundamentalism. In practical terms, this meant following passively the unaware masses.³³ NUW activists were unable to see how women's voices and women's interests were suppressed in the political organization to which they had devoted so much of their life and energy. Consequently, they failed to recognize that gender equality and the democratization of relationships between men and women were prerequisites for the democratic society they aspired to build.

The experience of Iranian women provides a specific case of the contradiction between socialism and feminism within the socialist tradition and national liberation movements of the more conventional type. The contradiction imposes itself upon the minds of those of us who lived through the first few years of the revolution and watched, in horror, as the goals of the 1979 revolution were turned on their heads, producing a brutal theocracy most deceptively called 'anti-imperialist'. Would the success of the new regime in silencing women's dissenting voices and discrediting all secular ideologies and movements have been so easy without the yielding acquiescence, if not the active cooperation, of the opposition, and, specifically, the acquiescence of the populist Left?

The elimination of even partially open political opposition to the Islamic regime meant a common fate for all organized Left forces. Starting with clashes between the Mujahedeen and supporters of President Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr with the Hezbollah and Islamic Guards (Pasdaran) in early 1981, and the Mujahedeen's unsuccessful armed uprising in June 1981, the secular and Marxist political organizations became subject to relentless police suppression. The Fedayeen *Aghaliat* took up arms against the Islamic regime in 1981 and lost many members in combat or to prisons. The total elimination of the Left as a viable political force came in the

spring of 1983 when the entire leadership and cadres of the Tudeh Party, including the general secretary, Nooreddin Kianoori, were arrested and charged with plotting to overthrow the government and spying for the Soviet Union.

Some concluding observations

During the first decade after the revolution, the Islamic Republic seemed to have firmly established its moral and political authority. Arrests, summary trials, the execution of hundreds of political activists, and intimidation and terror practices against religious and non-religious oppositional forces drove hundreds of Iranian intellectuals and thousands of skilled and educated workers into exile. Undoubtedly, the failure of the post-revolutionary women's movement to provide the nucleus for a mass-based feminist opposition in defence of women's legal rights and social status helped Iran's clerical state silence open opposition to its archaic, Shari'a-based, legal and social rulings aimed at restating the gender rights and the gender relations of a bygone era. However, the quiet yet remarkably dynamic and resolute resistance of women to re-Islamization policies continues to present the most potent challenge to the Islamic Republic. No other element of post-revolutionary politics could have exposed the cruel and archaic character of Islamic rule with greater clarity than its atavistic gender politics.

Today, even the clerics themselves have little doubt that the Islamic state's extensive ideological and political campaign has failed to win the support of the female population for its re-Islamization policies. The state's gender politics and women's response to it have been based on mutual disapproval and distrust. The state's campaign combines coercion with a far-reaching programme of indoctrination and resocialization targetting youth. The creation of a Morality Police to intimidate and punish those who insist on "un-Islamic" social and moral conduct complements this resocialization project, which also includes regular speeches on gender issues and man/woman relationships at Friday prayers; the organization of seminars, congresses and conferences to diffuse Islamic values; and the invention of 'Islamic' traditions and special days for celebration and dissemination of notions of Islamic womanhood, such as Islamic Mothers Day, Islamic Women's Day and the celebration of puberty (*Jashn-e Taklif*) for 9-year-old girls who reach womanhood and can be married off at that age. Moreover, a number of female-centred offices, committees and commissions within the state bureaucracy, such as the Bureau for Women's Affairs, the Women's Cultural and Social Council, Women's Commissions in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Women's Bureau of International Propaganda in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and various state-funded 'non-governmental' groups such as the Society of Women of

the Islamic Republic and the Women's Section of the Society for Islamic Propaganda (*Howzeh-ye Tablighat-e Eslami*), were founded. These activities are carried out by a group of trusted Muslim women from the homes of powerful clergymen, and the widows or mothers of martyrs of the revolution and the Iran–Iraq war.

Women's response to the state's social and moral crusades has been to challenge clerical authority and to counter it whenever and wherever they find a chance. Women resist by not giving in to pressures designed to enforce domesticity and male definitions of Muslim womanhood, by holding on to their jobs and even by entering new professions, despite despicable new measures in the workplace. Likewise, Hejab, the emblem of the 'Islamic Revolution' and of the cleric's grip on power, becomes the symbol of women's defiance and resistance. Hejab remains a haunting concern for the Islamic Republic.

I have argued elsewhere that the mere presence of working women in the state bureaucracy, educational institutions and industry can represent, perhaps, a partial defeat for the ultra-orthodox Islamists, who hoped for the establishment of gendered Islamic law and order through an absolute de-womanization of public life. By itself, however, women's presence in the workplace does not represent a fundamental retreat by the regime on issues pertaining to women's personal and social rights and obligations.³⁴ The impact of Islamization policies has been horrifically negative in crucial areas of women's lives. The most poignant example is the provisions of Qisas. The consequence of this legislation goes beyond its impact on individuals; it makes all women live under constant fear. Fear is a dangerously potent instrument in cementing men's power.

In this context, the recurring question, for those of us who lived through the unforgettable political struggles of the first year after the revolution, is whether a strong feminist movement could have fended off the Islamists' offensive in the area of women's basic human rights? Could not an opposition built from feminist, secular nationalist and Left movements have preserved the early dynamism of the women's insurrection and become a political force in defence of women's rights, individual liberties, and social and political democracy?

The larger question, perhaps, is whether gender equality will always remain the contested terrain in the struggle for political democracy, social justice and national dignity in the Middle East.³⁵ To be sure, after two decades of fundamentalist rule, the Islamic project is nearing exhaustion, its capacity for creative change literally used up. Iranian women and men knew this when they voted for Khatami as president in the spring of 1997, hoping that he would facilitate the shift to a secular state. The clergy's gender politics sparked an unanticipated deepening of women's gender-consciousness and resistance. The enactment in 1998 of a law in Iran which prohibits 'all writings which create division between women and men through defending

women's rights in the press outside the legal and Shari'a frame works' exposes the limits of the Islamists' tolerance for gender activism.³⁶ It also manifests the clerics' awareness of the dangerously potent impact of women's resistance on the general struggle for democracy in Iran.

Notes

- 1 This text draws on my book *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-defined Revolutionary Movement*, London: Macmillan, 1994 and 1996. I would like to express my gratitude to Mary Ann Tetreault for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper, and to Mark Goodman for his careful reading and editing of the text.
- 2 For a partial list of women's groups in post-revolutionary Iran, see Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh, *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran*, London: Zed Books, 1982.
- 3 A. Rahnema and F. Nomani, *The Secular Miracle*, London: Zed Books, 1990, pp. 4–5.
- 4 For an excellent account of women's experience in colonial and post-colonial Algeria, see Marnia Lazreg, *Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*, New York: Routledge, 1994.
- 5 Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam and Nation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, pp. 124–41.
- 6 Personal communication with women in Ramallah and Jerusalem, summer 2000 and 2001.
- 7 'Women, Hejab and anti-imperialist struggle', *Haqiqat* 81 (Tir 1359/July 1980), cited in *Ettehadieh-e Kommunistha, Ba Selah-e Naghd* (Winter 1365/1986).
- 8 *Kar* 2 (Esfand 1357/March 1979).
- 9 My interview with Hebat Ghafari, member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the OIPF, June 1990.
- 10 My interview with Ali Keshtgar, member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the OIPF, June 1990.
- 11 My interview with Mihan Jazani (Ghoreshi), the widow of Bizhan Jazani, the prominent leader of the OIPFG, who was killed by the shah's police in prison. Mihan was among the founding members of the NUW and a member of its first Executive Council.
- 12 My interview with Haleh (pseudonym), a founding member of the NUW and member of the organization's first Executive Board, and of the editorial boards of *Barabari* and *Zanan Dar Mobarezeh*.
- 13 S. Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974, p. 11.
- 14 My interview with Minoo, an activist in the NUW and OIPF, July 1991.
- 15 L. Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983, p. 122.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- 17 A. Adler (ed.), *Theses, Resolutions and Manifestos of the First Four Congresses of the Third International*, London: Ink Links and Humanities Press, 1980, pp. 211–18.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- 19 S. Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996, pp. 156–7.
- 20 M.A. Tetreault (ed.), *Women and Revolution in Africa, Asia, and the New World*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994, pp. 20–1.

- 21 See Kathleen Sheldon, 'Women and revolution in Mozambique', in Tetrault, *Women and Revolution*, pp. 33–61.
- 22 See Catherine V. Scott, 'Men in our country behave like chiefs: women and the Angolan revolution', in Tetrault, *Women and Revolution*, pp. 89–108.
- 23 *Memoirs of Maryam Firooz (Farmanfarmaian)*, Tehran: Didgah Research and Publication Institute, 1373/1994, p. 69.
- 24 My interview with Ali Keshtgar.
- 25 *Kar (Aghaliat)* 67 (24 Tir 1359/July 1980).
- 26 *Kar (Aksariat)* (18 Tir 1359/July 1980), translation from Tabari and Yeganeh.
- 27 *Etelaat* (20 Tir 1358/July 1979).
- 28 Iran Bureau of Statistics, *A Report on the Characteristics of Marriage in Iran [Vizhegiha-ye Ezdevaj Dar Iran]*, Tehran: Plan and Budget Organization, 1985, p. 2.
- 29 For the post-revolutionary gender politics of the Islamic Republic, particularly in the post-Khomeini period, see my article 'Public life and women's resistance', in Saeed Rahnema and Sohrab Behdad (eds) *Iran After Revolution: Crisis of An Islamic State*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995. See also Haleh Afshar, 'Women and politics of fundamentalism', in H. Afshar (ed.) *Women and Politics in the Third World*, London: Routledge, 1996; Janet Afary, 'Steering between Scylla and Charybdis: shifting gender roles in twentieth century Iran', *National Women Studies Association Global Perspectives* 8(1) (Spring); Farah Azari (ed.), *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalist Islam*, London: Ithaca Press, 1983; Azar Tabari, 'The women's movement in Iran: a hopeful prognosis', *Feminist Studies* 12(2).
- 30 My interview with Zohreh Khayam, a founder of the NUW and member of its first Executive Board.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Interview with Haleh.
- 33 Interview with Homa Nateq, the prominent historian and a founder of the NUW and member of its first editorial board.
- 34 For a more detailed analysis of some of the legislative and administrative measures introduced by the Islamic state, see my 'Women and fundamentalism in Iran', in R. Lentin (ed.) *Gender and Catastrophe*, London: Zed Books, 1997.
- 35 If we wish to examine this problem comparatively, outside the Middle East, Latin America provides many cases. For example, revolutionary changes in Cuba, Nicaragua and Chile have provided an occasion for sharp debates on the prospects for women's rights within nationalist and nationalist-socialist transformations. For a sampling of the literature, see Margaret Randall, *Gathering Rage: The Failure of Twentieth Century Revolutions to Develop a Feminist Agenda*, New York: Monthly Review, 1992, and her more recent article, 'Women in revolutionary movements: Cuba and Nicaragua', in F. D'Amico and P.R. Beckman (eds) *Women and World Politics*, Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1995, pp. 183–93; Carollee Bengelsdorf, 'On the problem of studying women in Cuba', *Race and Class* 27(2) (1985): 35–50; Isabel Largaia and John DuMoulin, 'Women's equality and the Cuban revolution', in June Nash and Helen Safa (eds) *Women and Change in Latin America*, South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1986, pp. 344–68; Maxine Molyneux, 'Mobilization without emancipation? Women's interests, the state and revolution in Nicaragua', *Feminist Studies* 11(2) (Summer 1985); Martha Luz, 'Impact of the Sandinista agrarian reform on rural women's subordination', in Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena León (eds) *Rural Women and State Policy: Feminist Perspectives on Latin American Agricultural Development*, Boulder, CT: Westview, 1987; Patricia Marie Chuchryk, 'Protest, politics and personal life: the emergence of feminism in a

military dictatorship, Chile 1973–1983’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1984.

- 36 *Payam-e Zan* 7(4) (Tir 1377/July 1998): 8–13. See also *Adine* 127 (Khordad 1377/June 1998): 12–13.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE IRANIAN LEFT¹

Ali Mirsepassi

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

Karl Marx²

Introduction

The story of the Iranian Left in the build-up to the revolution of 1979 is instructive in several important ways. The telling of this story, of course, amounts in the final analysis to the explanation of a tragic modernist failure. In all fairness, however, one should consider that the Iranian Left was confronted by a very difficult and complex situation for which it was not ready. The Islamic discourse and the pre-eminent role of clerics were explained away as “superstructural” manifestations, spontaneous religious expressions, and transiently superficial features of the revolutionary process.³ This overconfidence in theories of modernity and secularization (which scientific Marxism, as well as a range of other modernist ideologies, embraced) mirrored, and perhaps exceeded, the Pahlavi state’s own dogmatic and unrelenting attachment to predigested and hegemonic conceptions of modernity. The Left’s dismissal of religious politics as merely instrumental in their potential not only overlooked a towering and important source of revolutionary force, but resulted in support of Islamic politics, based on the same imperceptive reason, by many leftist organizations and intellectuals.⁴ We can say that the Left, not unlike many other Iranian political forces, was a victim of the general modernist failure to see Islam as the forceful and violent spring of power that it was. How destructive and unhelpful it proved, in their case, to cling to those rigidly preconceived modernist boundaries when things were unfolding in front of their eyes along profoundly different lines; and the conceptual blindfold

which dispensed with the need for self-doubt remained affixed seemingly until the final and bitter moment of reckoning.

On another level, a close look at the story of the Iranian Left will reveal that the revolution was far from an exclusively Islamic phenomenon. Other forces, most notably the secular Left and liberal nationalists, provided ideas which fueled the revolution and also fueled the Islamic radicals themselves. Significant and telling portions of society joined and participated in the revolution from a secular/Left perspective. The seminal role of the Left, as we will show in this chapter, was no accident; the tradition of leftist activism runs deep in modern Iranian political history.

What is perhaps most interesting and most contrary to prevalent views of Islamic radicalism is the fact that the Islamists proved themselves to be far more pragmatic in political thinking than the Left itself. It was the Islamists who unabashedly appropriated large portions of leftist discourse for their own purposes, while the Left itself clung tenaciously to its abstract modernist boundaries to the utter detriment of practical politics. Ironically, it was so-called “fundamentalists” who were most willing to twist and inter-fuse divergent ideological streams with the sheer force of their political imaginations, while the Left remained blindly and resolutely bound to its received “scientific” categories of social analysis. Moreover, the implications of this massive intellectual appropriation remained lost on most thinkers of the Left, with well-known and disastrous consequences. The political disarming of the Iranian Left was prefigured well in advance by its intellectual disarmament at the hands of Islamic radicals, and this critical blow transpired all but completely without their notice or serious consideration.

Yet the very failings of the Left – particularly its naïve, reductionist and dogmatic style of political thought – demonstrate that the conditions foreclosing the Left’s failure in this instance hardly ensure the irrelevance or inevitable failure of the Left or secularist projects in themselves for Iran. The fact that the ideas of class inequality and secularism exercised such widespread appeal at crucial junctures in modern Iranian history only shows all the more that the failure of the Left in the Iranian revolution sprang from its own self-induced and ultimately suicidal limitations, and not from any hostility to these ideas innate to the Iranian soil. Taking into consideration the highly significant role of Left, radical, and secular ideas in modern Iranian history, it would be entirely mistaken to presume such influences as *de facto* dead or irrelevant to the political and social development of the country.

A brief history of socialist movements

It is worth pointing out that the socialist movement in Iran is among the oldest not only in the Middle East but in Asia. Maxime Rodinson points out that at the beginning of the century there appeared in the Middle East a working-class trade union movement and various social democratic organi-

zations in contact with the Second International. Among them were Iranian laborers working in the Russian Caucasus, notably in Baku.⁵ Liberal thought had emerged in the previous century, and the small Iranian intelligentsia was active in the 1906–11 Constitutional Revolution in Iran,⁶ in Rasht, Mashhad, Tabriz, and Tehran. The Constitutional Revolution allowed the socialist trade unions and political organizations to develop and become firmly rooted in Iran itself.⁷ Iranian socialists took part in the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and were also greatly inspired by it. Persia's Avetis Mikailian, better known as Sultanzadeh, was, along with India's M. N. Roy, among the prominent Marxists of Asia, and was a delegate to the Comintern.⁸ The Iranian Communist Party took part in nationalist movements and autonomy struggles in the 1920s, and one of its leading figures, Haidar Amughli Khan, was a founder of the short-lived (1921) Gilan Soviet Republic.

The labor movement in Iran grew in tandem with the socialist and communist parties, as has been the case in many other countries. The earliest unions – of printers and telegraphers – were formed in 1906 in Tehran and Tabriz and by 1944 one of the largest labor confederations in Asia existed in Iran and was associated with the communist Tudeh Party.⁹ The making of the Iranian Left spanned several decades and left an indelible mark on the political culture. Certain words and concepts, understood to be left-wing or socialist in origin, have become part of popular and intellectual vocabularies. The evolution of the Left has been by no means smooth or uninterrupted; over the years, the socialist movement has suffered serious setbacks and lost many of its cadre and leading intellectuals to prisons and firing squads. Nonetheless, throughout the century and right up to the recent revolution, it managed to be a consistent social and political force which also represented a cultural alternative to both the traditionalism of Islamic forces and the “pseudo-modernism”¹⁰ of the monarchists.

To summarize the trajectory of the Left's growth and activities up until the recent revolution, we have identified four distinct phases (see Table 10.1). The first was the period 1906–37, representing its genesis and growth as a militant, revolutionary communist movement with strong ties to the emerging working class and an emphasis on trade unions. This period ended with the rise of the autocrat Reza Shah (ruled 1926–41), who put an end to left-wing activity through the promulgation of laws and through armed force. The second period was 1941–53, the interregnum between the two dictatorships, when activists from the 1920s re-emerged from prison, exile, and underground existence to form the Tudeh (Masses) Party. With close ties to the Soviet Union, the party became a major political actor with formal links to the labor confederation, one of the largest in Asia. The other major force during this period was the National Front, a grouping of liberal and nationalist parties which favored constitutional rule and a strong parliament. This period ended with the CIA-sponsored *coup d'état* against Prime Minister

Mohammad Mosaddeq (August 1953), and the resumption of autocracy. The third period, 1954–70, began in a post-Comintern context with no communist center; the Cold War and US hegemony reigned internationally, and the shah was closely identified with American global and regional economic and military interests. Regionally, the period was characterized by the rise of anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist movements. Domestically, the Tudeh Party and the labor unions were suppressed and banned; a project for capitalist development was initiated and jointly undertaken by the second Pahlavi ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah, in concert with Western, particularly American, capital. During this period, the locus of underground Left activity shifted from the factory to the university. In the early 1960s, there was a brief resurgence of dissident activity, mainly by the National Front. In what Abrahamian has called a dress rehearsal for the 1978–79 revolution, protests in 1963 against the shah's autocracy and growing ties to the US involved students, teachers, bazaaris, the Tudeh Party, and a leading cleric who was subsequently exiled – Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.¹¹

Table 10.1 Iranian secular radical organizations

<i>Period</i>	<i>Political parties</i>	<i>Activities</i>
1906–37	Social Democratic Party (later Edalat and Communist Parties)	Trade-union organizing; women's associations; Gilan Soviet Republic
1941–53	Arani Group Tudeh Party	Published <i>Donya</i> Trade-union organizing; parliamentary and political activities
	Ferqeh Democrat	Azerbaijan Autonomous Republic (1945–46)
1954–70	Kurdish Democratic Party Niroye Sevom Tudeh Party	Mahabad Republic Intellectual and political activities In exile; student organizing in Europe
	Second National Front, Niroye Sevom	Brief resurgence 1960–63; thereafter active in student movement in Europe and the US
1970–78	New Communist Movement	Urban guerrilla actions and underground activities
	People's Fedayee Peykar Revolutionary Organization Palestine Group Tufan Tudeh Party Confederation of Iranian Students (US, Europe) People's Mojahedin	Anti-regime activities Raising international awareness; anti-regime activities Urban guerrilla actions

In the fourth phase, 1970–78, a new type of Left emerged: political-military organizations espousing armed struggle against the Pahlavi regime as the regional pillar of US imperialism. In Iran, as elsewhere, this period saw the full formulation of an anti-imperialist paradigm which posited a military strategy of revolution and a vague socio-economic program. During these years, guerrilla activity was undertaken principally by the Organization of the Iranian People's Fedayee Guerrillas (OIPFG, or Fedayee), and the Organization of the Mojahedin of the People of Iran (OMPI, or Mojahedin), in addition to smaller guerrilla groups. These groups were (and are in this chapter) referred to as the "militant Left" or "new communist movement."

In his discussion of the contention between "fundamentalism" and secular criticism in the Arab world, Sharabi notes the "double disadvantage" of the latter: "It enjoys limited power in the political arena (lacking political organization), and as state censorship erodes, restricts, and deflects its effectiveness, it finds itself also opposed by mass (religious) opinion."¹² He points out that while the new radical critics are routinely attacked, muzzled, and suppressed under most Arab regimes, fundamentalist spokespersons are not only allowed to proclaim their doctrines freely and publicly but are often provided with substantial aid by the state institutional machinery and media. So it was in Iran.

It is important to note that throughout the 1960s and 1970s, while the Left and liberal/social democratic forces and their institutions were hounded and banned by the Pahlavi state, the religious establishment expanded considerably and its institutions proliferated.¹³ Networks of mosques, seminaries, and lecture halls, the publication of religious journals and books, access to the print and electronic media, and the steady stream of mullahs (clerics) emerging from the theological schools of Qom and elsewhere provided the leaders of political Islam with an important social base, organization, and resources.¹⁴ The shah's political war against the Left and the liberals resulted in a diminution of secular political discourse, left-wing organizational resources, and democratic institutions. The dominant language of protest and opposition against the Pahlavi state was religious, even though elements of other discourses (Third Worldist, Marxist, populist) were also present. When the army and monarchy collapsed in February 1979, the clerics were in a far more advantageous position than any other political force to assume power and to command popular allegiance.

The revolution and the Left

In Iran, uniquely, the revolution was "made" – but not, everyone will note, by any of the modern revolutionary parties on the Iranian scene: not by the Islamic guerrillas or by the Marxist guerrillas, or by the Communist (Tudeh) Party, or by the secular-liberal National Front.¹⁵

In providing an account of the experiences of the Left during and after the 1979 revolution, four phases may be identified. The first was the revolutionary conjuncture itself, 1978–79, which catapulted the Left as a mass force, a situation for which it was largely unprepared. The second important period was 1980–81, when the battle between the Left, liberals, and Islamists intensified. The third phase began in June 1981, when Left organizations went underground and lost the battle with the Islamists. The fourth and present phase is that of the resumption of the politics of exile and a shift in political thinking and practice.

When the revolution erupted, the odds were seriously stacked against the Left. Twenty-five years of systematic suppression of the socialist and liberal forces, and the absence of any democratic institutions, left a political and institutional vacuum which the religious establishment quickly occupied. The consolidation of Islamist rule, however, was by no means predetermined; rather, it followed protracted political conflict and ideological contention between Islamists, socialists, and liberals. The absence of an understanding of the nature of political Islam, on the part of the Left, disunity within its ranks, and unwillingness to forge a liberal–Left alliance undermined the secular project and facilitated Islamist domination.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the Iranian revolution occurred in the absence of any political parties openly operating in the country. The parties, organizations, and groups which were written about during the revolution – the National Front, the Freedom Movement, the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), the Tudeh Party – existed in name only. (The IRP was formed immediately after the revolution, but had distinct advantages which will be discussed in a subsequent section.) Years of underground existence and exile had left the Tudeh Party, National Front, Fedayee Guerrillas, Mojahedin, and others without the social bases, resources, large memberships, and other political means necessary for real and viable political organization. This is especially true of the new revolutionary organizations formed during the 1970s. Our interviews with past and present activists and leaders of Peykar, Fedayee, the Tudeh Party and smaller Maoist groups reveal that on the eve of the revolution in 1977, most of their cadres were in prison. Some were residing and working outside of Iran, and the rest of the membership was small in number and very disorganized. A former leader of Peykar told us that his organization had about fifty members in late 1977; a Fedayee leader estimated that there were about twenty-five remaining members. Notwithstanding the Tudeh Party's long history of political activity and the fact that it had refrained from armed struggle (and therefore had lost fewer cadres), it was only able to organize two or three cells. Compared to its large numbers in the early 1950s, the Tudeh Party on the eve of the revolution was quite small. Indeed, the student movement abroad, organized in the Confederation of Iranian Students, was actually larger than any of the internal parties. As the revolutionary situation intensified in 1978,

the existing Left organizations began to disagree internally as to the proper approach, method, and action to take. Within the Fedayee organization, major disputes around theoretical and political issues led some members to leave the group and join the Tudeh Party.

The revolutionary conjuncture

The revolutionary conjuncture transformed the Left's situation and gave it an open space within which to maneuver. With a base among university students and former political prisoners, the Left gained in stature and prestige as a result of its engagement in armed struggle against the shah. Indeed, the moral and psychological impact of the urban guerrilla movement was an important factor in attracting large numbers of radicalized youth and intellectuals to the Fedayee. In the process of the revolution, therefore, the Left emerged as a mass force and came to represent a serious challenge to the Islamists in 1979. Its social base was principally among university and high-school students, but included teachers, engineers, and some skilled workers.¹⁶ In addition, the Left was active among the ethnic and religious minorities, especially the Kurds and Turkomans. The student supporters were organized into different student groups (Pishgam, Daneshjooyan-e Mobarez, Demokrat, etc.); teachers and engineers became members or active supporters; workers' councils were supported or organized; and left-wing organizations promoted the struggle around ethnic rights and regional autonomy. Table 10.2 lists the main secular left-wing organizations and their characteristics.

It is important to stress the conjunctural nature of left-wing support. It was tied very much to revolutionary enthusiasm, the political space created by the revolution with the dissolution of the old regime, the absence of a new central authority, and the respect accorded to the guerrilla organizations which grew when SAVAK torturers on trial in early 1979 recounted their horrific treatment of communist prisoners. The Left's expanding base of support was not the result of years of political organizing and mobilization – this was a luxury they had never been allowed.

It should also be recalled that the Left was being challenged by a very difficult political and ideological situation. Political Islam was something that was not well understood; the Left had nothing to go by theoretically or experientially to help it better come to grips with this new phenomenon. To be sure, Iranian leftists were not the only ones who were confused by the situation and could not respond to the challenge of political Islam. Both within Iran and internationally, many liberal, progressive, and radical groups and individuals did not recognize the hazards of the political Islam which, under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, took over state power in 1979. The rise of Islam as a mass movement could not be explained by class analysis or other modernist sociological categories.

Table 10.2 Characteristics of principal secular left-wing organizations, 1979–83

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Orientation</i>	<i>Formation/duration</i>
Organization of Iranian People's Fedayee Guerrillas (OIPFG)	Independent, non-aligned communist	Formed 1970; split 1980 into minority and majority wings
Peykar	Maoist	Formed 1974 out of Mojahedin; disbanded 1983
Tudeh Party of Iran	Pro-Soviet communist	Formed 1941; leadership arrested early 1983; split in 1985, declared People's Democratic Party of Iran
Kumaleh	Formerly Maoist non-aligned	Formed 1978 as a leftist alternative to KDPI; remains active in Kurdistan
Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI)	Social democratic/nationalist/federalist	Formed 1945; split in 1988, created "Revolutionary KDPI"
Fedayee-Guerrillas (Ashraf Dehghani Group)	Armed-struggle advocates	Formed 1978 out of OIPFG; underwent several splits
Rah-e Karger	Independent communist	Formed 1978; still active
Ranjbaran	Maoist	Formed 1979; dissolved 1985
Ettehad Mobarezan	Maoist	Formed 1979; dissolved 1981
Union of Communists	Maoist	Formed 1976; dissolved 1982
Hezbe Kargaran Sosialist	Fourth International Trotskyist	Formed 1979; dissolved 1982

Expansion and contention

The year 1979 was one of expansion for the Iranian Left. The revolution created the possibility for their increased involvement on the political terrain, including participation in electoral politics. Leftist candidates ran for seats in the Assembly of Experts and the parliament (see Table 10.3). A serious drawback to left-wing activity, however, was the absence of a long-term perspective and program. Instead of building a movement, Iran's socialists were constantly responding to regime actions. For example, any measure taken by the regime which appeared progressive, such as nationalization of the banks and its confrontation with the US, would spark a discussion within the socialist organizations as to the nature of the regime and its future course

Table 10.3 Selected leftist candidates in the Tehran elections for the Assembly of Experts

<i>Candidate</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>
R. Daneshgari	115,334	Fedayee
M. Madani	100,894	Fedayee
H. Raisi	90,641	Fedayee
M. Hajghazi	56,085	Fedayee
M. Aladpoosh	49,979	Peykar
E. Tabari	47,225	Tudeh
N. Kianouri	32,627	Tudeh
M. Amooye	25,792	Tudeh
M. Farmanfarmaian	25,435	Tudeh
B. Zahrai	16,446	Hezbe Kargaran Socialist

Source: *Ettela'at*, 12 August 1979.

of development. In this way the totality of political Islam was ignored and a comprehensive analysis of the regime escaped them.

The theoretical discourse that most Iranian leftist organizations and intellectuals had adopted did not permit them to see the realities of political Islam and the course of events in Iran. Socialism was equated with nationalization of the economy and anti-imperialism. The Fedayee Organization published its program one year after the revolution, in February 1980. The main concern of the program was the elimination of dependent capitalism and imperialism, and the nationalization of industries and foreign trade.¹⁷ Thus, the nationalization program undertaken by the Islamic regime, and its anti-US rhetoric and policies, confused the Iranian Left – as it did many international leftists. When “Islam” was seriously considered, it was done so within an economic and reductionist discourse which viewed religion, culture and ideology as superstructural, and thereby derivative.¹⁸ For example, in analyzing the results of the Assembly of Experts elections, the Fedayee suggested that the people’s support for Khomeini was symbolic and emotional and did not represent any class interest.¹⁹

Analytically oblivious to the compelling nature of political Islam, and incapable of recognizing political Islam as a class project, the Left was also inattentive to the theocratic, anti-secular and anti-democratic nature of the regime. A line of argument in the newspaper *Kar*²⁰ was that the Islamic fanatics were unimportant and without a future and that the Liberals were to be the focus of the struggle. Because the struggle against imperialism and dependent capitalism was presumed to be paramount, the socialist organizations gave short shrift to democratic concerns, including “bourgeois feminism.” While socialists paid lip service to women’s rights, freedom of the press, and political freedoms, the major Left organizations, following a brief period of cooperation, ended ties with the National Democratic Front, which was making democratic rights its priority. Left-wing discourse was

strongly populist in its appeal to “the toiling masses” and to peasants. None of the socialist groups had specific references to the problems and needs of women or young people; all were inattentive to questions of education, recreation, personal freedoms and rights. As a result, the Left deprived itself of a solid base among the modern social strata, a foundation which any socialist program would need to realize its goals. In its inability to formulate an alternative democratic-socialist program, the Left missed the chance to present itself as a serious political and ideological contender.

Another missed opportunity was the construction of a Left united front. Even after the anti-democratic and anti-communist nature of the Islamist regime was obvious to all, the Left remained fragmented and sectarian and proved incapable of uniting to counter the Islamists’ moves. In retrospect, it is astounding that the many left-wing groups and organizations ignored the obvious fact that post-revolutionary Iranian society was being transformed into an Islamic-totalitarian state and made no effort to form a broad secular-radical united front to oppose this trend. It is conceivable that a Left-liberal alliance would have altered the balance of power. But such a prospect was never even considered. In some cases, opportunism and organizational fetishism precluded cooperation; this was especially true of the Mojahedin and the Tudeh Party, both of which had grand plans for themselves. In other cases, dogmatic insistence on ideological and political purity not only prevented cross-party alliances but eventually split certain key organizations (such as the Fedayee in 1980 and 1981) nearly into oblivion. Meanwhile the IRP, the party of the Islamists, was extending its sphere of influence and easing out liberal control within the government and bureaucracy. Without a perspective for the future and by adopting a naïve and simplistic anti-imperialist position, the Left found that the seizure of the American embassy by pro-Khomeini students in November 1979 represented a serious political and theoretical challenge. Following this event, disagreements within the Fedayee organization as to the nature of the regime intensified, and the organization formally split in early 1980. The Fedayee-Majority adopted the Tudeh Party position that the regime was “anti-imperialist” and deserving of left-wing support.

In sum, this critical period was marked by the expansion of the Left organizations and their bitter internal debates over the nature of the new regime; the efficacy of Islamic populism in mobilizing popular support and challenging the received wisdom of the communist groups; errors and missed opportunities in the areas of women’s rights and democracy; electoral confusion; and the absence of a united front. Guided by the anti-imperialist paradigm, the Left organizations frequently slid into a populist rhetoric that echoed many of the themes of the Islamists. They seemed unable to offer a distinct, separate, and alternative socialist agenda. Moreover, during this period, regime harassment of the Left increased;

violent battles were fought in Kurdistan (August 1979) and Turkaman Sahra (January 1980). Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was elected president but joined the "Islamic cultural revolution," which was spearheaded by his rival Ayatollah Beheshti, head of the IRP, to weed out communist influence in the universities (April 1980). In September 1980, the Iraqis invaded Iran, forcing the Left to face another challenge and to formulate a "line" on the war.

The seizure of the American embassy, the split within the Fedayee, the Iraqi invasion of Iran, and the growing rift between Bani-Sadr and the IRP each presented a new and apparently overwhelming challenge to the Left. Each time a problem was resolved or at least dealt with, a new one emerged to preoccupy the Left organizations. Like Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, it took all the running they could do to keep up, and still they were constantly overtaken by events. During this period the Islamists gained considerable political leverage; the program of Islamization in the juridical and cultural spheres continued apace without a serious contestation from liberals and leftists.

This was a period of considerable internal conflict and political confusion for the Left. The Mojahedin organization occupied the central position in the opposition while the secular organizations became secondary and marginalized. The Fedayee-Majority and the Tudeh Party were keen to be the "legal Marxists"; their only concern was that the IRP and Ayatollah Khomeini had rejected their suggestion of the formation of an anti-imperialist popular front.²¹

On the other hand, the militant Left (Fedayee-Minority, Peykar, the Kurdish organization Kumaleh, Ashraf Dehghani, Organization of Communist Unity) adopted a hardline and receptionist policy during this period. Attempts were made to join the Mojahedin in an anti-regime front, but the secular Left could not countenance the Mojahedin's unilateralism and commandism. The Mojahedin threw their support behind the beleaguered Bani-Sadr and staged large street demonstrations in his support in the spring of 1981. As the political contest between the Islamists and their erstwhile liberal associates intensified, the IRP-dominated majlis voted to impeach and prosecute Bani-Sadr. When the Mojahedin took to the streets to protest, they were violently attacked. In a rapid-fire series of events, Bani-Sadr and the Mojahedin leader Massoud Rajavi formed the National Council of Resistance and fled to Paris. The bombing of IRP headquarters (attributed to the Mojahedin but still mysterious in origin), in which nearly a hundred of its top leaders were killed, was met with arrests and executions by the authorities. A vicious cycle of regime brutality and Mojahedin assassinations plunged the country into a situation of near civil war and total repression as the Islamists attempted to restore order and reassert their power.

The Tudeh Party and the Fedayee-Majority sided with the regime, criticizing "ultra-leftists." At first, the secular Left organizations remained at the sidelines, unhappy with the turn of events and their own powerlessness.

Eventually, though reluctantly, they elected to join the battle, and subsequently suffered tremendous losses. When the mini-civil war finally ended in late 1982, the regime had won it. In 1983, the Islamists then turned their attention to the Tudeh Party and the Fedayee-Majority, and a new wave of arrests, executions, and repression ensued. Ironically for a party that had for so long toed Khomeini's line, the Tudeh Party suffered even greater losses than the other organizations, mainly because it had naïvely publicized names and addresses of its cadre, who were consequently more easily rounded up. In the wake of the repression, those Tudeh activists who were not arrested fled to Afghanistan and to Europe, where they resumed an existence in exile.

The social bases and composition of the Left

In a book on Arab society, Sharabi states that Islamism constitutes a "mass grassroots movement while secularism still consists of an internally diverse, largely avant-garde movement of critical intellectuals, writers, professionals, scholars, and students."²² In Iran, the secular Left is also composed of intellectuals, professionals, and students. In this section we will discuss the class composition and the social bases of the Left in post-revolutionary Iran. We intend to show that the left-wing organizations, ideologies, and discourses correspond to specific social and cultural groups within the population. Our first observation is that the socio-economic base and status of Iranian leftists in Iran and abroad was largely student and modern middle class, and included men and women, and members of the religious minorities and all ethnic groups. But to render this impressionistic analysis more objective, and to give it an empirical content, we have analyzed the social background of some 900 members of socialist groups who were killed in one way or another (that is, under torture, in prison, through executions, or in street battles) in the period 1981–83, and in the case of the Tudeh Party, in the post-1983 period.

The data reveal that in the case of the new revolutionary organizations, members were largely urbanized, educated, and youthful. In the case of the Tudeh Party, its members tended to be heavily represented by older people in the professions. Iranians attracted to left-wing organizations are primarily from the non-religious, highly educated, modern, and urban middle classes (see Table 10.4). Notwithstanding the Left's populist leanings and desire to attract *khalq* ("popular masses"), our data reveal that Left organizations were largely composed of urban, highly educated, and professional Iranians. Bazaaris, traditional urban petty bourgeois, rural elements, and the urban poor were not to be found in the Left ranks in any significant numbers. The latter were in fact more likely to be attracted to the various Islamist groupings. There was some, but not significant, working-class participation. Our political conclusion from the empirical findings, supported by the evidence in the tables, is that the Left organizations could and indeed should have taken a more explicitly secular and modern cultural and political stance without alienating their social bases.

A note on sources is in order before proceeding. The following data are compiled from a list of 10,231 names of individuals who were in one way or another killed by the Islamic regime. The listing is contained in the June 1984 issue of *Mojahed*, the magazine of the People's Mojahedin Organization. Our tables do not include the Mojahedin casualties, which were by far the highest (9,368). We focus instead on the secular Left groups. Because the data reflects the period 1981–83, the Tudeh Party and Fedayee-Majority are not represented, as they were legal parties at that time and supported the regime. However, a separate table (see Table 10.5) illustrates the Tudeh Party victims of the regime's repression. There are no data for the two Trotskyist groups. In a developing context, engineering is an elite occupation, with a strategic role to play in modernization and the rational reordering of the world. Engineers therefore tend to be politically active (unlike engineers in advanced industrialized countries who tend to be conservative or quiescent). In Iran, for many years the most radical academic settings were the Technical College of Tehran University and other engineering universities.²³

Out of 863 dead communists, the occupation of 566 of them could not be identified. It is highly likely that many of these individuals were professional revolutionaries and therefore did not hold regular jobs. Indeed, we are familiar with many of the names, recognize many of them as leading cadre, and know that they were previously university students. Hence, the number of students in the tables is actually a conservative figure.

Table 10.4 provides a summary of the characteristics of Iranian communists. Twelve major left-wing organizations are listed (again, excluding the Tudeh Party and Fedayee-Majority, which at this time were not targets of regime repression), and their fallen members are described by sex, age, education, and occupation. The organization with the largest number of dead is the Fedayee-Minority; Peykar, Kumaleh, and the Fedayee-Guerrillas (Ashraf Dehghani Group) also lost many members. The vast majority of their martyrs are male; the average age is 25; nearly all have at least a high-school education; almost half are college students or graduates; engineering is the most frequent occupation for those communists on whom occupational information is available.

Table 10.4 provides more information on the occupations of the fallen leftists. It reveals that more than half were students (177 out of 307). Professionals are also represented (teachers, doctors, engineers, etc., that is, the modern, salaried middle class), while traditional occupations and class locations (such as peasant, bazaari, and so on) are insignificant. Workers are represented, but not in a significant way. For example, out of a total of 307 dead leftists of identified occupations, 39 were workers, the largest number of which were affiliated to Peykar.

Out of 835, the fallen men constitute 768 (92 per cent), and the women 67 (8 per cent). This is suggestive of the skewed sexual distribution patterns.

Table 10.4 Summary characteristics of Iranian communists

	Sex			Age			Occupation											Total
	M	F	NA	A	AA	NA	C	HS	NA	S	T	E	W	P	MD	M	O	
Fedayee-Minority	205	13	6	97	24	127	37	62	125	43	10	6	6	1	1	2	8	224
Peykar	164	27	3	67	26	127	60	32	102	53	5	10	8				1	194
Kumaleh	142	7	8	41	23	116	18	24	115	18	7	7	5	1	1	3	3	157
Fedayee-Guerillas	97	7	4	41	23.5	67	11	40	57	25	4	2	6				1	108
Union of Communists	58	3	2	17	24	46	14	9	40	8		5	1				2	63
Rah-e Kargar	36	3	1	18	26	22	13	3	24	15	1	1	1	1			1	40
Ranjbaran	22	1		8	27	15	6	5	12	6	1						1	23
Tufan	18	1	1	13	25	7	4	5	11	1		1	2		2			20
Razamandegan	11			6	28	5	6		5	5								11
Union of Militant Communists	1	2	2	3	27	2	2	1	2	1								5
Pouyab Group	4					4			4									4
Communist	2		1	1	28	2	1		2	1								3
Unity																		
Others	8	3		4	31	7	6		5	1	1	1						11
Total	738	67	28	316		547	178	181	504	177	29	33	29	3	4	5	17	863

Notes:

Key to headings: M: male; F: female; NA: not available; A: numbers for whom age was available; AA: average age; C: college; HS: high school; S: student; T: teacher; E: engineer; W: worker; P: peasant; MD: medical doctor; M: military; O: other.

Source: These data were compiled from a list of 10,231 individuals who were in one way or another killed by the Iranian state. The greatest number of “martyrs” belongs to the Mojahedin Organization, and these are excluded from this table. The table is based on characteristics of 863 members of secular left-wing organizations, mostly self-described communist groups, and excluding the Tudeh Party.

The list was published in a special issue of *Mojahed*, the journal of the Mojahedin Organization, in June 1984. The data refer to the period 1981–82, with some deaths occurring in 1983.

This does not necessarily mean an under-representation of women among the rank-and-file. It does indicate, however, that leadership positions were occupied by men. In this regard, we can put forward the proposition that the Left's insensitivity to women's rights was in part related to the male-dominated leadership and the fact that the women cadres were less powerful in their respective organizations than were the men.

Nearly all of the fallen communists were highly educated. Slightly less than half (49.58 per cent) of the total were college students or graduates and the remaining 50.42 per cent were high-school students or graduates. Once again, this confirms the Left organizations' base among modern, educated, and professional social groups.

The data in Table 10.4 confirm our impressions and earlier speculation that the average age of those within the "new communist movement" was the mid-20s. It should be noted that as a result of its high birthrate, Iran has a large youthful population.²⁴ As we mentioned earlier, young people tended to be attracted more to the new and militant Left organizations than the older and more traditional parties. However, the same criticism that we raised above pertains here as well: that is, that the Left organizations' programs did not reflect their own social base. They did not address themselves to the needs, problems, and aspirations of the modern, educated, professional middle class, including its youth and women.

In 1983 the regime turned against the Tudeh Party, and a sudden wave of arrests and executions nearly decimated it. Our data (see Table 10.5) indicate that thirty Tudeh members lost their lives in 1983 and 1984. This information comes from the Tudeh Party's own sources, notably *Donya*, the political and theoretical organ of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party of Iran, no. 2 (new series), 1985. Table 10.5 provides information on the fallen Tudeh members. It must first be noted that the table is based on thirty individuals described in the issue of *Donya*. While this is a small numerical base, we feel that it is fairly representative of the Tudeh Party's general characteristics. In the table, all of the members are male; the average age is 40; most of the members are university educated; and most are employed in the professions. In contrast to the "new communist" organizations, the Tudeh Party cadres were more heavily male, older (average age 40 rather than 25), and more highly educated (predominantly university graduates rather than high-school graduates). The militant Left was largely composed of students, while the Tudeh Party was heavily represented by professionals. Another difference between the Tudeh Party and the new communist organizations is that the party had a base within the military. Party policy was to enter the civil service, bureaucracy, the military, or the revolutionary guard (*pasdaran*). Indeed, a high-ranking military officer who was also a Tudeh Party member was Admiral Bahram Afzali, the commander of the Iranian navy. He was arrested and executed in 1983.

Table 10.5 Fallen Tudeh Party members, 1983–84

<i>Members</i>	<i>Total</i>
Male	30
Female	0
Average age	40
NA	21
High School ^a	4
College ^b	17
Student	2
Teacher	4
Worker	6
Military	6
Pasdar	2
Civil servant	2
Engineer	1
Total	30

Notes

^a Includes people with a few years of education, high-school students, and high-school graduates.

^b Includes college students and graduates.

Critiques of the Left

In the wake of the defeat of the Mojahedin, the communists and the liberals, and the consolidation of the Islamist state, recriminations and accusations abounded. In particular, the Left has been charged with all of these things: naïveté and inexperience, collaboration and opportunism, sexism, betrayal of socialist ideals, excessive workerism, Third Worldism, populism, being “out of touch” with Iranian culture and language, being inappropriately atheistic and being insufficiently irreligious. In this section, we survey the sources of the main criticisms, and offer our assessment of them. These arguments were especially heated during the 1980s.

We begin with the conservative wholesale attack of Left praxis. The major argument of the monarchists and other Iranian conservatives is that the Left was responsible for the emergence and dominance of the political Islam; it facilitated Khomeini’s assumption of power and collaborated with the Islamists after the revolution.²⁵ The conservative critics have also regarded the contemporary Left as a clear and present danger (to borrow a phrase from the American context). In their speeches and writings (which appear in the newspaper *Kayhan-in-exile*, published in London, as well as the journal *Sahand*), they have sought to expose the continuing left-wing threat, and warn of left-wing infiltration of the military and bureaucracy in Iran. They presented a very unflattering picture of the Left, depicting the Left as unpopular, without social roots, and thoroughly discredited in the eyes of the people. Herein lies the contradiction in their argument: the

Left is presented as both unpopular and present in almost all political events in Iran. This characterization of the Left derives from the Right's fundamentally conspiratorial mentality, which at one point led them to insist that a certain high official of the Islamic Republic, Prosecutor-General Khoiniha, was a pro-Soviet communist. The intellectuals of the Right were obsessed with the Left and sought to attribute the shah's fall and the success of the Islamists to the left-wing organizations. In the process they both exaggerated the role of the Left in the anti-shah movement and offered a mere conspiracy theory of communist influence in the Islamic Republic.

For the liberals and nationalists, the main problem with the Left was that it was alien to Iranian culture and politics. In often patronizing terms the Left is presented as too young and inexperienced to be effective and too radical for the Iranian setting. They also accused the Islamic regime of adopting leftist discourses, a revolutionary course, and a set of policies which are non-Islamic and non-Iranian. Thus, in the liberal and nationalist critique, both the Left and the Islamists are alien, attempting, with various degrees of success, to impose languages, ideas, and institutions that are foreign, strange, and inappropriate.

In the liberal and nationalist account, the Left is blamed for the post-revolutionary turmoil and conflict because it insisted on radical change and revolutionary transformation and thereby both encouraged the Islamists in that direction and undermined the liberals' gradualist program. The Left was also bitterly denounced (in this case correctly) for favoring the Islamists and attacking the liberals in 1979, and for being insufficiently sensitive to the need for democracy. They argue that as a result of all its mistakes and the defeat it suffered at the hands of the regime in the period 1981–83, there is no future for the Left in Iran.²⁶ Thus, the liberal/nationalist critique of the Left's record and its prospects focused on the following points: (i) the Left is alien to the Iranian culture; (ii) the Left has suffered a serious defeat and is too weak, fragmented, and demoralized to be of any future use; (iii) a leftist program is too radical for the realities of Iranian society, religion and nationalism being structural obstacles to any socialist movement in Iran; and (iv) the Left is anti-democratic and authoritarian, and it collaborated with the regime when it should not have – that is, after the liberals were eliminated from the political terrain in 1981. In this regard, they are especially hostile to the Tudeh Party, which remained supportive of the regime until its own demise in 1983.

The Islamists' critique of the Left echoes some of the themes found in the right-wing critique and among the liberals and nationalists. The Left is charged with being too Westernized, non-traditional, and economic; before, during and after the revolution it was completely divorced from and therefore irrelevant to the lives and aspirations of ordinary Muslim people. The Islamists perceive the Left project as an alien intrusion into the politics

and culture of traditional Iranian life; a corollary view is that left-wing activity is part of a Western conspiracy against Islamic values and practices. Islamists also accuse leftists of immorality in their personal lifestyles and in their program for gender equality. The Islamist critique includes philosophical arguments against Marxism and materialism, and an alternative emphasis on the spiritual dimension of life.

A response to the critiques

The conservative critique of the Left is politically motivated and very ideological. There is no logic to the claim that the Iranian Left is responsible for the revolution or for the hegemony of political Islam. Nor is there any reality to the myth of an international and intellectual conspiracy to overthrow the shah. The fact is that (a) at the time of the revolution, there was no powerful left-wing organization, and (b) the Iranian revolution was a truly mass movement in which all classes and social strata participated. To suggest that the Left supported the Islamist regime and was responsible for its coming to power is also a distortion of the record. In the referendum of 1 April 1979, the Islamic Republic had the vote of more than 90 per cent of the electorate; moreover, the Left (with the exception of the Tudeh Party) boycotted the referendum because it objected to the wording "Are you for or against the Islamic Republic?" The Iranian Left is responsible for many mistakes, but the claim that the Left is responsible for the rise of political Islam is an absurdity.

We also take issue with the characterization of the present Islamic regime as leftist. The ideology of political Islam (*velayat-e faghih*) and the practices of the Islamic Republic in the past ten years should dispel the myth of a convergence with the left-wing politico-cultural project. Only on some aspects of economic organization, such as nationalization, is there a convergence. The liberal critique of the Left is based on a double standard. For example, all of the main points of their case against the Left – that leftists were alienated from the Iranian masses, that they collaborated with the Islamic regime, were disunited, paid insufficient attention to democratic rights, suffered a serious defeat at the hands of the Islamists, no longer have the trust and confidence of Iranians – can be turned around and used against the liberals themselves. The first and most obvious point to be made is that it was the liberals, and not the Left, who were part of the new state structure. Members of the principal liberal/nationalist groupings, the National Front and the Freedom Movement, occupied Cabinet posts and were part of the formal governmental structure as well as the shadowy Revolutionary Council in 1979. It was a liberal, Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who became the first president of the Islamic Republic. Liberals were not the first dissidents; they joined the opposition movement much later. Secondly, liberals are themselves accused of *Gharbzadegi*, or of being too

Westernized. Thirdly, unlike the leftist organizations – which resisted the regime and were defeated only after a bloody conflict – almost all the major liberal groupings and individuals dispersed as soon as the situation became difficult. Today, the only liberal or nationalist organization active in Iran is the Freedom Movement (*Nehzat-e Azadi*), led by former Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan.

There is another critique of the Left which is more sophisticated and merits more serious attention. A number of Iranian intellectuals in exile and certain European and American scholars have argued that the modernist vision as represented in particular by the Left is an alien one, and that clerics or Muslims of various hues are “closer to the people” and represent “authentic” Iranian culture and identity. The essential point is that the Left is too Westernized, does not “speak the language of the people” and is divorced from and ignorant of the culture and sensibilities of the traditional Iranian population. This critique is based on a dubious claim to “authenticity” and is ultimately the manifestation of a view informed more by nostalgia and romanticism than by the realities of the Iranian cultural context. Like ideology, culture should be seen not as primordial and fixed but as contingent and changing. In a complex, developing, and heterogeneous society, there is not one culture but many, all of which are “legitimate” and “authentic.” Furthermore, it seems that behind the propositions about the “authentic culture” of Iran, there is a subtext: the Left is being attacked for being leftist, that is, for subscribing to ideas, objectives, and institutions that are associated with the social democratic, socialist, or communist traditions.²⁷

As for those whose critique of the Iranian Left is based on the notion of the greater “authenticity” of political Islam, and who regard Ali Shari’ati and Al-e Ahmad as quintessential Iranians, we would point out the many conflicts that have characterized post-revolutionary Iran and question the utility of notions of “authenticity” in heterogeneous and complex societies. Obviously, there is no consensus as to what “Iranian identity” is; who defines “identity” and “culture”; how different cultural practices and discursive traditions can coexist within one society. What has the struggle in post-revolutionary Iran been about, if not the imposition of a central idea of what the Islamic Republic should look like, and the many reactions to it? The “return to Islam” – with its inherent ambiguity and multiple meanings, as well as absolutist underpinnings – is hardly the solution to the political and cultural crisis in Iran.

What is needed in Iran is political and cultural openness and not the monolithic and totalizing political-cultural model that the Islamists have sought to impose. The latter is based on the erroneous assumption of a uniform “Muslim culture” and of a population prepared for and receptive to direct clerical rule and constant ideological exhortation, mobilization, and manipulation.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is based on an earlier article co-authored with Val Moghadam and published in *Radical History*: "The Left and Political Islam in Iran," *Radical History Review* 51 (Fall 1991). This article was revised by Ali Mirsepassi and published in his book *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 2 Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), p. 42.
- 3 By the Left here we mean the dominant trends and groups among many different leftist organizations. There were some leftist groups which had a more critical analysis of the situation during the revolution.
- 4 Several leftist groups and many radical intellectuals were critical of political Islam during this period.
- 5 Maxime Rodinson, "Marxism and socialism," in Michael Adams (ed.) *Marxism and Socialism in the Middle East* (New York: Fact on Files, 1988), p. 641.
- 6 Fereyduun Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasi-ye Ejtema'i dar Nehzat-e Mashruteh-ye dar Iran* [*The Idea of Social Democracy in the Constitutional Movement in Iran*] (Tehran: Payam Publisher, 1975), p. 38.
- 7 Rodinson, "Marxism and socialism," p. 641.
- 8 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, CT: Princeton University Press, 1982); Cosroe Chaquerie, "Sultanzade: The Forgotten Revolutionary Theoretician of Iran: A Biographical Sketch," *Iranian Studies* 17(203) (Spring–Summer 1984): 215–36; Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966).
- 9 Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979); Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*; Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986).
- 10 Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).
- 11 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*.
- 12 Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 12.
- 13 Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban For the Crown: Iran's Islamic Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 91.
- 14 Shahrugh Akhavi, *Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1980); Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
- 15 Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian revolution," *Theory and Society* 11 (1982): 265–83.
- 16 Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*.
- 17 *Kar* 44.
- 18 But the hostage takeover forced a break in the Fedayee's political position. Now they became almost exclusively concerned with the atrocities of US imperialism, and the collaboration with it of the liberals and monarchists. The best example of Left confusion is reflected in the Fedayee positions in the first year of the revolution. At the beginning, they adopted a highly critical position against the regime and defended the cause of democracy. They participated in the National Democratic Front's meeting in commemoration of the late Prime Minister Mosaddeq (*Kar* 1). Many of the editorials and headlines of *Kar* cover the repressive policies of the Islamic regime and support basic human and democratic rights (*Kar* 8, 12, 13). They support the independent Kayhan editors and condemn the regime's attempt to remove them (*Kar* 14), and also condemn the Hezbollah's attack on the National Democratic Front (*Kar* 17). In this period,

Kar ran several editorials and analyses in defense of the freedom of the press (*Kar* 12, on *Ayandegan*; 11, the suppression of the press; 14, the Iranian lawyers' editorials condemning the Iranian liberals as tools of the US). In *Kar* 28–61, they published special issues containing secret documents that revealed the liberal connections to the US (*Kar* 40). At the same time, there was hardly any mention of the issue of democracy or of the regime's attempt to monopolize political power. They even criticized the Mojahedin for advocating freedom for all political parties, including the liberal parties (*Kar* 44).

19 *Kar* 29.

20 *Kar* 53.

21 “Only the united actions of all revolutionary organizations and institutes under the proven and wise leadership of Imam Khomeini will be able to complete this great task that has already started” (*Donya*, Tudeh Party, p. 45).

22 Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, p. 11.

23 We should note that in recent years, engineering is no longer an elite occupation and therefore engineers are no longer predictably radical/secularist in Iran.

24 *National Census* (Tehran: Statistical Center of Iran, 1986).

25 G. Afkhami, *The Iranian Revolution: Thanatos on a National Scale* (Washington DC: Middle East Institute, 1985); Arjomand, *The Turban For the Crown*, 1988; Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

26 Katouzian, *Political Economy*; Mehdi Bazargan, *Enghelab-e Iran dar do Harakat* [*The Iranian Revolution in Two Phases*] (Tehran: Naraghi Publisher, 1984).

27 It is worth pointing out that the Bolsheviks were also seen as having imported an “alien” European ideology. For Adam Ulam, author of *The Unfinished Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), the Bolsheviks are seen as a tight-knit party of intellectuals, almost literally divorced from their society. They bring to Russia from the outside, from exile, an alien European ideology, i.e., Marxism, and they come to power with the support of the newly urbanized proletarians, uprooted from the countryside and disoriented by industrial life. One could actually apply Ulam's thesis to the Islamists rather than to the leftists!

THE LEFT AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN IRAN

Saeed Rahnama

Democracy has remained an elusive concept and ideal for which countless Iranian intellectuals for over a century have unsuccessfully struggled. Different forces in different periods of contemporary Iranian history have hampered the attainment of this long-desired ideal. Authoritarian regimes, foreign powers, the domestic dominant classes and reactionary religious establishments, to varying degrees, have blocked the attainment of democracy. The twentieth century witnessed three waves or cycles of authoritarianism, each corresponding to the rise, consolidation and decline of despotic/dictatorial regimes, and each lasting for over two decades: Reza Shah, twenty years; Mohammad Reza Shah, twenty-six years; and the Islamic Republic, over twenty-five years and counting. The Iranian Left, more than any other political force, struggled against and suffered from the lack of democracy under these three regimes. Yet it never succeeded in clearly defining and developing its own notion of democracy. The Left has rightly pointed to the obstacles presented by the lack of democracy; however, it has failed to look critically at its own theories and practices and to consider the possibility of itself also being part of the problem.

To attain its goal of socialism, the Iranian Left, like its counterparts around the world, followed two different paths or strategies: a revolutionary one and a reformist one. Can the transition to socialism be achieved gradually, peacefully and through parliamentary means, or is the attainment of socialist ideals only possible through the use of force, popular uprisings and the complete breaking up of capitalist institutions and order? From the inception of the socialist movement, these and other similar arguments have been at the core of conflicts and controversies, and have forced alliances and divisions within the Left. The difference is that, in an atmosphere of despotic rule, reformist ideas have had little chance to grow in Iran. In only a few intervals in the twentieth century, as a result of the weakness of the central autocratic power, has active party politics been possible, and

different socialist, social democratic, and reformist parties and organizations have emerged. Moreover, the reformist has lost ground to the insurrectionist revolutionaries as a result not only of suppression by the dictatorial regimes and reactionary forces, but also by the radicalism of the revolutionaries. Reformists' own internal theoretical and organizational weaknesses have also determined their defeat.

This paper discusses socialist reformist tendencies after the revolution. In what follows, I will first briefly point to reformist tendencies among the Iranian Left in the three periods of party politics in Iran, before and during the 1979 revolution, and will then discuss the rise and demise of socialist reformism in the post-revolutionary period in exile.

Here, I have adopted the distinction that Miliband makes between two categories of reformer. The "social reformer" who has no desire to achieve the wholesale transformation of capitalist society into an entirely different social order must be sharply distinguished from the "reformist" strategy, which insists that this is precisely its purpose.¹ In using the term "social democracy", I am distinguishing among three historical trends. The first, and the focus of this paper, refers to the trend within the Left movement that historically favours an electoral road to socialism. This trend, which can be called socialist (or reformist) social democracy, was represented by figures such as Bernstein and Kautsky within the German Social Democratic Party of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and is distinct from the insurrectionist social democratic – and later Communist – parties represented by Lenin and the Bolsheviks, as well as from the non-Marxist, or capitalist, social democracies found mainly in Western Europe following the Second World War.

Socialist reformism in Iran

Social democratic and reformist ideas have played a part in three distinctive periods in the contemporary politics of Iran. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, in a socio-economically backward society torn between Russian and British colonial powers and ruled by corrupt despots surrounded by fanatical mullahs, Iran witnessed the gradual emergence of social reformers who demanded constitutionalism and an end to despotic rule. The early reformers of the period, despite their political differences, were the vanguards of an enlightened movement that culminated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905. Although, with the exception of Agha Khan Kermani, the first Iranian social democrat, none of the reformers of this period had socialist reformist tendencies and were mostly liberal democrats, they paved the way for subsequent socialist social democratic or reformist tendencies in Iranian politics. As Edward Bernstein wrote: "There is actually no really liberal conception that does not also belong to the elements of the ideas of socialism."²

The first period of party politics, the period that covers the First to the Fifth Majlis (parliament), saw the emergence of different societies, associations and parties with moderate to radical platforms. The Social Democratic Party established in 1905 by Iranian intellectuals in Baku was the first organized social democratic effort of Iranian political activists. The most important Left political organization in this period, however, was the social democrat Edalat Party, which in 1920 changed its name to the Communist Party of Iran (*Ferq-e Kommonist*) and followed an ultra-Left line calling for immediate socialist revolution. The Comintern rejected their ultra-Left programme and approved a more moderate one. But later, in the light of Stalin's anti-social democratic policies, the party again shifted to the ultra-Left position. In the meantime, a moderate Left organization, the Revolutionary Republican Party of Iran (*Ferq-e Jomhuri-e Enghelabi-e Iran*), emerged, but was soon condemned by the Comintern. The latter's reaction became harsher when the Minority Faction of the Communist Party called for a reformist rather than a revolutionary platform and favoured a "parliamentary struggle within the framework of a single front of nationalist and democratic forces". The platform of the Minority Faction of the Communist Party, reflecting the level of socio-economic development of the time, called for industrial development, land reform, labour law, the right to organize, and other political freedoms and rights. This was in sharp contrast to the radical Left's platform, which heedless of the objective and subjective realities of the time, called for a workers/peasants' revolution in Iran.³

Thus, in the first period of party politics in Iran, the social democrat reformists along with other social reformers came under attack not only by the reactionary landed aristocracy and the conservative clerics, but also by the communist revolutionary forces and the Comintern. The coming to power of Reza Shah put an end to the activities of both radicals and reformists, and for about twenty years the Left activists had no chance of articulating their demands.

The second period of party politics, encompassing the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Majlis, began in 1941 with the removal of Reza Shah from power by the Allied forces. In the absence of a central autocratic power, political parties of diverse persuasions mushroomed. The Tudeh Party, formed in 1941, soon became one of the most important Left political organizations in the country. Its first programme, in line with the social and economic realities of the time, was gradualist and reformist. However, with its strong linkages to the Soviet Union, it soon became an appendage of the Soviets and changed its programmes accordingly. Internal differences led in 1947 to the separation of a group of cadres headed by Khalil Maleki who formed the short-lived Socialist Tudeh Society (*Jamiat-i Socialyst-e Tudeh*). This was Maleki's first attempt to establish a reformist social democratic organization, a task that he continued when joining the Toilers' Party, and later in his own organization, the Third Force (*Niru-ye Sevm*). The name,

taken from his newspaper while in the Toilers' Party, implied national independence from the West and the East. The Third Force, while fully supporting Mossadeq's National Front, advocated social democracy and rejected the Stalinist policies followed by the Tudeh Party. The Third Force was the best example of a reformist social democratic tendency in this period and, for that matter, in Iranian history.⁴ However, it came under severe attack by the Tudeh Party and Moscow.

The CIA-backed coup in 1953, which brought the shah back into power, ended the second period of Iran's party politics, and for over twenty-six years of the shah's dictatorship, there were no oppositional parties of any kind in Iran. Under brutal dictatorial rule, only clandestine political activities were possible, and several guerrilla groups and organizations, notably the Left *Fedaian-e Khalq* and the Islamist *Mujahedin-e Khalq*, emerged. These clandestine organizations inside Iran and a wide variety of political organizations in exile (originating either from the Tudeh Party or the National Front) laid the foundations for many liberal and Left political organizations that came to play a major role in the immediate years of the post-revolutionary period.

The third period, from the preparation for the 1979 revolution to the consolidation of power by the clerical regime in the early 1980s, was a period of political anarchy rather than a period of party politics. Yet the absence of a central autocratic power allowed the formation and activities of diverse political organizations and fronts. Unlike the previous periods, in which only a few, actually one or two, Left organizations were active in the political arena, this short period saw a crowd of Left organizations with diverse platforms. These included the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party, which resumed its activities after the revolution, the Organization of Iranian People's Fedaian (OIPF) (*Sazman-e Fadayian-e Khalq-e Iran*), which soon became the most popular and influential Left organization, the Workers Path (*Rah-e Kargar*), and several Maoist organizations, notably Struggle (*Peykar*). Several new organizations originating from the Confederation of Iranian Students abroad were also formed, including the Communists' League (*Ettehadieh Komunistha*), Left Unity (*Ettehad-e Chap*), and Communist Unity (*Vahdat-e Komunisti*). The National Democratic Front of Iran (NDFI) (*Jebhe-ye Demokratik-e Melli*) was also formed by several prominent liberal and Left personalities and groups. In Kurdistan, the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) also resumed its activities, and a new radical Kurdish organization, *Komala*, was formed.

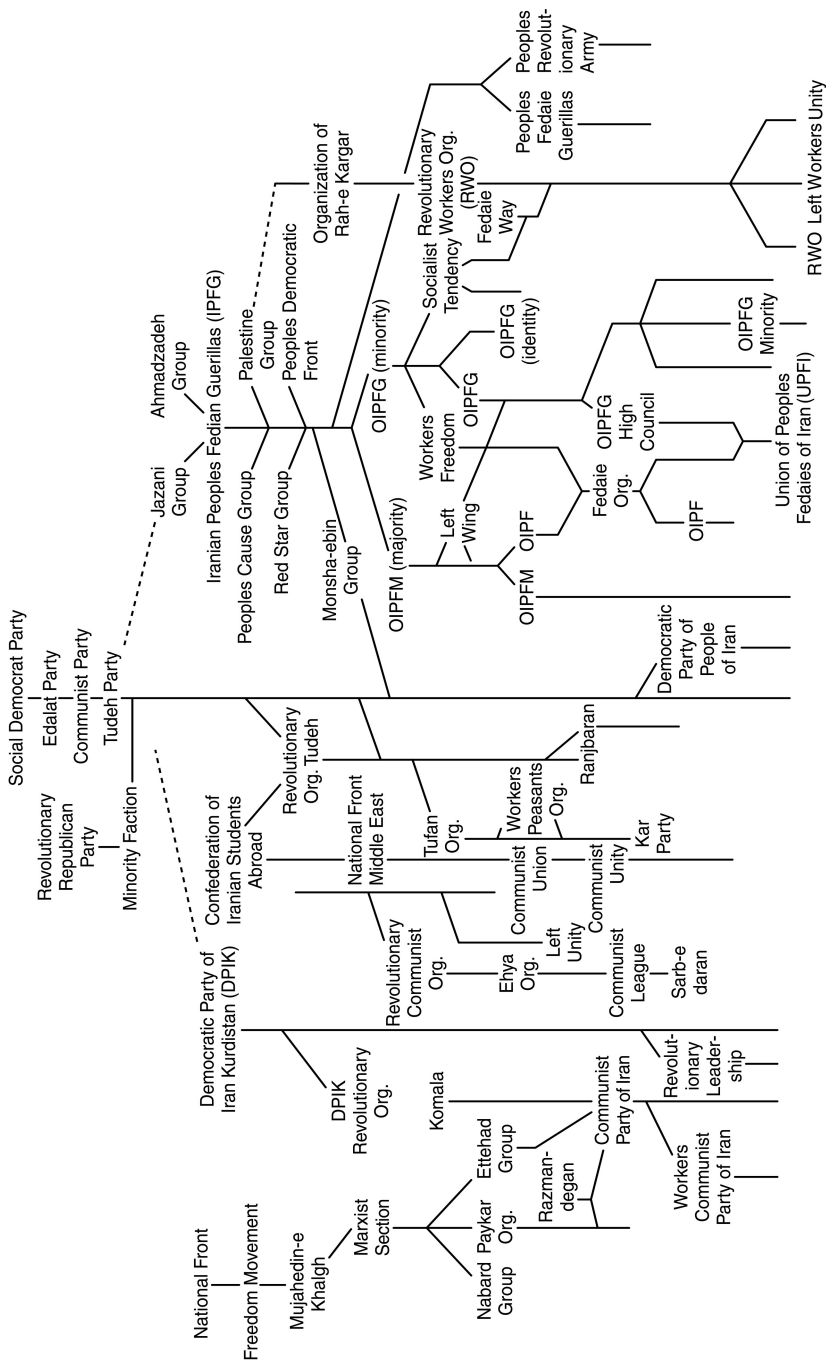
The major question confronting these Left organizations was the nature of the new state in power, and how to deal with it. For the first time, the Left was confronted with a regime which had come to power with the support of the "masses" and, in many ways and at the outset, seemed to be different from the imperial dictatorships of the previous periods. Confusions and disagreements over the issue of the nature of the regime – whether to

support or confront it – led to many splits, break-ups and much internal fighting in these organizations, particularly among the largest and most influential, the Organization of Iranian People's Fedaian.

The OIPF faced a major split in 1980, when a section advocating a radical platform, known as the OIPFG *Aghaliat* (Minority), separated from the *Aksariat* (Majority) (renamed thereafter OIPFM).⁵ Later, another group called *Jenah-e Chap* (the Left Wing) broke away from the OIPFM and subsequently joined with the Minority. In the absence of the radical elements, the majority of the leadership of the OIPFM moved closer to the Tudeh Party. In 1981, when the majority of the leadership decided to dissolve the organization and join the Tudeh Party, another major split occurred. The section opposing unification with the Tudeh Party dropped the name "Majority" from its title and continued its activities – to be discussed later – as the OIPF.⁶

Figure 11.1 broadly depicts the multitude of Left organizations. In the absence of a comprehensive and accurate source in English on Iranian Left organizations, this figure shows the extent of the splits and mergers, particularly after the revolution.⁷ Although each of these organizations and groups came up with different platforms, policies and programmes, it is possible to group them under two broad categories. On the one hand, there were those, like the Tudeh Party and the OIPFM, who sought alliance with the "progressive" factions of the regime with the hope of directing them to a "non-capitalist path" and "socialist orientation". On the other, there were radicals, like the Fedaian Minority, Peykar, Rah-e Kargar (later the Organization of Revolutionary Workers), the Communist League, and Komala (later the Communist Party of Iran), that, to different degrees, hoped to overthrow the regime and elevate the revolution to a socialist one.

The only Left organization of this period somewhat adhering to a socialist reformist platform was the Left Unity, which joined the National Democratic Front of Iran (NDFI).⁸ Left figures such as Shokrollah Paknezhad, a celebrated Left political prisoner of the time of the shah and a veteran of the Palestine Group,⁹ also joined the Front. At its formation immediately after the revolution, the NDFI attracted lots of attention. But growing repression by the new regime, lack of support and even denigration by larger Left organizations, along with internal weaknesses and differences, isolated the Front, which for the first time had brought both liberal democrat and Left activists together. The revolutionary atmosphere of the time in particular left no room for gradual reform towards socialism. Even those who adhered to a non-insurrectional, "non-capitalist path" could not be considered socialist reformists, as they were hoping to work with and within the framework of the Islamic regime, and were emphasising neither socialism nor democracy. With the consolidation of the power of the Islamists, all Left organizations – at first the revolutionary Left, and then the accommodating Left – were brutally suppressed and eliminated by the regime.



In sum, in the three periods discussed above, none of the socialist reformist organizations – the Revolutionary Republican Party and the Minority faction of the Communist Party in the 1920s, the Third Force in the late 1940s, and the Left faction of the National Democratic Front in the late 1970s – could come to prominence and turn into a major political force. Suppression by the reactionary forces, denigration by the revolutionary Left organizations and internal weaknesses determined their failures. The lack of development of democratic institutions, the experience of dictatorial rule and the short intervals of party politics, in a society torn by severe inequalities and open class conflicts and dominated by superpower politics, made impossible a gradual, peaceful and electoral road to socialism.

Socialist reformism in the post-revolutionary exile

In exile, after over a decade since the 1979 revolution, and along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iranian Left, engulfed in a deep crisis, began to review its past. For some, the rapid demise of the Left was the result of tactical mistakes, while others perceived it as the result of deviation from the correct line. For a number of Left leaders and activists, however, the failure had deep strategic, theoretical and ideological roots. The latter embarked upon a discourse rejecting Leninist policies, and instead favouring gradual reforms for attaining socialism, emphasizing democracy. The significance of this shift towards socialist reformism was that it came from revolutionaries with a very radical, pro-guerrilla warfare past.

These calls came, gradually but steadily, from several organizations, notably the OIPF that had split from the OIPFM over unification with the Tudeh Party in 1981. They came to be known as the Keshtgar Group. This was a tag placed on the organization by the leadership of the Tudeh Party and OIPFM to undermine its significance at the time. Although Ali Keshtgar (M.A. Farkhondeh) was one of the influential figures of this organization, many leading and veteran Fedaian were among the leadership, including Habatollah Moini (known as Homayoon; executed in 1986), Mehrdad Pakzad (executed in 1986), Behrooz Soleimani (jumped to his death when the Islamic Guards discovered and invaded his hideout apartment in 1983), Iraj Nayeri (the last surviving member of the celebrated Siah-kal guerrilla operation), Nasser Kakh-saz, Nasser Rahim-khani, Heybat Ghafari (three of them veterans of the Palestine Group) and many other well-known cadres. Moreover, most of the well-known intellectuals, writers, artists, academics and professionals affiliated with the Fedaian had joined this split, as had nearly all the different Commissions of the Central Committee, notably the Economics Commission. By many accounts, this was a most significant split of the Fedaian, but it was unable to bring about any major change, because as a result of internal differences, it failed to distance itself publicly from the disgraced policies of the OIPFM towards the Islamic government.

In exile, a growing number of the surviving cadres of the OIPF began to question earlier policies and ideology. In 1988, the OIPF joined with the Workers Freedom (WF) (*Azadi-Kar*) to form the Fedayee Organization.¹⁰ This alliance was short-lived, and at its first (unification) congress, the two organizations could not agree on the OIPF draft of the organization's programme and split, with a group of OIPF cadre going with the WF. The OIPF's draft programme proposed by the majority of its Central Committee contained elements of socialist reformism. After the split, and before its eventual dissolution, the OIPF continued as a separate organization. The rest of its cadres, who remained with the WF merger, were later joined by the OIPFG High Council, another section of the Fedaiian Minority, and formed the Union of People's Fedaiian of Iran (UPFI), presently a radical Left organization in exile.

Another Left organization advocating socialist reformism at the time was the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPIK). The DPIK, one of the oldest Left parties in Iran, and a most significant political force in Kurdistan,¹¹ was actually the first Iranian political organization to advocate "democratic socialism", a policy adopted at its sixth party congress in 1983, under the leadership of Dr Abdol-rahman Ghassemlou (assassinated in 1989 by agents of the Islamic Republic). Under the leadership of Dr Sadeq Sharafkandi (known as Dr Saeed, also assassinated in 1992 by agents of the Islamic Republic), the DPIK was one of the staunchest supporters of the socialist reformist tendency among OIPF cadres.¹²

The third advocate of socialist reformism at the time was the Democratic Party of the People of Iran (DPPI) (*Hezb-e Demokratik-e Mardom-e Iran*), a product of a split in the Tudeh Party in 1987, which openly rejected the traditional Left notions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, proletarian internationalism and the Leninist Party. The programme of the party, approved at its second congress, most explicitly depicted a gradualist socialist programme.¹³ Later, however, the party dropped its emphasis on socialism and turned towards social reformism within the existing socio-economic system.

Considering the diversity of the views expressed by members of these groups, it is not easy to synthesize them all. Here, I just refer to views expressed by several leading cadres in interviews with the author in the early 1990s. Ali Keshtgar, a former member of the Central Committee and Political Bureau of the OIPF, and a central figure of the reformist debates which came to be known as "the New Insight", summarized his perspective this way:¹⁴

The first and most important point is that the Iranian left arrives at the conclusion that, without wide-ranging political and individual freedoms, [social] justice is unattainable. The second important point...is that for the first time the Iranian left recognizes that

without overall economic, social and cultural progress, justice is not possible...The third point is that the New Insight is not bloc-oriented...or internationalist...and focuses on the national interests...There is also a fourth point and that relates to the notion of party. The new left puts aside the Bolshevik-style party...[and along with it] the notion of “professional revolutionaries”.

Nasser Kakh-saz, a celebrated Iranian Left political figure, and a veteran of the Palestine Group, summarizes his views about the characteristics of what he calls the views of the “non-ideological left” in the following points:

It is only through widespread political freedoms and industrial growth, that paternalistic institutions that have prevented the development of Iranian citizens...can be eliminated. [Then] there is the question of “social justice”. By talking of social justice after freedom and industrial growth, I am not undermining social justice. I consider [them] as combined. Freedom has a logical, rather than a temporal priority over social justice...without freedom we cannot speak of social justice. Yet if there is freedom, but no industrial growth, [social] welfare is not possible, and without welfare, there can be no social justice, regardless of how much we talk about it...As for the “Workers” question...the theory of class struggle that [believes] workers [should become] masters of society is not valid. The left, while defending the rights of workers, should make the workers conscious that no class should be superior among different social classes.

Nasser Rahim-khani, a former member of the OIPF Central Committee and its Political Bureau, and also another veteran of the Palestine Group and long-time political prisoner, explained his perspective of the New Insight:

The most important aspect of the new perspective is that it distances from its past dogmas...The left comes to the conclusion that it cannot explain and analyze the world...on the basis of a once-and-for-all pre-determined paradigm and ideological framework...The main elements of this development relates to a revisiting and rethinking of ideology...and the question of democracy, be it political democracy...in-party organizational democracy...or democracy between parties or within a front...Each ideology turns its believers to a cult...For its believers, ideology becomes an obstructive element in thought, in method and in behaviour...each ideology develops its own set of internal rules and criteria, a set of behavioural patterns, customs, rituals, ceremonies and manners.

Heybat Ghafari, another former OIPF Central Committee and Political Bureau member, a veteran of the Palestine Group and of the Red Star Group,¹⁵ and a long-time political prisoner, described his views on the New Insight as follows:

To understand the new perspectives, you need to consider what were the main features of the old perspective. We had a simple uni-dimensional perception of the world...Our perspectives...similar on many accounts with those of the Islamic Republic...had the following features...We thought if a regime nationalizes the economy and brings it under state control, all problems will be solved...We were advocates of a single party system...and an ideological state...We talked a lot about human rights but in reality we did not believe in these rights...and left them to the bourgeoisie to defend...Our theory of imperialism...and the notion that whoever is against imperialism is our ally...put Khomeini on our side.

Bijan Rezai (pseudonym), another Central Committee and Political Bureau member of the OIPF and long-time political prisoner, emphasized democracy as the main feature of the New Insight:

We believed that socialism and communism...could be attained through force and dictatorship. The new perspective is the revision of this way of thinking. Of course, Marx himself did not believe in progress through dictatorship and through leadership...he rejected the notion that society should be divided into a minority of decision makers and administrators, and a majority who follow their orders. Politically [the old perspective]...focused on the role of vanguards...those isolated from the society, yet the ones who should lead the masses. Organizationally...it focused on the role of a minority of active revolutionaries in an elitist organization with sharp boundaries dividing them from the masses...The new developments question all these perceptions.

All in all, these and other proponents of the New Insight emphasized democracy, rejected revolution by a minority and the dictatorship of the proletariat, and recognized the contradictions between economic growth and social justice. They implicitly appreciated degrees of capitalist development and the creation of democratic institutions as preconditions for socialism. Yet none succeeded in clarifying the ambiguities and contradictions of their arguments, and they failed to develop a theoretical framework for the new perspective. It was obvious from the start that they had totally broken with past paradigms and dogmas, but they could not develop new theories and perspectives. Their failure to theorize was a reminder of what

Kautsky had said about some European revisionists: “they have nothing to revise, as they have no theory”.¹⁶ The most troubling confusion, to which some of their opponents rightly referred,¹⁷ was whether they were “reformists” in the sense of expecting a peaceful, gradual transition to socialism, or were they just “social reformers” with the objective of reforming the existing capitalist order? How their positions on economic policies, pluralism or political liberties could be differentiated from those of the traditional liberal nationalists was not clear. They openly admitted that they had become social democrats, but what type of social democrat was not immediately obvious.

For a while, this tendency attracted attention not only among Left intellectuals, but also among many Iranian liberals and democrats. Given the historically unhappy relations between the Left and the liberals in Iranian politics, attracting the support of the non-socialist democratic figures was politically very significant. Reformism, unlike revolutionary politics, needs partners, and with the exception of the short-lived NDFI during the revolution, this coming together was almost unprecedented among Iranian political activists. But as time passed, this tendency waned for different reasons. Theoretical and organizational weaknesses, living in exile and not having the chance of getting involved in overt political action inside Iran, and confusions about the Islamic regime’s factional conflicts led to the demise of this tendency. The OIPF as an organization ceased to exist, but its leaders continued their political activities individually. The DPPI removed the emphasis on socialism from its programme, and more and more moved towards social reform within the existing system.¹⁸ The DPIK, as a result of the Islamic regime’s brutalities and the assassinations of the party’s leaders, moved to a more radical platform while maintaining its long-time slogan of “democracy in Iran and autonomy for Iran’s Kurdistan”.

In my study of this reformist tendency, I had concluded at the time that if these reformists did not put their house in order, they would go through an epistemological break, and might end up in the spectrum of liberal democrats or nationalists, and might seek alliances with the pragmatists of the Islamic regime. This seems to have happened to most of them. Almost all the leading figures of this tendency, to varying degrees, and directly or indirectly, rejected Marxism and socialist social democracy. Thus we witnessed the metamorphosis of this group of Left activists: from radical revolutionaries, they turned to reformist socialists, and finally ended up embracing liberalism.

The challenges facing the Left today

Although the socialist reformist tendency subsided organizationally, its ideas and logic persisted and have gained support both in exile and inside Iran. Yet it has still to find its proper place within the Left political spectrum. The

two extreme tendencies of the time of the revolution, those seeking alliance with the regime, and those seeking its complete overthrow, continue. New coalitions, alliances, and joint charters and platforms have emerged, but more or less on the basis of past positions. The difference is that each emphasize their definition of democracy.

On the far Right of the Left continuum is the Charter of Cooperation (*Manshur-e Ham-kari*) signed between the Organization of National Republicans of Iran (ONRI) (*Jomhuri-khahan-e Melli-e Iran*),¹⁹ the OIPFM and the DPPI. These organizations along with others of the accommodating or liberal Left, including some of the former leaders of the OIPI, became more hopeful particularly after the 1997 presidential election of Khatami, and, despite setbacks, still hope to be able to collaborate with Khatami and his supporters, known as the *Dovom-e Khordad*. The liberal Left fails to appreciate the simple fact that so long as the clerical regime enjoys a monopoly of power, it will not seek an alliance with any other force, particularly with the secular or Left liberals. Even if they are allowed to become active in the Islamic regime's electoral process, it is not clear on what basis the working class and people in general would be able to identify and differentiate them from other liberals, nationalists or the so-called moderate Islamists.

On the far Left of the continuum, in addition to different OIPIFG Minority organizations and groups, are the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (WPI) (*Hezb-e Komunist-e Kargari*), a product of a split in the Communist Party of Iran (CPI-Komala), and the CPI itself. These organizations form the ultra-radical Left, call for an immediate socialist revolution and reject liberalism as a bourgeois phenomenon. They also emphasize democracy, but their notion of democracy is in line with their past conviction that the only true democracy is the dictatorship of the proletariat or some type of workers' state. The ultra-radical Left organizations preach simplistic and utopian solutions to the exceedingly complex political and socio-economic problems of Iran, and compete with each other in their promises to the workers. As an example, the WPI in its programme written in 1995, among other things, promises an immediate six-hour working day/thirty-hour working week (which includes the time spent on transportation to and from work, lunchtime, a shower, training and union activities), with no overtime allowable. Questions concerning whether a developing economy like Iran, or any economy for that matter, can afford what is effectively about a three-hour working day, or how many shifts would be needed for factories with continuous production, or what would be the impact on costs of production, prices of commodities and productivity, do not seem to merit contemplation. In the programme, the workers alone determine the minimum wage, and they adjust it regularly. If the workers go on strike, they would continue to receive their regular full pay and benefits, and no authority has the right to decree back-to-work

legislation. The programme contains many other fantastic promises. The other Communist Party (CPI) and the OIPFG Minority programmes share, more or less, the same promises.

Other radical organizations, despite their calls for immediate socialist revolution, are less idealistic and more balanced. They include the Rah-e Kargar, which joined with several groups and formed the Left Workers' Unity (*Ettehad-e Chap-e Kargari*), and the UPFI. These two together with the DPIK have formed the Unity of Action for Democracy (*Ettehad-e Amal baray-e Demokrasi*), and cooperate in their struggle against the Islamic government.

The revolutionary Left organizations do not make it clear with whose support and how they might be able to bring about a socialist revolution. They underestimate the enormous power of the Islamic regime, and ignore their own weaknesses and their lack of linkage with the working classes. What constitutes the working class is not clear either. They pile together all categories of the working people and identify them as the working class or proletariat, and assume the numerical superiority of workers within the working population. Contrary to this view, a recent study based on the latest 1996 census shows that, of the economically active population of 14.5 million, about 5 million, or 35.6 per cent, are traditional middle classes, about 3.5 million, or 24 per cent, are new middle classes, and about 4 million, or 27 per cent, are wage workers.²⁰ If we consider the salaried middle classes as part of the working class, then we deal with an extremely heterogeneous class with diverse interests and demands. If, on the other hand, we exclude them, then the proletariat does not form the majority of the working population, as the revolutionary Left assumes to be the case. These empirical and analytical confusions are inevitably reflected in the Left's formulation of its immediate revolutionary tasks: ascertaining its potential and actual allies and developing its political agenda for mobilizing the support of particular classes.

Within this context, it is reasonable to argue that both sections of the organized Left, the liberal Left and the radical Left, have failed to provide the sound theoretical and organizational basis necessary for the creation of an effective Left alternative ready to play a significant role in Iranian politics. The faulty explanations they offer for the present popular drive towards democracy in Iran are cases in point. The liberal Left, by just adding its voice to those of the liberal nationalists or pragmatic Islamists, has made itself redundant as a Left alternative in the struggle for democracy. The radical Left, by ignoring and rejecting the calls for democracy and repeating the old dogma, has also made itself irrelevant.

Outside the organized Left, both in exile and inside Iran, however, there are a growing number of Left individuals who are critical of both the accommodating liberal and the revolutionary radical Left, and seek other alternatives. Also, despite decades of bloody repression and negative propa-

ganda by the Islamic regime, socialist and secular ideas are still influential, and even a new breed of Islamic pragmatist liberals, who have become the champion of democracy and social justice, have generously given themselves the title of "Left".

A socialist social democratic platform could attract a significant number of these Left individuals. But neither the organizational nor the theoretical means of such an alternative are yet in place. Theoretically, many of the unresolved issues of the past need to be addressed. A striking aspect of all the discussions of the OIPF proponents of social democracy was that they seemed not to be aware of the actual problems faced by social democrats around the world, problems that for decades have confronted Western Marxists or Left scholars and political activists.²¹ It is true that the social democratic parties in Western Europe after the Second World War, compared to the communist parties, which often remained small and isolated, were more successful in imposing reforms in favour of the working class. Yet, as Przeworski shows, "in the process of electoral competition, socialist parties are forced to undermine the organization of workers as a class".²² In order to obtain a majority, these parties have had to appeal, in addition to the workers, to other social classes, particularly the growing middle classes. This has meant compromises, undermining the ultimate goal of socialism, and in many cases confrontations with labour unions. In the case of Greece, as Petras rightly shows, the social democrat government failed even to implement major aspects of its economic policies.²³

At the theoretical level, Norberto Bobbio rightly talks about the "ambiguous nature" of the concept of democracy manifested in the notion of social democracy, and the ambiguity that reflects itself in the "double-edged nature of the critique" of both the liberals on the Right and the socialists on the Left. The intransigent liberals claim that social democracy "diminishes the liberty of the individual", while "the impatient socialists condemn it as a compromise between old and new which, far from favouring the realization of socialism, hinders or renders it altogether inoperable".²⁴ In most countries, from Spain to France and the Canadian Provinces, where social democrats have come to power, it has become more and more difficult to differentiate between their policies and those of their rival liberal or Right parties. Also, again as Przeworsky notes, we need to consider that social reforms are not necessarily irreversible and cumulative.

The situation is far more complicated for a Third World setting. Most Third World countries have had, to different degrees, long reigns of terror and dictatorship, which have blocked the development of democratic institutions. Moreover, because of limited productive capabilities and the wide gap existing between the rich and the poor, these countries are faced with severe social cleavages and conflicts. Obviously, an atmosphere of repression and poverty is not conducive to moderation. Situations such as these nurture radicalism and make the instant and quick solutions offered by the radical

Left appealing. This is one of the most serious problems facing the proponents of social democracy in Third World countries, among them socialist reformist tendencies among the Iranian Left.

For the Left to play a serious role in Iranian politics, it needs first and foremost to develop theoretical and analytical frameworks reflecting the realities of Iranian society and the economy, and to forge meaningful links with diverse classes and strata of the working population. At the theoretical level, the fact is that classical Marxism, preoccupied with economic sources of power and with the proletariat, never developed a theory of democracy. Liberalism, on the other hand, preoccupied with the free market and individual choice, provided a wealth of knowledge about the workings of democracy, though in the interests of the capitalist class. These two schools of thought are no doubt the opposite of each other and are antagonistic on all counts. Yet for socialism to overcome its political weaknesses, it has no other choice but to borrow aspects of liberalism that are conducive to individual, social, and political liberties and development. While liberalism and socialism are contradictory, this is not the case when it comes to the question of democracy. Bobbio rightly suggests that liberal or capitalist democracy is more in contradiction with democracy than socialist democracy. Many Left scholars in the West have worked towards such reconciliation. Nicos Poulantzas's "socialist pluralism", C.B. Macpherson's "participatory democracy", David Held's "Democratic Autonomy", Gregor McLennan's "Marxism-Pluralism debate" and many others are great theoretical achievements from which the Iranian Left can learn.²⁵

As discussed elsewhere, the progress of the working-class movement, which is the most important preoccupation of the Left activists, is more than ever linked to the movement for democracy. Removing the obstacles standing in the way of independent trade unions and other workers' organizations is the most immediate task. This is not possible without achieving other democratic freedoms, including freedom of expression and a free press. Without this, the Left intelligentsia cannot develop effective communicative and political links with the workers' movement, and without such a mass base, it will remain isolated and in illusion, as it is today. Likewise, without such linkages with the Left, the workers movement, in turn, will be confined to sparse, sporadic actions at the factory level, as it is today.²⁶

Social development is a multifaceted process that consists of at least four interrelated and contradictory dimensions: economic growth, political democracy, social justice and environmental balance. Contrary to liberalism's claims, there is sufficient global evidence to support the argument that capitalism has neither been nor will it be capable of providing conditions for the development of all these elements. The liberal perspective has not had the capability or the intention to defend the rights of the working class. Similarly, contrary to the claims of Marxist-Leninists, "scientific socialism" has neither been nor will it be able to resolve complex develop-

mental problems. The experience of the revolutionary Left around the world shows that insurrection of a minority only adds to the miseries of the working people.

The attainment of the ideals of socialism is a long and protracted process and needs sustained progressive and gradual change. This gradualism does not mean that socialists must sit and wait. Rather, it involves radical activism and a serious struggle for the creation of “counter-hegemony” in civil society. The experience of Left movements throughout the world in over a century shows that socialist ideals can neither come about by themselves, nor can “the revolutionary alchemists” – as Marx characterized Blanqui and the Blanquists – bring them about overnight.

Notes

- 1 R. Milliband, *Marxism and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 155.
- 2 E. Bernstein, *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 142.
- 3 For the programme and the background of the Minority Faction of the *Ferq-e Komunist*, see H. Ahmadi, *Red Star and the History of the Communist Party of Iran* [in Persian] (Sweden: Baran Publishers, 1993).
- 4 For Khalil Maleki and his politics, see Homa Katouzian, “The strange politics of Khalil Maleki”, Chapter 7 of the present volume (pp. 165–188), and *Memoirs of Khalil Maleki* [in Persian] (London: Jebheh, 1983). Katouzian, however, rejects the idea that Maleki was a social democrat, because according to Katouzian, “social democracy is a Western European phenomenon and has no relevance to Iran”. Instead, he prefers to call him an “Iranian Democrat”.
- 5 The first split in the OIPFG had taken place at the time of the shah, when in 1976 a small group of cadres, rejecting guerrilla tactics, joined the Tudeh Party. The second split came in 1979, when another small group, headed by Ashraf Dehghani, a celebrated female guerrilla, left the organization.
- 6 See S. Rahnema, *Re-birth of Social Democracy in the Iranian Left Movement* [in Persian] (Stockholm: Baran Publishers, 1996).
- 7 No comprehensive or up-to-date source on Iranian Left organizations is available in English. The recent book by Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999), provides a good description of a few post-revolutionary Left organizations, particularly the Minority section of the Fedaian, although it tends to exaggerate the Minority’s influence in factories and neighbourhoods. The author even questions the fact that the Minority consisted of a minority of the membership (p. 111), a fact that even hardline Minority leaders have not denied (see Tavakol, “Fedaian’s objectives...” [in Persian], *Ettihad-e Kar* 81 (Dey 1379/July 2000)). The author asserts that “While prior to revolution there had been perhaps a dozen such groups [adhering to Marxism], after it their numbers grew to perhaps over 80, and this number increased as Marxist groups began to fragment into smaller units.” Such assertions are neither helpful nor accurate. We never had “over 80” Marxist “groups, organizations, and parties” after the revolution. Coverage of other splits within the Fedaian, and accounts of other important organizations, such as Peykar, Rah-e Kargar and the DPIK, are very limited and unbalanced. At the time of the publication of the book, many mergers and coalitions had taken place among different Left organizations,

- but no information is provided on them. There are also other weaknesses, particularly in relation to the analysis of the failure of the Left.
- 8 The Left Unity was formed by several groups of veterans of the Iranian Student Confederation including the Workers Group, the Left Group and, for a while, the Communist Unity. For an account of the National Democratic Front and the Left Unity, see H. Showkat, *A Glance From Within the Iranian Left Movement: Interview with Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani* [in Persian] (Saarbrücken: Baztab Verlag, 1989), pp. 407–30.
 - 9 The Palestine Group was the name given to a group of Iranian Left activists who had decided to join the Palestinian movement to learn guerrilla warfare. They consisted of three different circles, all of whom were captured by SAVAK, and, because of their heroic defence in the shah's courts, became very popular. Under international pressure, they were not executed and many of them later formed the leadership of different Left political organizations.
 - 10 Contrary to what Behrooz says in *Rebels with a Cause*, the Fedayee Organization was not a name change of the Keshtgar Group (OIPF); rather, it was the merger with WF. Several leading cadres of the OIPFG Minority, including the leader of the split, Heydar, and others such as Parviz Navidi and Rasoul Azar-noosh, who had left the Minority, originally formed WF.
 - 11 Behrooz in *Rebels with a Cause* asserts that between the 1950s and 1979, the party "existed on paper more than in reality" (p. 130). Compared to other organizations, the DPKI had a significant mass base. During the period in question, there were three military assaults against the party by the shah's forces, and in the same period, the DPKI held its second and third congresses. Behrooz does not either mention the successive assassinations by the Islamic regime of the party's top leaders.
 - 12 S. Rahnema, interview with the secretary general of the DPIK, Dr S. Sharafkandi, *Mehregan* 2(3) (Fall 1993).
 - 13 DPPI, "Theoretical-political foundations" [in Persian] (1990), pp. 4–17.
 - 14 Unless otherwise mentioned, all references to the proponents and opponents of the New Insight are based on my interviews with these figures. See Rahnema, *Re-birth of Social Democracy*.
 - 15 The Red Star Group was an underground circle preparing for guerrilla warfare in the late 1960s. The group was captured in 1970.
 - 16 K. Kautsky, quoted in D. McLellan, *Marxism After Marx* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p.22.
 - 17 My interviews with M. Shalgooni, P. Navidi, M. Azami, M. Vahabi (Baba-ali) and B. Moazami (Mahmood), in Rahnema, *Re-birth of Social Democracy*.
 - 18 My interview with B. Amir-Khosravi, the secretary general of the DPPI, in Rahnema, *Re-birth of Social Democracy*.
 - 19 The ONRI was formed in 1984 by a coalition of various political organizations and national personalities with diverse persuasions. It is a front-type democratic organization which has drawn its cadres from liberal and Left organizations such as the National Front, the Society of Iranian Socialists, the Moslem Peoples' Party (*Hezb-i Khalgh-i Musalman*), the Peykar Organization, the Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh, Left Unity and the National Democratic Front.
 - 20 H. Moghissi and S. Rahnema, "The working class and the Islamic state in Iran", Chapter 13 of the present volume (pp. 280–301).
 - 21 See, among others, W.E. Paterson and A.H. Thomas (eds), *The Future of Social Democracy: Problems and Prospects of Social Democratic Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
 - 22 A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 3.

- 23 J. Petras, "The contradictions of Greek socialism', *New Left Review* 163 (May-June 1987).
- 24 N. Bobbio, *Liberalism and Democracy* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 78.
- 25 Among others, see G. McLennan, *Marxism, Pluralism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), D. Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), and R.G. Peffer, *Marxism, Morality, and Social Justice* (Princeton, CT: Princeton University Press, 1990).
- 26 S. Rahnema and H. Moghissi, "Clerical oligarchy and the question of 'democracy' in Iran", *Monthly Review*, March 2001.

THE ISLAMIC LEFT

From radicalism to liberalism

Ervand Abrahamian

The works of Ali Shariati should be relegated to a museum of historical studies.

Akbar Ganji

Introduction

Since the 1979 revolution, religious intellectuals in Iran have reinvented themselves. Before 1979, they championed root-and-branch revolution and drastic socio-economic transformations. In recent decades, they have lowered their expectations to piecemeal reforms, particularly political liberalization. The key words in their previous lexicon were *enghelab* (revolution), *emperialism* (imperialism), *shahid* (martyrdom), *mostazafin* (dispossessed), *towhid* (solidarity), *khish* (roots), and *gharbzadegi* (Western intoxication). The key words in their current lexicon are *demokrasi* (democracy), *azadi* (liberty), *barabari* (equality), *pularalizm* (pluralism), *hoquq-e beshar* (human rights), *jame-e madani* (civil society), *moderniyat* (modernity), *goft-e-gou* (dialogue), *moshkerat-e siyasi* (political participation), and, a new term coined in the late 1990s, *shahrvandi* (citizenship).

This article has modest intentions. It aims to offer some intellectual reasons for the change of focus, language, and priorities. It does not intend to provide a sociological analysis; nor an in-depth study of the political, social, and economic pressures that have brought about this transformation; nor examine the religious intellectuals' complex relationships with their secular counterparts, especially the Marxist Left. It will illustrate the larger intellectual metamorphosis by contrasting Ali Shariati, the paramount figure for the 1960s, with Abdul-Karim Soroush – the equivalent figure for the 1990s. In fact, Soroush and his cohorts, such as Akbar Ganji, have often described themselves as Shariati's intellectual heirs and have praised him as the “ideologue of the Islamic Revolution.”

Fathers

Jalal Al-e Ahmad's *Gharbzadegi* (*Western Intoxication*) – published first in 1962 – marked a seismic shift in the whole language of modern Iran. Until then, reformers, even pious ones such as Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq, had avoided making overt appeals to religion. They shunned religion because of their own personal experiences during the Constitutional Revolution when conservatives, headed by Shaykh Fazlallah Nouri, had opposed reforms, including representative government, civic codes, women's rights, equality before the law, and individual freedoms. They had denounced such reform as “foreign innovations” that would inevitably pave the way to republicanism, socialism, communism, anarchism, nihilism, and naturalism (*natouralism*).¹ Shaykh Nouri had issued *fatwas* (religious decrees) sentencing to death leading constitutionalists on the grounds that they were secret Babis, heretics (*kafers*), non-believers (*lamazhab*), and apostates (*murtads*). Reformers retaliated by hanging him for instigating these deaths.

In a volte-face, Al-e Ahmad in 1962 praised Shaykh Nouri as a “symbol” of cultural authenticity and a “martyr” to blind imitation of the West. “To my eyes,” he declared, “the corpse of this great man hanging on the gallows is like a flag raised over the country to signify the triumph of *gharbzadegi*.”² In a footnote, he reassured readers that progressive clerics could use *ejtehad* (judicial reasoning) to overcome any “medieval vestiges” found in their ranks and in traditional scriptures. Al-e Ahmad had rushed headlong into an arena where earlier reformers had feared to tread.

Shariati pursued to the full the trail Al-e Ahmad had blazed. In the course of a short but prolific writing career, he produced numerous pamphlets and innumerable lectures, which, together, came to fill over thirty-five volumes. In them, he relentlessly pursued the theme that Islam, especially Shi'i Islam, was a radical ideology that could outdo Marxism in championing revolution and the class struggle as well as in opposing feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism.³

According to Shariati, the Prophet had been sent to establish not just a new religion but a dynamic society in permanent revolution towards a classless utopia. Imam Ali had opposed the early Caliphs because they had compromised with the powers-that-be and betrayed the true mission. Imam Hussein had died at Karbala in a valiant attempt to keep alive the revolutionary content of Islam. And the contemporary *ruwshanfekran* (intelligentsia) had the prime duty to rediscover and revitalize the original meaning of revolutionary Islam.

In Shariati's hands, stock scriptural terms attained radically new meanings. *Ummat* (Community) was transformed into dynamic society in permanent revolution towards the classless utopia; *towhid* (monotheism) into social solidarity; *imamat* into charismatic leadership; *jihad* (crusade) into liberation struggle; *mujahed* (crusader) into revolutionary fighter; *shahid* (martyr) into revolutionary hero; *momen* (pious) into true fighters; *mazhab*

(religion) and *din* (religion) into a total ideology; *kafer* (unbeliever) into passive and resigned subject; *shirk* (idol worship) into submission to despotic power; *tafsir* (scriptural commentary) into extracting radical meaning from sacred texts; the Cain (Qabil) and Abel (Habil) fable into a metaphor for the ageless class struggle; *entezar* (expectation) – as in the coming of the Messiah on judgement day – into preparations for the imminent revolution; and *mostazafin* (meek) – as in “The meek shall inherit the world” – into the oppressed masses, as in Franz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. He also saw Imam Hussein as an early-day Che Guevara; Karbala, Muharram, and Ashura as symbols of heroic struggles; Fatemeh – the Prophet’s daughter, Imam Ali’s wife, and Imam Hussein’s mother – as an example of the true revolutionary woman; and Zaynab – Imam Hussein’s sister – as the exemplary woman who kept alive the true message for future generations. In other words, true Islam was seen as a “total ideology” with “solutions” to all problems – “whether ethical, moral, philosophical, political, culture, social, historical, or economical.”⁴

Shariati, moreover, elaborated on Al-e Ahmad’s polemics against the West. He argued that *bazgasht beh khish* (return to one’s roots) did not necessarily mean the recreation of a backward and primitive past, since the essence of the true Islam has been dynamic, radical, and innovative. The *Ummat* had been born in a state of permanent revolution towards the ideal classless society. Thus, Iran could look both forwards and backwards – forwards to a utopian future and backwards to an ideal past. In other words, Iran could be innovative as well as authentic to itself. In his own words:

Now I want to turn to a fundamental question raised by intellectuals in Africa, Latin America, and Asia: the question of “return to one’s roots.”...Since World War II, many intellectuals in the Third World, whether religious or nonreligious, have stressed that their societies must return to their roots and rediscover their history, their culture, and their popular language. I want to stress that nonreligious progressives as well as some religious ones have reached this conclusion. In fact, the main advocates of “return to one’s roots” have not been religious – Franz Fanon in Algeria, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania, Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya, Leopold Senghor in Senegal...When we in Iran say “return to one’s roots” we are not really saying return to our racial (Aryan) roots. I categorically reject racism, fascism, and reactionary returns. Moreover, Islamic civilization has worked like scissors. It has cut us off completely from our Islamic, especially Shi’i, roots.⁵

Shariati, furthermore, perpetuated the marked tendency of Al-e Ahmad to discount the conservative opposition. He argued that the task of understanding the essence of true Islam has been handed over from the

conservative clergy to the intelligentsia, who could use reason (*ejtehad*) and knowledge of society to wipe clean the cobwebs of history, dispense with esoteric mumbo-jumbo, and, thereby, unveil the true essence of radical Islam. They would initiate an Islamic Renaissance – even an Islamic Reformation. They would unmask the difference between radical Red Shi‘ism and reactionary Black Shi‘ism. They would raise public awareness; reveal the fundamental class divisions of society; locate the true place of the country in historical development; lead the way to the revolution; and, after the revolution, provide the revolutionary elite that would have the expertise to lead the way to the utopian future. For Shariati, the forthcoming revolution would produce “the dictatorship of the intelligentsia” that would chart the road towards the classless utopia.

In his revolutionary exhortations, Shariati tended to be dismissive of democracy in general and of liberal democracy in particular. He rarely mentioned the Enlightenment concept of natural rights. Although he sprinkled his writings with such names as Luther, Stalin, Trotsky, Fanon, Toynbee, Heidegger, and Carrel (a Catholic pro-Vichy scientist), he rarely referred to Hume, Kant, Voltaire, Locke, Thomas Paine, and Diderot. On rare occasions when he mentioned the Enlightenment, it was to criticize it for supplanting divine premises with humanistic ones. He clearly saw natural rights to be contrary to divine rights. In a pamphlet aptly entitled *Ma‘bad* (*Place of Worship*), he confessed that the “spark and dazzle, the noise and fireworks” of the Enlightenment had forced him to take shelter under the reassuring shade of the traditional mosque.⁶ In another pamphlet entitled *Mankind’s Four Prisons*, he listed “naturalism,” together with racism, materialism, and historicism, as major threats to “human freedom.”⁷ He saw naturalism as “denying mankind’s spiritual dimension.”

Similarly, in *Ummat va Imam* (*Community and Leadership*), Shariati claimed that liberal democracy was inherently “stagnant.” For in such systems, the “conservative masses” who resemble “immature children” are easily led astray by “corrupt capitalists” – especially “Mafia gangsters, Jewish newspaper magnates, and owners of cabaret and gambling dens.”⁸ The best way to prevent such a system from emerging after a revolution – especially in the Third World – was to have an *Imamat*. He defined this as the rule of the committed intelligentsia. He claimed that the only ideal society to appear in world history was that of Medina under the Prophet. In these brief years, he claimed, the whole *Ummat* led by a true imam and formed of active citizens – not of rulers and ruled, rich and poor, exploiters and exploited – had been in permanent revolution against traditional authorities, old-fashioned cultures, primitive superstitions, and, of course, exploitative socio-economic structures. There, “the people’s rights” (*hoquq-e mardom*) – as opposed to phony “individual rights” (*hoquq-e fardfard*) – had been fully respected.

Shariati received instant acclaim from college and high-school students of the 1960s. In the words of one prominent figure in the revolution: “Shariati

drew the youth into the revolutionary movement by creating a new *maktab* [doctrine].”⁹ His radicalism, particularly his Marxist analysis and class rhetoric, resonated well to those eager for the overthrow of the whole Pahlavi establishment and also fascinated by contemporary world events – student protests in the West, Che in Cuba, Mao and his Cultural Revolution in China, the emerging guerrilla organizations in Latin America, and, of course, national liberation struggles throughout the Third World, especially in Algeria and Vietnam. Moreover, his religious outlook appealed directly to those concerned about authenticity, national roots, and cultural imperialism – i.e. about *gharbzadegi*. Two terms define this generation’s outlook: *gharbzadegi*, and *chapzadegi*, a lesser but equally important term, which can be translated as “awestruck by the Left.” It meant being ultra-radical in order to outflank the rest of the Left. By mixing Marxism with Islam, Shariati had found a potent cocktail. Although Shariati mesmerized and energized many, his appeals to religion caused concern among secularists – both among the older generation of reformers and among his own contemporary Marxists. One such contemporary, in an underground pamphlet entitled *Marxist Islam or Islamic Marxist*, warned that such reckless exploitation of religion was tantamount to placing one’s own head under a sword of Damocles. For, he argued, the traditional clergy could at will wield that sword to decapitate those who disagreed with their reactionary interpretation of the Koran, sunna, hadiths, sharia, and thirteen centuries of Islamic history.¹⁰ If Michel Foucault had been known then, these secularists could have argued that by using religion, Shariati was rushing headlong into a discourse with its own language, symbols, signifiers, logic, conventions, truth, mentality, and, most important of all, conceptual parameters. In short, he was jumping headlong out of a secular discourse into a religious one that would inevitably whirlpool down and backwards into seventh-century Arabia. In other words, Shariati’s mixture could be lethal not only to the regime but also to his own colleagues.

Children

These warnings proved prophetic. Shariati had the good fortune to die before the revolution, but his colleagues lived to see their worst secular fears be realized. The revolution brought to power not the intellectuals but the ulama. The rule of the revolutionary elite turned out to be the “dictatorship of the mullahariat” – a term coined by a Shariati associate.¹¹ The Islamic Republic became a clerical republic capped and sanctified with the *Velayat-e Faqeh* (Guardianship of the Jurist) – a notion rarely heard before the revolution. The new constitution gave democracy, *vox populi*, and popular sovereignty short shift in favor of theocracy, *vox dei*, and clerical authority.¹²

It placed the country under the supervision of a clerical leader (*Rahbar*) chosen by a *Majles-e Khebragan* (Assembly of Religious Experts). Ayatollah

Khomeini was hailed Leader of the Revolution, Founder of the Islamic Republic, Spokesman of the Oppressed, and, most potent of all, Imam of the Muslim *Ummat*. Upon his death in 1989, Hojjat al-Islam Khamenei inherited many of these titles. The Leader, according to the constitution, has the power to “determine the interests of Islam” and set directions for the state; mediate between the three branches of government; eliminate presidential candidates and dismiss the president if necessary; and grant amnesty, declare war and peace, and convene defense councils. Moreover, he appoints the chief of the judiciary, judges and prosecutors to special courts, commanders to all branches of the armed forces, directors to the radio-television network, supervisors to the large religious endowments, and preachers to the major Friday mosques. Furthermore, he, together with the chief judge, appoints jurists to the powerful twelve-man Council of Guardians (*Showra-ye Negahban*). This council has the authority to ensure that bills passed by parliament conform to the sharia. It has further gained the power to vet all candidates to the majlis and to the Assembly of Experts.

What is more, immediately after the revolution, the regime codified the chief features of the sharia into the *Qanon-e Qesas* (Retribution Law) and the *Qanon-e Tazir* (Law of Discretionary Punishments).¹³ These laws give judges authority to execute those “sowing corruption on earth,” “declaring war on God,” and “blaspheming against divine figures.” They impose *hadd* (divine punishments) for fornication, habitual drinking, and apostasy (*murtad*). They also impose *tazir* (discretionary punishments) for illicit kissing, failing to wear proper *hejab* (headgear), and libeling officials, including judges and members of the Council of Guardians. Based on traditional morality and the ancient principle of an “eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a limb for a limb, and a life for a life,” these two laws resort to physical punishments – often in public; use lashings for such “moral offenses” as drinking, revealing hair, or socializing with non-family members of the opposite sex; permit capital sentences for victimless crimes – lapidation for adultery and hanging for homosexuality; allow the victim’s family to participate in physical punishments – even in executions and gouging of eyes; stipulate draconian measures against property crimes – notably amputations for theft; and discriminate against women, non-Muslims, and the poor – some lives are valued more than others, and court evidence provided by women and non-Muslims is deemed worth only half that given by Muslim males. At the same time, the judicial system proceeded to purge women from its ranks, and the family courts brought back stock sharia rulings on sensitive issues – men were again permitted to divorce at will, polygamy restrictions were relaxed, fathers were favored for child custody, and the marriageable age for girls was lowered back to 9.

Shariati was probably turning in his grave. Islamic justice had turned out to be a version of the sharia resembling more Leviticus than modern law; the *Imamat* had turned into a Fuhrership; and stock terms such as *ummat*,

mostazafin, *tafsir*, *towhid*, *maktab*, and *mahzab* had regained their traditional meanings. To use Shariati's imagery, Shi'ism had turned out to be more Black than Red.

Not surprisingly, this outcome caused a profound ideological crisis among young Muslims who had enthusiastically participated in the Islamic Revolution. Some, notably the *Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq* (Organization of the People's Crusaders) – better known simply as the Mojahedin – declared that the revolution had been betrayed, took up arms against the Islamic Republic, and, setting up bases outside the country, turned into a cult resembling medieval Shi'i sects. Its leader elevated himself into an infallible imam with the power to determine policy and reinterpret thirteen centuries of Islam.

Others, especially those with family ties to the ruling elite, swallowed their radicalism, placed themselves under the patronage of influential clerics, and took up high positions in the new regime. Meanwhile, a few exiled themselves to Europe, where they began quietly to develop a critique of the Islamic Republic, of the Mojahedin, and, implicitly, of Shariati.¹⁴ But most radical Muslims kept their reservations to themselves – especially while the Iraqi war continued – and waited for a better day.

The opportunity came in the 1990s – after the ending of the war in 1988, the death of Khomeini in 1989, and the landslide victory of Hojjat al-Islam Muhammad Khatemi in the presidential elections of May 1997. Younger intellectuals – almost all former admirers of Shariati initiated into politics by the revolution and the hostage crisis – re-entered the political arena with a brand new and liberal reinterpretation of Islam. Their intellectual laureate is a chemist-turned-philosopher named Abdul-Karim Soroush (born Hussein Dabbagh). The movement's most articulate members are journalists and younger middle-ranking clerics. Among the former are Akbar Gangi, Saed Hajjarian, Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, Mohammad-Mojtahed Shabestari, Abbas Abdi, Hamid-Reza Jalaipour, and Ibrahim Nabavi. Among the latter are Hojjat al-Islams Yousefi Eshkevari, Abdollah Nouri, Mohsen Saedzadeh, Mohsen Kadivar, Mohammad Shabestari, and, to some extent, President Khatemi himself. Together they are known as the Khordad Movement, named after the month when Khatemi swept the polls.

These intellectuals reach the public through journals, particularly *Kiyan* (named after an ancient Iranian dynasty), and mass circulation papers such as *Khordad*, *Iran*, *Jameh (Society)*, *Tous (Tous)*, *Neshat (Joy)*, *Salaam (Greeting)*, *Hamshahri (Fellow Citizen)*, *Asr-e Azadegan (Age of Freeborn)*, *Arya (Aryan)*, *Zan (Woman)*, *Azad (Freedom)*, *Jehan (The World)*, *Jehan-e Islam (World of Islam)*, *Cheshmandaz (Outlook)*, *Siyasat (Politics)*, and *Sobh-e Emruz (This Morning)* – many of which have been closed down at one time or another in the last two years. Their main constituencies are the young – especially college and high-school students, young professionals, women – particularly those working outside the home, and younger wage

earners affiliated with *Khaneh-e Kargar* (Workers' House) and its paper *Kar va Kargar* (*Work and Worker*). They also receive support from the older and more secular intelligentsia. In the 1997 presidential elections, these groups helped give Khatemi 70 per cent of the vote in a campaign that drew nearly 80 per cent of the electorate. Soroush and his *Kiyan* are for this generation what Al-e Ahmad and his *Gharbzadegi* had been for the earlier one – a seismic shift in intellectual discussions.

Soroush has gone furthest on this road towards a new liberalism. He has gone so far as to accept the Enlightenment premise that all human beings – irrespective of religion and gender – are born in nature with reason as well as with equal and inalienable rights.¹⁵ Without entering a polemic against Shariati and without explicitly revising his own earlier beliefs, Soroush freely cites Karl Popper's *Open Society and Its Enemies* and stresses that in recent decades, "some have fattened up Islam so much that it has become bloated." The task at hand, he adds, is to "reintroduce the true essence of religion" and to slim Islam down back to its proper size – that of personal piety, individual morality, inner truths, the search for the divine presence, and the transcendence of earthly concerns. True religion has no defects; but human understanding of religion can produce dangerous defects. Islam should not be used as a dogmatic system of thought encompassing all aspects of life – law, politics, economics, science, national identity, and social behaviour. Instead, it should be kept pure, pristine, and uncontaminated by mundane and profane issues – especially politics. In a recent interview given in the West, he went straight to the core of his new thinking:

The greatest pathology of religion that I have noticed after the revolution is that it has become plump, even swollen. Many claims have been made in the name of religion and many burdens are put on its shoulders. It is neither possible nor desirable for religion, given its ultimate mission, to carry such a burden. This means purifying religion, making it lighter and more buoyant, in other words, rendering religion more slender by sifting, whittling away, erasing the superfluous layers off the face of religiosity.¹⁶

By reducing faith into personal piety, Soroush is able to sever Islam from its many contemporary entanglements – from the ulama; from the *Velayat-e Faqeh*; from *feqh*, the sharia, and the *Qanon-e Qesas*; from *fatwas* against apostates and those who "sow corruption on earth"; and from laws that blatantly contradict the UN Declaration of Human Rights – especially the premise that all humans, irrespective of religion and gender, are equal before the law. He even praises Hume, Kant, and the "extra religious concept" of natural rights – something no avowedly Muslim writer had ever before done in Iran. Some would say that Soroush is providing Islam with a human face.

Accepting individual rights, Soroush favors a political system that would be pluralistic, democratic, representative, respectful of others, and not favoring any particular strata – including the clergy. “The clergy,” he wrote, “has always been an organized party; now it is a party in power that has eliminated all of its rivals.” Where he finds a clash between the conventional interpretation of Islam and the concept of natural rights, he forthrightly sides with the latter:

The language of religion (especially that of Islam as exemplified by the Qur’an and the Traditions) is the language of duties, not rights. In these texts, human beings are given commandments by a supremely sovereign authority. The language of shariah is that of commanding...In the modern world people have the right (not the duty) to have a religion; they are free to be religious or nonreligious.¹⁷

He adds that in the past, people killed for their beliefs, but in the modern age, killing others for their beliefs is an unacceptable breach of human rights. He describes those who oppose individual rights as “monopolists,” “fundamentalists” (*asoulgari*), “traditionalists” (*sunnatgari*), “reactionaries” (*mohafezeh-e kar*), “fanatics,” “right-wing extremists,” “fascists,” and “Stalinists.” The rhetoric heated up in 2000–01 – in anticipation of the new presidential elections – when club-wielding gangs known as *hezbollahs* (“God’s partisans”) broke up Soroush’s public meetings. Meanwhile, conservative prosecutors dragged to trial liberal journalists such as Akbar Ganji and closed down more newspapers. And the Special Clerical Court accused Nouri, Kadivar, Eshevari, Saedzadeh, Shabestari, and other Hojjat al-Islams of assorted crimes against Islam and the Islamic Republic. Eshkevari was charged with “apostasy”; he had argued that the veil originated in traditional Middle Eastern cultures – not in Islam per se. Kadivar was charged with undermining the Islamic Republic; he had written that Khomeini’s concept of *Velayat-e Faqeh* could not be found in the Quran, the hadiths, nor in the doctrines of the Twelve Imams.¹⁸ Saedzadeh was stripped of his clerical rank and forbidden to write; he had lectured in favor of a “modern religious law” (*feqh-e modern*) and “Islamic feminism” (*feminizm*).¹⁹ These sentences were designed to silence the liberals. Instead, they further inflamed the electorate and reinforced public perceptions of the conservatives as desperate reactionaries eager to hang on to power at all costs.

The Khordad intellectuals can be described as both secular and liberal. They, however, avoid both labels, preferring to describe themselves as “modernists.” The term “secular” is too associated with the West, the Marxist Left, and, paradoxically, the Pahlavi past. In Khomeini’s diatribes, *layek* (secular) was tantamount to being *taqut* (despotic), *lamazhab* (irreli-

gious), *shirk* (polytheistic), and *kafer* (unbeliever). Similarly, “liberal” carries with it the baggage of nineteenth-century laissez-faire capitalism – imperialism, destruction of local industries, giving priority to civil liberty over human equality, and sanctifying wealth and private property at the expense of social justice and economic reform. These intellectuals are reluctant to explore the fact that being “modern” does not necessarily mean respecting individual rights and political pluralism. After all, Stalinism, Maoism, and Fascism, including Nazism, were highly “modern.” Of course, this intellectual reluctance is not limited to the intelligentsia in Iran.

Archaeology of knowledge

A Foucault excavating political thought in twentieth-century Iran would be struck not by continuities but by gross discontinuities. The first generation – the grandparents of the present intellectuals – favored secularism. They separated Islam from the state, eased clerics out of the public sphere, supplanted the sharia with Napoleonic-type civil codes, and, even when personally pious, shunned religious polemics. It championed the secularism of the French Revolution.

The second generation – epitomized by Shariati – did an about-turn. It Islamicized all and sundry – especially political culture. It criticized, on the one hand, the older intellectuals for imitating the West, and, on the other, the conservative clerics for not doing enough to take religion to the larger public. It aspired to make Islam into a radical ideology – one that would compete with the current Maoist perceptions of Marxism.

The third generation – led by Soroush – has done another about-turn. Without conceding that the caution of their predecessors may have been well placed, it now argues that true Islam is personal piety and not total ideology. It also favors a political system that would be pluralistic, democratic, representative, republican, and based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity – i.e. one that would be secular and liberal. Unknowingly, the grandchildren have readopted the core concepts of their grandparents.

In short, in this archaeological dig, Foucault would find that the most recent generation tends to guard its Islam as a precious pearl – something to be protected from worldly contaminates, particularly politics. He would also find that the previous generation saw Islam as a large, American-styled supermarket. They freely took from religion the aspects they liked, cavalierly reinterpreted others, brazenly injected new meanings into hallowed concepts, and, of course, ignored entirely features not to their liking. They behaved much like free-wheeling supermarket shoppers who go straight for the commodities they want, pick the size and brand of their choice, bypass entirely the lanes shelved with commodities they do not want, and, having checked out, convey their goods back home. Experience has shown that

religion is not a supermarket. On the contrary, it is a discourse with its own logic, parameters, and, most important of all, premises – most of them grounded in the distant and obliterated past.

Notes

- 1 A. Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh-e Iran* [History of the Iranian Constitution] (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications, 1961), pp. 415–22.
- 2 Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Gharbzadegi* [Western Intoxication] (Tehran: n.p., 1962), p. 36.
- 3 Husseinieh-e Ershad, *Majmueh-e Asar az Barodar Shahid Ali Shariati* [Collected Works of Martyred Brother Ali Shariati] (Solon, OH: Muslim Student Association, 1977), Vols. 1–35. For an analysis of his works in English, see Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).
- 4 Ali Shariati, *Dars-ha-ye Islamshenasi* [Islamology Lessons] (n.p.: Muslim Student Association, n.d.), Lesson 1, p. 16.
- 5 Ali Shariati, *Bazgasht: Bazgasht beh Khishtan – Bazgasht beh Kodom Khishtan* [Return: Return to Roots – Return to Which Roots?] (n.p.: Muslim Student Association, 1978), pp. 11–30.
- 6 Ali Shariati, “Ma’bad,” in *Kavir* [Kavir Desert] (n.p.: Tous Publications, 1970), pp. 181–258.
- 7 Ali Shariati, *Chahar Zendan-e Ansan* [Mankind’s Four Prisons] (n.p.: Muslim Student Association, 1977), pp., 1–43.
- 8 Ali Shariati, *Ummat va Imamat* [Community and Leadership] (n.p.: Muslim Student Association, n.d.), pp. 172–3.
- 9 Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani, cited in *Ettela’at*, 17 June 1980.
- 10 Bezhan Jazani, “Marksism-e Islami ya Islam-e Marksism” [“Marxist Islam or Islamic Marxism”], *Jahan* 34–35 (September–October 1985): 22–7, 36–40.
- 11 Abul-Hussein Banisadr, *Khiyanat beh Omid* [Betrayal of Hope] (Paris: n.p., 1982).
- 12 Islamic Republic, *Qanon-e Asasi-e Jomhuri-ye Islami Iran* [The Constitutional Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran] (Tehran: Ettela’at Publications, 1992).
- 13 “The Retribution Law,” *Iran Times*, 29 May 1981; “Law for Discretionary Punishments,” *Iran Times*, 9 December 1983.
- 14 Ghulam-Hussein Baqerzadeh, *Yek Harf Bas Ast* [One Word is Enough] (London: n.p.: 1984), pp. 1–114.
- 15 Abdul-Karim Soroush’s views are summarized best in his *Kiyan* articles of 1992–95, and in his book *Qabz va Bast-e Teorek-e Shariat* [Theoretical Expansion and Contraction of the Sharia] (Tehran: Muassissah-ye Farhange-ye Sirat, 1990). See also Marzieh Zajaji-Qomi, *Monazereh-e Doktor Abdul-Karim Soroush va Hojjat al-Islam Mohsen Kadivar dar bareh-e Puluralizm-e Dini* [Discussions between Dr. Abdul-Karim Soroush and Hojjat al-Islam Kadivar about Religious Pluralism] (Tehran: Salam Publications, 1999), pp. 1–102. For “authorized” translations of some of his articles, see Mahmoud and Ahmad Sadri, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Iran: Essential Writings of Abdolkrim Soroush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). For an excellent analysis of his works, see Afshin Matin-Asgari, “Abdolkarim Soroush and the secularization of Islamic thought in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 30(1–2) (Winter–Spring 1997): 95–116.
- 16 “Intellectual autobiography: an interview,” in Sadri, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Iran*, p. 21.
- 17 *Ibid.*, pp. 62–4.

- 18 Mohsen Kadivar, *Nazariyeh-ha-ye Dowlat dar Feqh-e Shi'ah* [*Concepts of the State in Shi'ah Law*] (Tehran: Nay Publishers, 1998), pp. 1–223.
- 19 For Mohsen Saedzadeh, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 247–72.

THE WORKING CLASS AND THE ISLAMIC STATE IN IRAN*

Haideh Moghissi and Saeed Rahnama

In all the major political developments of twentieth-century Iran, from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906–11 and the nationalization of the oil industry in the early 1950s to the political upheavals of the early 1960s and the 1979 revolution, workers were major participants and demonstrated a high level of militancy. However, governments of diverse persuasions, from the Pahlavis' modernizing dictatorial monarchy to the liberal nationalists and the Islamists' pre-modern theocracy, have all ignored workers' legitimate demands and suppressed their dissent. Many factors account for this situation, not the least of which is the qualitative and quantitative weaknesses of the working class – a result of the specific nature of capitalist development and industrialization in Iran. Because of its own internal weaknesses, the workers' movement has depended historically on Left social democratic and communist movements both organizationally and intellectually. In fact, socialist and communist ideas about the workers' right to form unions and emancipate themselves preceded the emergence of the working class itself. Yet dependence on external leadership made Iranian workers susceptible to the theoretical and political wavering and internal conflicts and divisions of the country's Left intelligentsia. As well, the continuous suppression of the Left by successive dictatorial regimes inevitably also affected the militancy and organizational efficacy of the working-class movement.

In this context, it is reasonable to argue that the progress of the working-class movement has been and continues to be directly linked to the movement for democracy and social change. Removing the political obstacles standing in the way of independent trade unions and other forms of labour organization remains the working class movement's most immediate task. But this is

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not possible without achieving other democratic advances, including full freedom of expression and association and a free press, and other constituent elements of political and economic democracy. Without this, the Left intelligentsia cannot develop effective communicative and political links with the labour and the workers' movement, and that movement, in turn, will be confined to sparse, sporadic actions at the factory-level, as it is today.

Evolution of the working-class movement

Ideas about workers' rights and organizations emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹ Several Iranian intellectuals formed the first Social Democratic Party in 1905; its programme called for, among other things, the right to unionize and strike, and an eight-hour working day.² They also tried to make connections with the socialist leaders in Russia. This was exemplified by the 'Iranians' Letter' sent by Chalangarian to Kautsky in 1908, and the latter's response.³ Initial efforts to establish trade unions began in 1906, at the peak of the Constitutional Revolution (1905–11), with the formation of the printers' union in Tehran. The return to power of the supporters of the absolutist monarch in 1908, and their defeat by the constitutionalists in 1909, predictably led first to the suspension and then the resumption of trade union activities. The first decade of the twentieth century marked the actual organization of the printers' trade union and the publication of its newspaper, *Unity of Labour* (*Ettehad-e Kargaran*); their successful strike has been called 'the first manifestation in Persia of a collectivist or socialist movement'.⁴ Encouraged by the printers' success in improving their working conditions, including the eight-hour day and overtime pay, between 1910 and 1922 several other unions were formed, including the bakers' union and unions of postal workers, shoemakers and dressmakers. In the same period, Iran's first communist party, *Edalat* (Justice), was also started.

In these years, both trade union activities and the political movement for national independence got their inspiration from revolutionary developments in Russia. Socialist and labour activists among the Iranian diaspora in Russian Azarbaijan, and the formation of Iran's first communist party in Baku, played a determining role in the upsurge of labour activism in the homeland. The first congress of the party held in Anzali in 1920 emphasized the rights of 'Iranian toilers' to organize their own trade unions and urged the party's local branches to work in that direction. This led to the emergence of the All-unions Council of Tehran (*Showray-e Ettehadiehaye Tehran*), consisting of three representatives from each union and representing 20 per cent of all workers in Tehran.⁵

Reza Khan's British-backed military *coup d'état* of 1921, his eventual seizure of the throne in 1925 and his brutal suppression of Left activists struck severe blows to the primordial labour movement. Yet Reza Shah's reign also marked the emergence of modern industries and a significant increase in the size of the industrial working class. This eventually led to the second major

period of labour activism, which, with the direct involvement and support of the Iranian communists, came about after Reza Shah's removal from power in 1941. In fact, the period 1941–53 was perhaps the most important period in the history of the labour and trade union movement in Iran. The oil workers' syndicates, led by the Yousef Eftekhari group, achieved enormous success in organizing workers in the oil fields of southern Iran.⁶ Workers constituted 80 per cent of the members of the newly formed Tudeh Party (the pro-Soviet Communist Party); by 1942, the Central United Council (CUC) (*Showray-e Motahedeh Markazi*), organized and led by the Tudeh Party, claimed a membership of 400,000 workers through 186 affiliated unions.⁷

The state's response to the growing demands and political influences of the unions and the Tudeh in the post-war period was essentially coercive. In 1949, the CUC was banned and many of its leaders were detained. But the period also saw the rise of the nationalist movement against the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and the coming to power of Mosaddeq's nationalist government. This was a period of constitution-based government and a free press, leading to greater political awareness and activism on the part of large sections of the middle, lower-middle and working classes, and the growing appeal of the socialist ideas and programmes promoted by the Left. But the Tudeh Party turned the labour unions into appendages of the party in the service of its short-term agenda, influenced mainly by the Soviet Union's foreign policy.

The return to power of Mohammad Reza Shah through the 1953 CIA-induced *coup d'état*, and the brutal suppression of the Tudeh Party and labour leaders, once more forced a retreat of the labour and Left movements. The Tudeh Party was declared illegal, socialist publications were banned and all independent unions were disbanded and replaced by state-run syndicates. At the same time, there was a major drive towards industrialization. In the absence of a strong domestic entrepreneurial class, the government played a dominant role in directing industrialization, working closely with multinational corporations. The shah's drive towards industrialization and the modernization of Iranian social and economic structures, however, did not permeate the political arena, where no independent, voluntary institutions within the civil society were allowed. Between 1953 and 1978, for twenty-five years, the working class remained effectively unorganized and lived under the close surveillance of SAVAK (the secret police). Of course, there were still sporadic struggles for improving pay and working conditions, and in the 1970s, after several major 'illegal' strikes, industrial workers achieved some of their economic demands. But the demands for the right to establish independent unions and to participate in management had to be put on hold until 1978, when the tide of the anti-shah revolution swept away the state's coercive apparatuses and its agents.

With the weakening of government control and police surveillance, industrial plants again became sites of labour activism. Strikes, particularly by the most privileged segments of the Iranian working class in key industries such

as oil, communications, heavy industries and power plants, had a severe impact on the shah's regime and brought the country to a virtual economic halt.⁸ Becoming aware of its own power and potential for united struggle, and influenced by Left organizations that had resumed their activities, the working class rearranged and enlarged its demands. Initially limited to pay and working conditions, under the influence of the Left its demands now included political and anti-imperialist measures such as the nationalization of the key industries and the expulsion of foreign employees.

The establishment of united front organizations, such as the workers' and employees' councils (*Showra-ye Kargaran va Karmandan*), during and immediately after the 1979 revolution provided a unique experience in self-management and democratic participation and had an enormous political and ideological impact on workers and the Left organizations. The councils, one of the most fascinating outcomes of the revolutionary movement, were thought at the time to be an instrument for the consolidation of political democracy in Iran. In various factories and plants, they ventured to assert control over production, management and distribution, as well as enabling workers to participate in the country's political process. But these ambitious goals proved illusory.⁹ The divisive ideological and membership configuration of the councils made them the locus for the hard struggles and conflicting agendas of workers and salaried employees. Both categories had membership in the councils. In addition, the councils were beset by constitutional and organizational ambiguities. The three major political currents in contemporary Iran, the socialists, the nationalists and the Islamists, each to varying degrees tried to mould the workers' movement and bring it under their control. Lacking its own internal ideological and organizational cohesion, the Iranian working class was hampered by these diverse and hostile tendencies. Constant infighting within the councils added to the ideological confusion.

The gradual takeover of the councils by Islamic activists and functionaries of the Islamic state, the expulsion and eventual suppression of secular Left activists, and their ultimate replacement by Islamic *Showras* ended a major period of independent labour activism in Iran. Whatever their achievements, the divisive atmosphere of the early councils exhibits clearly the political and organizational weaknesses of the Iranian working class and the Left generally. The causes of these weaknesses are manifold. In this essay, we focus on three: the configuration of the working population; emerging mechanisms of Islamic state control; and the troubled relationship between workers and Left political groups and organizations.

The configuration of the working population

The relatively small number of industrial workers employed in large modern industries is a factor which inhibits the formation of a strong and united working class. Intense work segmentation and a weakly developed division

of labour has not only created a highly fragmented working class within the manufacturing sector, but pre-capitalist crafts still continue to live side by side with capitalist industrial enterprises. The vast majority of the latter are very small firms, while the larger enterprises, mostly established through licensing agreements with multinational corporations, are predominantly government-owned and controlled and have been the main arena for worker activism. However, this activist core is under constant and intensive surveillance not only by the police but also by fellow workers of the factories' Islamic Associations. Two decades after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, which promised to install 'the rule of the toilers' (*mustaz'afan*) and to create a strong, independent industrial sector and sustained industrial development, the new regime has failed to break the cycle of industrial weakness, which is reflected also in weaknesses in the working classes' organizational abilities.

As in other developing countries, the traditional Left in Iran has tended to lump together all working people (with the exception of the peasants) and to call them the working class or proletariat. This conceals the heterogeneity of the living and working conditions and demands of a very diverse population and is theoretically meaningless and politically misleading. A closer look at the employment categories show that wage and salary earners constitute about half of the working population. According to the latest census data (1996), out of a total population of over 60 million, 14.5 million people aged 10 and over are working. Of these, about 3.2 million, or 22.4 per cent, are wage and salary earners in the private sector, and about 4.2 million, or 29.2 per cent, are wage and salary earners in the public sector. The 5 million self-employed are the still largest category, constituting 35.6 per cent, not counting the over 5 per cent (just under 1 million) who are unpaid family workers (see Appendix and Table 13.1).¹⁰

Even among those who sell their labour as wage and salary earners, moreover, there are enormous differentiations in economic, social, political and cultural conditions, with very real consequences in terms of alliances and combined political actions. Indeed, the working population really falls into three distinct class categories. First, there are the 40 per cent of the

Table 13.1 Configuration of working population (aged 10+) by employment category, 1996 ('000s)

<i>Employers</i>	<i>Self-employed</i>	<i>Wage/salary earners, private sector</i>	<i>Wage/salary earners, public sector</i>	<i>Unpaid family workers</i>	<i>Co-ops and others</i>	<i>Total</i>
528 (3.6%)	5,199 (35.6%)	3,270 (22.4%)	4,258 (29.2%)	797 (5.4%)	520 (3.49%)	14,572 (100%)

Source: Adapted from Statistical Centre of Iran, *Statistical Yearbook: 1996-97*, Tehran, 1998, p. 79.

working population who are traditionally petit bourgeois, or old middle class, made up of the self-employed and unpaid family workers, the majority of whom work within pre-capitalist relations.¹¹ Then there is the diversified and problematic 'new middle class', which technically includes everyone from managers to professionals, and to salaried clerical and retail employees. We may exclude the 2 per cent who have senior executive occupations, who clearly fall within the capitalist class, or are directly in the service of value extraction.¹² The rest, which we estimate at 3.5 million people, or no less than 24 per cent of the working population, properly constitute a new middle class which needs to be differentiated from the working class, especially in a less-developed country like Iran, because of their higher level of education, job security, income and social status. Only 27 per cent of the total working population, 4 million out of 14.5 million, are wage workers. They are also differentiated in terms of skills, income and working environment, of course, but their similar overall condition and relation to capital justifies grouping them under the single category of the working class (see Appendix and Table 13.2).

In addition to its small size, the Iranian working class is highly differentiated and segmented. For example, the industrial (manufacturing) workers, the most politically significant section of the Iranian working class, are scattered in over 360,000 industrial establishments, 91.6 per cent of which are workshops of less than 5 workers and employees. Of the 1.2 million wage and salary earners in the manufacturing sector, over 269,000 work in these small workshops alongside hundreds of thousands of unpaid family workers. Over 279,000 work in small/mid-size factories of 6–49 workers and employees, and about 69,000 in factories of 50–99 workers and employees. At the other pole, however, over 1,200 factories and plants have over 100 workers and employees and in total employ over 580,000 wage and salary earners.¹³ These workers form the core of the Iranian working class and are the focus of the attention of labour activists, and as such are the main targets of the Islamic regime's ideological and repressive apparatuses.

Table 13.2 Configuration of working population (aged 10+) by occupational category, 1996 ('000s)

<i>Senior officials, executives</i>	<i>Professionals</i>	<i>Technicians</i>	<i>Clerical</i>	<i>Service, sales workers</i>	<i>Agricultural and fishery</i>	<i>Craft and trade workers</i>	<i>Plant and machine operators</i>	<i>Elementary occupations</i>	<i>Others</i>
325 (2.2%)	1,263 (8.6%)	457 (3.1%)	614 (4.2%)	1,480 (10.1%)	3,043 (20.9%)	2,942 (20.15%)	1,303 (8.9%)	1,931 (13.2%)	1,213 (8.3%)

Source: Adapted from Statistical Centre of Iran, *Statistical Yearbook: 1996–97*, Tehran, 1998, p. 80.

A further significant aspect of the situation of the Iranian working population relates to the millions of unemployed. The latest sample data of the 15 to 64-year-old working population show the percentage of the unemployed to be 13.1,¹⁴ which is far below the actual number. The vast majority, or 57.9 per cent of the unemployed, are in the 15 to 24 age category. This fact partly explains the continued youth unrest and activism in present-day Iran. There is, additionally, a large 'sub-proletariat' of shantytown dwellers, the '*zaghe-neshinan*', mostly made up of the displaced rural population who live under precarious conditions. During the revolution, Khomeini and the Islamists, unlike the Left that almost solely focused its activities on industrial workers, successfully mobilized this large population of urban poor by addressing their specific concerns.¹⁵ All these factors – the high percentage of the traditional middle class, the existence of a sizeable new middle class, the relatively small percentage of wage workers and their dispersion in a large number of small and medium workshops and factories, as well as the persistence of millions of unemployed and the growing size of the shanty-town sub-proletariat – have serious implications for the kind of political agenda that can be credibly put forward by and for different social classes, including workers.

Another major aspect of the configuration of the working population relates to gender. The sexual segregation of the workforce is a persistent policy of the Islamic state, and under Islamic rule, the share of women in the total economically active population dropped from the pre-revolutionary figure of 14.8 per cent in 1976 to 10.2 per cent in 1986.¹⁶ Although this percentage increased in the mid-1990s to 12.7 per cent, the female participation rate remains below the pre-revolutionary figure (see Table 13.3). Much of the increase in female employment relates to the government sector. Female employment in the public sector as a proportion of total female employment increased from 20 per cent in the pre-revolutionary period to 31 per cent in the mid-1980s and 39 per cent in the mid-1990s. Two factors explain this increase. First, dramatic population growth, which sharply increased the demand for new female teachers. Women are overwhelmingly dominant in the staff of sexually segregated educational institutions (82 per cent). Ideological and political considerations also account for new female hiring. Employed in the public sector are large numbers of female family members of government officials, martyrs (*Shohada*), veterans (*Janbazan*) and the war disabled (*Ma'lulin*). To these, we should add an even larger number of women who, since the revolution, have been recruited into such institutions as the all-female morality squads, the Islamic Associations of government and semi-government agencies, the *Pasdaran* Corps, the Society for Islamic Propaganda (*Howzeh-ye Tablighat-e Eslami*), the Martyr's Foundation (*Bonyad-e Shahid*), the militia (*Basij*)¹⁷ and the special women's committees in neighbourhood mosques – all charged with disseminating Islamic values through indoctrination and intimidation. Thus, most of these women are employed in state and para-state apparatuses designed to control and police other women.

Table 13.3 Configuration of female working population, 1976–96 ('000s)

	1976	1986	1996
Female population	16,352	24,164	29,164
Economically active population	9,796	12,820	16,027
Females economically active	1,449	1,307	2,037
Employed female population	1,212	975	1,765
Senior officials/managers	5	13	16
Public sector employees	245	407	698
Private sector employees	322	99	249
Self-employed	130	181	347
Unpaid family workers	495	212	366
Co-ops and unspecified	12	70	87

Source: Calculated on the basis of the population census results, Iran Statistical Centre, *Iran Statistical Yearbook*, 1977, 1987, 1997, Tehran, pp. 29, 31, 58, 70, 80 and 81.

In the industrial manufacturing sector, women constitute only 5.2 per cent of all wage workers and salaried employees.¹⁸ In the post-revolutionary period, the number of female self-employed and unpaid family workers increased dramatically. This trend has both economic and ideological causes. First, in many cases, men have replaced female workers whose employment, otherwise, would add to day-care costs. But beyond this, ideologically, the Shari'a-based Iranian Civil Code, by recognizing the man as family head and putting him in charge, has enforced his responsibility 'for providing for the wife' (Article 1106) and has promoted the perception that women's paid employment is not necessary for the family's upkeep. This and other legal provisions, such as the husband's right to prevent his wife from working in jobs which he considers as 'against the family's interest' (*Masaleh-e Khanevadegi*, Article 1117), are 'anti-female-labour force participation messages'.¹⁹ Of course, such messages do not prevent women from undertaking paid work without which the family's survival is increasingly difficult. Yet the messages work to legitimize women's inferior status in work and pay hierarchies. The combined impact of economic and ideological factors has increasingly pushed female workers out of the large urban industries which are covered by the provisions of the Labour Law. Female industrial workers at present are found in three different categories: large industries, small

workshops with less than 10 workers, and women working at home (piece workers). The last category, according to one study, comprises the majority of female urban workers, who are excluded not only from the provisions of the Labour Law, but from work statistics as well.²⁰ Obviously, this situation negatively affects the organizability of the employed female population.

The segmentation of the working population on the basis of class, gender and work is intensified further by the ideological and religious differentiation imposed by the Islamic state. From its inception, the regime's indoctrination and manipulation of the people's (including the workers') religious beliefs drove an ideological wedge between them. The Islamic regime turned the 'opium' of the masses into the steroid of the masses. Earlier decades of dictatorial rule and anti-socialist propaganda had already helped to inoculate the vast majority of workers against infection by socialist ideas. The organizational splintering and intellectual and political isolation of the Left movement made the workers even more vulnerable to Islamic ideology. Through intimidation and deceptive rhetoric, the Islamists managed to construct a wall separating both the working poor and organized labour from socialist ideas and projects. But responding to overpowering demands for social justice, promoted by the Left, the Islamic regime, while violently attacking the 'atheistic' language of the socialists, nevertheless appropriated some of the ideas and jargon of the outlawed groups. One faction of the ruling bloc even started to identify itself as 'Left' to differentiate itself from the conservatives, which they identified as the 'Right'. Parallel to the creation of separate students' associations, women's organizations and professional groups, each faction has established its own workers' association whose main task has been to support its parent faction when the need arises. The formation of the Association of Islamic Councils, the House of Labour and an Islamic Labour Party (*Hezb-e Eslamiy-e Kar*), with the pretext of facilitating 'the participation of productive forces in political power',²¹ are cases in point.

Despite this ideological manipulation, however, objective realities and the harsh conditions of life which Iranian workers had to endure began to strip away illusions about the Islamic regime. During over two decades of Islamic rule, industrial workers, the unemployed and the urban poor have confronted the regime through sporadic protests, sit-ins and strikes, demanding an improvement in wages and working conditions. Workers suffered most in the early post-revolutionary period, particularly during the harsh working conditions imposed by the regime as a result of the long war with Iraq. Such measures as the extension of the working day, reduction of wages, forced fund-raising for the war by the Islamic Workers' Councils and Associations, involuntary transfer of workers to the front and no adequate bunkers during bombardments of the factories are cases in point. The workers resisted these measures as best they could through such actions as signing petitions to the authorities and organizing sit-ins and protests within

the confines of their factories. In many cases, they boycotted the general meetings of the Islamic Councils, demonstrated against the Islamic Associations in the factories and, in some cases, resorted to strikes. Workers' protests would reach their height whenever the news of war casualties involving a fellow worker on the front was received in the factory.²²

With the war ending, the workers became bolder in their demands, and moved their demonstrations to the nearby streets or highways. Major issues for the workers in the post-war period have been delayed wages and benefits, lack of occupational safety standards, job classification schemes, and layoffs. Labour activists recorded about ninety cases of strikes in large industries in 1998 alone, including strikes in the Isfahan Steel plant, in Behshahr Textiles, in the Hamedan Glass manufacturing plant, and most important of all several strikes and demonstrations by workers in the oil industry at Abadan Refinery, and in Gachsaran. Most of these protests involved the blockages of major highways, followed by the brutal responses of the police and military.²³ Other examples of such actions include the coordinated strike of thousands of workers from the National Industrial Groups, the General Tyre workers and Arak Industrial Groups.

In other cases, workers have used the regime's rhetoric and celebrations against it. For example, under pressure from workers, the 1999 May Day celebration was organized by the House of Workers and the Ministry of Labour with the participation of parliamentarians from the regime's moderate faction as speakers, in defiance of an explicit ban by the Ministry of the Interior. At the rally staged in Tehran (which started with a recital of the Qur'an and concluded with the Shi'i ritual of chest beating), the workers seized the opportunity to protest against a new bill which had been introduced in the parliament. This bill, initiated by the conservatives, exempted small workshops with fewer than three workers from provisions of the Labour Law, but, faced with such severe resistance, it was postponed. However, the outgoing conservative majority, even after its overwhelming defeat in the parliamentary election in February 2000, later passed the bill, now amended to exclude workshops with less than five workers and employees from the provisions of the Labour Law.

Mechanisms of control under the Islamic state

The Islamic government replaced the shah's regime at a time when all the major industrial plants and public and private institutions were under the control of the workers' and employees' councils (*Showras*). The councils were the outcome of strike committees that had emerged during the 1979 revolution, and, in the absence of the owners and managers, were in control of these institutions. The major councils, in many cases, either were formed by or were under the ideological influence of the sympathizers of different Left organizations, or the Islamist Mujahedin.²⁴ Early

in the post-revolutionary period, the councils were supportive of the new regime. All of them followed Khomeini's back-to-work decree. However, confrontation with the provisional government, headed by the liberal nationalist/Islamist Bazargan, was inevitable. The government's policy was to try to preserve the status quo in the industrial sector, while the councils had radical demands including the immediate improvement of working conditions and wages, the nationalization of industries, and workers' participation in management. The liberals in government were too slow in responding to the genuine demands of the councils; the councils had no patience for waiting for gradual reforms. After the hostage crisis, the fall of the provisional government and the consolidation of the clerics' monopoly of power, the situation changed. The regime tried to bring the pluralist and independent *Showras* under its control, and failed. This failure led to the suppression of the councils and the establishment of the yellow 'Islamic *Showras*'. The role of these councils, along with the Islamic Associations which mushroomed in most major plants and institutions, was similar to the *Arbeitsfronts* in Nazi Germany and the *Sampo* in Japan during wartime fascist rule. While creating an atmosphere of terror in the workplace, they moved towards a thoroughgoing ideological indoctrination of workers and employees.²⁵

The new regime's labour policy was one of its most contentious preoccupations, second only to the clerics' gender crusades. Under intense pressure from the Left organizations and workers in the early months of the revolution, the regime annulled the *ancien régime's* Labour Law. With the demise of the councils' and workers' militancy, the first version of a new Islamic Labour Law, based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, was designed by an arch-conservative labour minister. This draft, among others, implicitly envisaged the worker (*kargar*) as a semi-slave who 'rents' himself/herself to the employer (*karfarma*), and who must therefore remain under the almost absolute control of the employer. The draft created such an uproar that it was shelved after intense infighting within the ruling bloc. Faced with the realities of a society that had experienced capitalist market relations and associated impacts, the regime had to retreat and make some concessions with regard to the rights of workers – as it also did in its gender politics. Even in the absence of the Left and pro-workers opposition, which, by then, it had already brutally suppressed, the regime's rhetoric of being a government of the dispossessed could be manipulated by workers and the ruling populist faction to force the government to come up with a less outrageous law. In the end, it took about twelve years for the Islamic Republic to devise and approve its Labour Law.

As in other social and political domains, pragmatists in the regime, responding to internal and international pressures, had learned to adopt seemingly acceptable legislation knowing that they were not bound to implement it. After years of going back and forth between the parliament and the Council of Guardians, the new draft was eventually approved by the

Expediency Council in 1990.²⁶ Cleverly drafted, the new Labour Law was not only far more advanced than the pre-revolutionary Law, but in many of its provisions it is among the most progressive labour laws in the Middle East. For example, the Law makes layoffs very difficult and increases compensation at termination (Articles 21–33). This had been one of the workers' major concerns. It also reduces working hours from 48 to 44 hours a week and to 36 hours for hazardous jobs (Article 51, 52). The minimum working age was increased to 15 (Article 79). Annual paid leave was increased to 30 days (Article 64).

The pre-revolutionary provision of 'equal wages' for men and women 'for performing work of equal value' (Article 38) was confirmed, with the added proviso of prohibiting wage discrimination on the basis of 'age, gender, race, ethnic origin and political and religious convictions'. Pregnancy leave was increased from 10 weeks (6 weeks before and 4 weeks after childbirth) to 90 days (Article 76).²⁷ These provisions are more woman-friendly than the pre-revolutionary Labour Law, at least on paper. However, actual practice, as also seen in the case of promised but not delivered day-care provisions, effectively cancels out the progressive legislation. In fact, many employers would stop hiring women if they had to be paid the same wages as men. Studies conducted by researchers in both the pre- and the post-revolutionary periods show that, intimidated by the employers' layoff power, female workers hesitate even to disclose their wage and working hours to researchers.²⁸ Pregnancy leave, amounting to two-thirds of the last wage, as in the past, applies only to workers who have paid the employees' share of insurance. It needs to be borne in mind, moreover, that only a tiny minority of female workers are employed in industries which are covered by the Labour Law.

The area where the new Law deliberately and significantly falls far short of the old Law is in its attempt to restrain the workers' right to organize. In fact, with regard to the right to form labour unions and to negotiate collective agreements as well as the right to strike – that is, in the three most important areas for guaranteeing workers' rights – the Islamists' Law is more reactionary than the Labour Law enforced by the shah. Fearful of labour unions, their legacy and their historical links with the Left, the new Law has even avoided using the familiar terms of '*Sandika*' ('syndicate') or '*Ettehadieh*' ('union'). Instead, it has invented 'Guild Societies' that workers 'may establish' to 'protect the legitimate and statutory rights and interests of workers and employers [*sic*]' (Article 131). To add to the confusion, two other types of organizations are seen as representing workers: one, the notorious Islamic Associations, whose aim is 'to propagate and disseminate Islamic culture' (Article 130), and the other, the 'Islamic Workers' Councils', the yellow councils that replaced the genuine workers' and employees' councils. Each factory or plant can choose only one of the three types of organizations, each of which can only be established under the strict

supervision of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The irony, however, is that even these rudimentary and strictly controlled organizations, as a result of intense pressure of the workers, have come to create problems for the regime. Because of the provisions that are favourable to workers, the Labour Law has become a major source of tension between the populist and hardline factions of the ruling bloc. Both public- and private-sector managers have called for major revisions of the Labour Law. They want easier provisions to facilitate layoffs.

The Islamic republic's other 'progressive' legislation included a Social Security Law (which on paper expanded the coverage of the insured), as well as a law compelling the sale of a total of 43 per cent of the government's shares in public companies to their wage and salary workers and employees (financial support for the purchase of shares was provided through the creation of cooperatives, but, notably, most of the purchases have been for shares in money-losing companies).²⁹ But overall, the Islamic state's policy in relation to the Iranian working class has been in line with its overall repressive political strategy. In its over two decades in power, the regime developed the most powerful and intricate array of coercive, ideological and economic apparatuses effectively to suppress dissent. It is not an overstatement to claim that no other type of state, including fascist regimes, has ever succeeded in establishing and employing such diverse apparatuses of control over a deliberately weakened civil society. In addition to apparatuses typically available to other states, such as the police, the army, the courts, the mass media and the educational system, the Islamic regime in Iran has incorporated its traditional Shi'i structures, and a range of new institutions, at various levels of civil society.

In the early years of the post-revolutionary period, particularly during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, the mosques became multifunctional. Residents in each neighbourhood had to maintain good relations with its clerics and functionaries. Apart from their traditional function of being a place for prayers and religious propaganda, the mosques distributed coupons (*bon*) for subsidized and rationed food on which the vast majority of the people depended for their survival. An assurance of good morals was also needed by job applicants, and receiving it depended on their participation in prayers and other activities. Although their non-propaganda functions have since diminished, the mosques – now estimated to number 50,000 – continue to be a base for the regime in every neighbourhood. In addition to the mosques, there have been Islamic Revolutionary Committees, one of the most feared and repressive institutions of the regime, formed by the *lumpen* proletariat and bullies of the neighbourhoods (these committees were later incorporated into the regular 'law-enforcing' bodies). At workplaces also, each plant and institution has an Islamic Association. The larger organizations have a resident cleric, and, if necessary, a resident representative of the Supreme Leader, who makes sure that

there is no deviation from the revolutionary line. For major confrontations, there are the elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards, *Pasdaran*, and the Islamic militia, *Basij*, in addition to the regular police, gendarmes and army. The Islamic Republic also has a most extensive set of ideological apparatuses, combining the traditional Shi'i institutions such as regular sermons delivered in mosques and the Friday prayers with modern mass media and the Internet. The most significant players are the clerics themselves, whose number has grown more than any other occupation and profession, as has the number of seminary schools in the holy cities of Qum and Mashhad.³⁰ Graduate clerics are employed in public and private organizations as prayer leaders, or work in the growing number of mosques and prayer houses in factories and other institutions.

In addition to massive propaganda and ideological indoctrination, the clerics maintain control over their followers through economic means and the provision of social welfare. The largest fund of this type belongs to the late Ayatollah Khomeini, known as 'Imam Khomeini's Aid Committee'. Established in 1979 and now secured through more than 1,130 branches throughout Iran, it provides a vast array of social and financial services to needy followers. Over 1.7 million people are 'permanent' beneficiaries of this fund, mostly the working poor and the unemployed. The Aid Committee also provides health services through clinics, covering over 4.3 million people. It provides educational grants to over 769,000 students and has created over 850 youth centres in urban and rural areas to provide 'education, ideological guidance, and physical education'. It also gives allowances for the construction and repair of dwellings, marriage allowances, and interest-free loans.³¹

In addition to clerics' funds, there are also several extremely powerful religious/ para-statal organizations, including the Mostaz'afan and Janbazan Foundation, the Martyrs Foundation, and the Fifteenth Khordad Foundation, which run the lucrative confiscated properties of the last shah's Pahlavi Foundation and those of the richest families of the previous regime. The Mostaz'afan Foundation, one of the largest corporations in Iran,³² is the richest cash cow of the clerical establishment outside the oil-rich government itself. With links to the powerful bazaar, the traditional economic base of the clerics, this foundation has helped create a new bourgeoisie out of the Islamic elite, while at the same time providing assistance to poor followers, including disabled or sick veterans. Over 325,000 people receive 'permanent' allowances from the Mostaz'afan Foundation, and over 230,000 families are covered by the Martyrs Foundation.³³ The use of religious economic institutions and provision of welfare to recruit or sustain followers has always been an effective way of maintaining and expanding followings in Shi'ite tradition, a policy now effectively used by many other Sunni and Shi'i fundamentalist groups in the region, notably Hamas in the Occupied Territories, and Hizbollah in Lebanon. The difference in Iran,

though, is that the Islamic clerics have amassed enormous wealth in their religious funds, endowments and foundations, and at the same time are in control of the government and its enormous oil revenues.

Had it not been for the economic, social and political crises to which the clerical regime has repeatedly been subject, the existence of such extensive apparatuses of state control would destroy all hope for the liberation of the country from fundamentalist rule. But the same interrelated factors which account for these crises also prompt hopes for future change. First, this gigantic machine lost its leader: it could not replace Ayatollah Khomeini with an equally charismatic and powerful figure capable of maintaining a balance between different clerical factions within the ruling bloc. Secondly, unlike most post-revolutionary regimes, the ruling bloc has not been able to resolve its internal conflicts by the physical or ideological elimination of one faction by another. With the Ayatollah's death, political differences continuously widened on economic, social, political and moral issues. These differences, moreover, represent less the contending opinions of clerics and their conflicts over the prescriptions of the Qur'an, and more the irresolvable contradictions stemming from the realities of running a society whose social and economic structures have undergone dramatic changes over several decades prior to the revolution. In establishing its ideal state, the regime, modelled after the Islamic golden age of the seventh century, had to swim against the historical current. It confronted a society which had experienced a degree of modernization and modernity, and had had a long, though unsuccessful, history of struggle for democracy and political freedoms, and could not easily be governed through a pre-modern political and legal system and an Islamic moral order.

Above all, in over two decades in power, the Islamic government 'of the dispossessed' has failed to provide for the most deprived section of the population. The ever-widening gap between the working poor and newly rich, the evident corruption, the outright mismanagement of the economy and the indisputable abuse of power by the clerics to accumulate wealth, which accompany their hypocritical moral crusades aimed particularly at women and youth, have severely discredited the regime in the eyes of a growing number of people. Continued and intensified political repression (which now affects even the Islamists within the system), and particularly the cold-blooded murder of intellectuals and writers (referred to as the 'chain assassinations') directly at the hands of high-ranking officials who have gone unpunished, has done much to discredit the Islamists' projects and to delegitimize the regime.

The Left and the working class: the struggle for change

The Left, historically the strongest supporter of the workers' movement in Iran, suffered a terrible defeat at the hands of the Islamists. This was partly

a result of its own weaknesses and mistakes and its tendency to underestimate the robust mass-based coercive power of the Islamic state, and its overestimation of the numerical and organizational capacity of both the Left and the working class. Theoretical and analytical confusions led to fatal mistakes in formulating the immediate priorities of the Left movement as well as a faulty agenda of demands under the Islamic state.

Almost from the inception of the post-revolutionary period, organizations in the highly diverse Iranian Left exhibited two distinct orientations towards the Islamic regime. The first, represented by the Tudeh Party and by the Fedayeen *Aksariat* (Majority), which was quite popular immediately after the revolution,³⁴ was characterized by a certain infatuation with the Ayatollah's 'anti-imperialism', and sought to ally itself with 'progressive' and 'revolutionary democratic' elements within the Islamic regime, hoping to direct it towards a 'socialist orientation'.³⁵ The other orientation, made up of smaller, more radical Left organizations, such as the Fedayeen *Aghaliat* (Minority), *Rah-e Kargar* (Workers Path),³⁶ *Peykar* (Struggle),³⁷ *Ettehadieh Komunistha* (Communist Union)³⁸ and *Komeleh*,³⁹ chose open confrontation with the regime, hoping to 'overthrow' it and to 'elevate' the revolution to the socialist stage. Both approaches have failed. The groups who sought an alliance with the 'progressive' clerics were discredited by excusing, and eventually even colluding with, the regime's brutal and anti-democratic policies; the organizations seeking the regime's overthrow facilitated their own annihilation by confrontation with a ruthless but, at the time, popular regime. In the end, both were brutally suppressed. Thousands of Left activists were executed, imprisoned, maimed or driven into exile. One devastating result of the Left's defeat has been its loss of contact, perhaps even credibility, with the working class.

These two distinct political lines still dominate the discourses of the surviving Left organizations in exile. The disgraced first group continues to seek an alliance with the 'moderate faction' within the ruling bloc, embodied in the person of President Khatami. It fails to appreciate the simple fact that so long as the clerical regime enjoys a monopoly of power, it does not need and will not seek an alliance with any other force. It will concede such an alliance only when it faces a serious crisis of authority, and in any case, the alliance will include only the political forces ideologically and politically closest to the Islamic regime. That means, at most, a connection with moderate Islamist and liberal nationalist forces. Even if, as a result of a strange turn of events, the clerics were to look to the compromising faction of the Left as an ally, it will not be treated as a major player (given the Left's organizational weakness and its lack of credibility). Instead, it will be used in the service of the state. Similarly, the radical segments of the Left who call for the overthrow of the regime in favour of establishing a socialist workers' state do not explain their strategies for achieving socialism or who their potential allies are. Their approach is obviously based on the assumed homogeneity and

numerical predominance of the proletariat within the working population who are going to lead the socialist revolution. They do not seem prepared to recognize either their own organizational weakness and the lack of linkage with the working class, or the strength of the present regime.

Organizationally weak, mainly based in exile and having a minimal presence in political events inside Iran, the Left, despite some name changes and new coalitions, remains sharply divided. The organizations inclined to compromise, such as the People's Democratic Party of Iran,⁴⁰ the Organization of People's Fedayeen-Majority and the remnants of the Tudeh Party, retain hopes for reform within the clerical regime. Others, such as the Left Workers Union, the Union of Peoples Fedayeen, the Communist Party of Iran and the Workers Communist Party of Iran, herald an impending proletarian revolution. They emphasize their 'proletarian' character by adding an adjective, *Kargari* (of workers), to their names to differentiate themselves from the 'bourgeois communists'. Except in a few cases, the Left movement appears to be operating within the old theoretical and organizational framework, without making serious efforts at self-assessment or self-criticism even when the Islamic regime is facing a serious political crisis and popular resistance is on the rise.

That such popular resistance is developing, there can be no doubt. Frustrated by over two decades of political and cultural repression, corruption and economic deprivation, and benefiting from the Islamists' crippling factional divisions and in-regime conflicts, the Iranian people are learning how to resist the regime in ingenious ways. The remarkable resistance of women, youth and various sections of the professional strata and intellectuals, as well as several major riots over 'illegal' building in shanty towns and ceaseless strikes and sit-ins in the industrial sector, suggest that, perhaps for the first time in modern Iranian history, the people have taken political initiatives without coordination and organized leadership. A good example is the 1997 presidential elections, in which voters participated enthusiastically and elected Khatami to the presidency, despite both the conservatives' fierce propaganda in favour of the other candidate and the radical Left's plea to boycott the elections. After this election, the people continued to force the regime to play according to the rules of its self-invented democratic game, taking advantage of the shifting forces among the Islamists and the emergence of a new coalition calling for a free press and democracy. On two other occasions – the 1998 elections of the city councils, and particularly in the 2000 parliamentary elections – the people actively participated and voted in favour of less conservative candidates.

Yet the people's remarkable resistance, despite the human sacrifices it has involved, will not guarantee social and political change. For one thing, it is devoid of an organized, unified and clear-sighted leadership, and the opposition in the diaspora, including the Left, is as divided as ever. In the absence of a democratic Left alternative, debates over modernity versus tradition,

democracy versus authoritarianism, social justice versus Islamic justice and the need for the separation of religion and state are carried out by a new breed of Muslim intellectuals, many of whom previously served in the repressive physical and ideological apparatuses of the Islamic state. These disillusioned Islamists, who (unlike the secular intellectuals) have access to their own 'alternative' papers, have become household names for their bold criticism of the repression, corruption and despotism of the conservative clergy. The danger, once more, is that the Left, the working class and other progressive forces will lose the opportunity to mobilize the massive discontent around a secular democratic alternative.

The fact remains that despite the bloody suppression of the secular Left opposition, and extensive negative propaganda by the regime, socialist and secular ideas are still influential. That they have become recurring themes in the oppositional Islamic liberal discourse prompts optimism that the Left has a chance to emerge as an active part of the opposition and gain the support of the working classes for building a progressive, alternative united front against the Islamists. The immediate goal of such a united front must be to remove the sacred halo around a corrupt and brutal regime and to fight for the transfer of power to a secular democratic state. It must represent the interests and the voices of various social classes, including new-middle-class professionals and the working poor alike. The segmentation of the working class by work and ideology has had a serious impact on the level of its involvement in the movement for democracy and social change. Thus, it becomes clear why the main challenges to the Islamic regime in the last two decades have come from the women's movement, youth, university students and from middle-class intellectuals, writers and professionals. If these movements are joined by the working class, they will become more effective. Only through such a broad, focused, organized and coordinated struggle will the Left prevent yet another interpretation of Islam embodied in the 'moderate clergy' and 'Muslim intellectuals' from emerging as the effective alternative to the faction of the clergy which now rules. Only by establishing the rights of all citizens to participate in political processes and to form their own voluntary organizations will the working class regain the confidence to represent its own interests, which, in a democratic system, will be the interests of the most oppressed and the most deprived sections of the population.

Appendix

The 1996 census provides separate figures for employers, the self-employed and unpaid family workers (mostly the traditional middle classes), but does not distinguish between wage workers and salaried employees. However, it is possible to estimate roughly the numbers and percentages of these latter categories using the data of occupational categories, shown in Table 13.2, and the

data of wage and salary employees in different subsectors of the economy, shown in Table 13.1. By looking at the detailed subcategories of the ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations), on the basis of which the data of Table 13.2 have been calculated, most of the occupational categories can be grouped under the three categories of social classes: the traditional middle class, the new middle class and the wage workers.

Aside from the senior officials and executives, the professionals (who include engineers, scientists, computing professionals, medical doctors, nurses, teachers, academics, accountants, social workers, writers, artists) and technicians (who include electronic and communication technicians, draughtspersons, photographers, to medical assistants, building inspectors, faith healers, real estate agents), as well as the clerical employees, belong to the new middle classes. Non-wage agricultural and fishery workers are mostly traditional middle classes, while the vast majority of machine operators (roughly 90 per cent), and all the elementary occupations, form the wage workers. However, even within the category of operators there are occupations, such as taxi drivers and truck drivers, that cannot be considered as wage workers, as many of them are the owners or co-owners of the vehicles.

The two categories of service and sales workers, and craft and trade workers, are more differentiated and fall under more than one social class category. Since detailed data for each of these categories are not available, by considering the descriptions of each of the occupational subcategories, we have assumed that the majority (80 per cent) of service/sales workers, including travel attendants, transport conductors, restaurant services workers, to hairdressers, fire fighters, police officers, etc., fall under the new middle class, and the rest under workers. The majority (80 per cent) of craft and trade workers, ranging from non-wage quarry workers and bricklayers to carpenters, roofers, plumbers, welders, motor vehicle mechanics, and electrical and electronic mechanics, belong to the traditional middle classes; the rest fall under the working class.

To cross-check the estimates of separate figures and percentages of wage workers and salaried employees, another set of data dealing with the wage and salary employees in different subsectors of the economy was used. Of the 4,258,000 workers and employees of the public sector, 2,759,000, or 64.7 per cent, are in the public administration subsector. The vast majority, or 90.4 per cent, of this subsector are salaried employees, and only 9.5 per cent are wage workers.⁴¹ For other subsectors of both the public and the private sectors, such as agriculture and fishing, manufacturing and mining, construction, utilities, and commercial services, we have used the 20/80 'administrative ratio' for salaried employees and wage workers respectively. This is a low ratio for salaried employees in a Third World setting like Iran, which, as a result of lower organizational efficiency, has a higher administrative ratio or intensity than more advanced countries.⁴² On such a basis, the total number of wage workers in both the public and the private sectors

amounts to over 3,871,000, or about 26 per cent of the total employed population, similar to the figure using data of Table 13.1. The wage workers (WW) figure is calculated on the basis of the following: *public sector WW* = agriculture ($0.8 \times 57,000$) + manufacturing ($0.8 \times 619,000$) + construction ($0.8 \times 63,000$) + service ($0.8 \times 586,000$) + public administration ($0.095 \times 2,759,000$) = 1,255,855; *private sector WW* ($0.8 \times 3,270,000$) = 2,616,000; *public WW* + *private WW* = 3,871,855.

Notes

- 1 The oldest (handwritten) document in this regard is Khan-e Khanan, *Political Treatise*, 1894, in which the author refers to the need for 'majma'ha' (associations), and labour 'rules' for regulating working conditions. See Feraidoun Adamiyat, *Ideologi-ye Nehzat Mashroteh [Ideology of the Constitutional Movement in Iran]*, Tehran: Payam Publishing, 1976, p. 282.
- 2 Saeed Rahnema, *Tajdid-e Hayat-e Social Democracy Dar Iran? [Re-birth of Social Democracy in Iran?]*, Stockholm: Baran Publishers, 1996, p. 17.
- 3 See J. Riddle (ed.), *Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International*, New York: Monad Press, 1984, pp. 60–5.
- 4 Tarbiyat, cited in Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985, p. 3.
- 5 Asnad-e Tarikhi-e Jonbesh-e Kargari, *Social Demokrasi va Kommonisti-e Iran 1903–1963 [Historical Documents: The Workers, Social Democratic And Communist Movement in Iran]*, Vol. 6, Florence: Mazdak Publisher, n.d., pp. 107–8.
- 6 See Kaveh Bayat and Majid Tafreshi, *Memoirs of Yousef Eftekhari* [in Persian], Tehran: Ferdows Publishing, 1991.
- 7 Fred Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997, pp. 199–200.
- 8 Ali Rahnema and Farhad Nomani, *Secular Miracle*, London: Zed Books, 1990, p. 12.
- 9 Saeed Rahnema, 'Workers councils in Iran: the illusions of workers control', *Economic and Industrial Democracy: An International Journal* 13(1) (February 1992).
- 10 Iran Statistical Centre, *Statistical Yearbook, 1996–97* [in Persian], Tehran, 1998, Table 3–7, p. 79.
- 11 These relations, to use Olin Wright's distinction, may entail relations of both domination and appropriation in the form of individual appropriation by the self-employed under his/her self-direction and control, yet the individuals involved are not capitalistically exploited. The same is true of unpaid family workers who, despite the fact that their labour is appropriated and dominated by someone else, usually the family patriarch, are not exploited in the capitalist sense. See Erik Olin Wright, *Classes*, London: Verso, 1985, pp. 50–1.
- 12 This is true whether we consider Poulantzas's distinctions of ownership and/or possession, Olin Wright's notions of degrees of ownership and contradictory class location, or Carchedi's two-fold division of capitalist management and the unity-in-domination of the labour process and the production of surplus value. See Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London: New Left Review, 1975, p. 180; Erik Olin Wright, *Classes*, pp. 42–51; Guglielmo Carchedi, *On the Economic Identification of Social Classes*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 8.
- 13 Iran Statistical Centre, *Statistical Yearbook, 1996–97*, pp. 200, 206.

- 14 Iran Statistical Centre, *Employment and Unemployment Data*, Tehran, 1997, p. 22.
- 15 Bijan Jazani, the founder and leader of the Fedai movement, writing from his jail cell, was the first Left theorist to recognize the significance of the shanty-town dwellers. See *On the Life and Works of Bijan Jazani* [in Persian], Paris: Khavaran Publishers, 1999.
- 16 For controversies over decline or increase in female employment after the revolution, see Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Post-modern Analysis*, London and Islam Abad: Zed Books and Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 111–15.
- 17 By 1994, over 300,000 militia (*Basiji*) were recruited to push back the ‘West’s cultural invasion’, and 300,000 more were to be hired for ordering good and preventing evil (*Amr-e Be Marouf Va Nahy-e Az Monkar*). See *Iran Times*, 28 October 1993.
- 18 Iran Statistical Centre.
- 19 Mehrangiz Kar, *Eliminating Discrimination Against Women: Comparing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women With Iranian Laws*, Tehran: Parvin Publications, p. 252.
- 20 Maryam Mohseni, ‘Kargar-e Zan-e Khanegi’ [‘Women Home Workers’], *Negah-e Zan* 1, Tehran: Touse’e Publishers, 1998, pp. 9–14.
- 21 *Salam*, Tehran, 11 Ordibehesht 1378/1 May 1999.
- 22 For a detailed account of workers’ reactions during the war, see *Rah-e Kargar* 37–48, 1987.
- 23 See *Kargar-e Kommunist* 1 (September), 1999, pp. 36–38, and various issues of *Rah-e Kargar* and *Ettihad-Fadaian*, 1999.
- 24 Mujahdeen-e Khalq originated from a radical Islamic guerrilla group fighting against the shah’s regime. After the revolution, they followed their eclectic ideology, mingling some socialist ideas with their interpretation of Islam, were brutally suppressed by the clerical regime and were reduced to a religious cult based in Iraq but with a large following in other countries outside Iran.
- 25 For workers’ councils in Iran, see Rahnema, ‘Workers councils in Iran’. See also Asaf Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, London: Zed Books, 1987.
- 26 The Council of Guardians is a twelve-member body of Islamic jurists and lawyers that acts as an upper chamber and oversees the decisions of the parliament. The conflicts between it and parliament, these bodies representing different factions of the regime, had created a stalemate that led Khomeini to order the establishment of a new extra-parliamentary body, the Council of Expediency, to resolve the disputes and come up with final decisions. See Saeed Rahnema and Sohrab Behdad (eds), *Iran After the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1996, Appendix.
- 27 Labour and Social Security Institute, *Labour Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Tehran, 1993.
- 28 See *Huquq-e Zan Dar Iran* [Women and the Law in Iran (1967–1978)], compiled by Mahnaz Afkhami, Women’s Centre of the Foundation of Iranian Studies, 1994.
- 29 Labour and Social Security Institute, *Law of Transfer of Government Shares to Workers* [in Persian], Tehran, 1996.
- 30 The Shi’i hierarchy works through recruiting young seminary students (*tolab*) as the tutees of a senior cleric or Ayatollah, who pays their *shahrieh* (allowance). A cleric’s major financial source are the donations, *Sahm-e Imam*, that he receives from his followers. The *Sahms* are a sort of tax that Muslim believers must pay to the imam of their choice. One of the functions of the tutee, acting as a sort of spiritual labourer, is to recruit new followers for the cleric by preaching in the

rural areas and working-class neighbourhoods. The more followers he finds, the higher would be his own allowance. The top clerics compete with each other to attract more tutees by paying higher wages, and use part of their income received for charities to help their followers. See, Sayed Ali Akbar Mohtashemi, *Khaterat [Memoir]*, Vol. I, Tehran: Hoseh Honary, 1997, pp. 112–19.

- 31 The figures are for 1996, Imam Khomeini's Aid Committee Activities, cited in *Iran Statistical Yearbook* [in Persian], Tehran, 1997, pp. 486, 487.
- 32 S. Michel, 'Les Dëshérités sont à vendre', *Le Point* 1420, 3 December 1999, p. 41.
- 33 Iran Statistical Centre, *Iran Statistical Yearbook* [in Persian], Tehran, 1997, pp. 488, 489.
- 34 The Iranian Peoples Fedayeen Guerrillas was the leading Left underground organization during the time of the shah. After the revolution, the organization dropped its armed struggle strategy and changed its name to Organization of the People's Fedayeen. Soon, a split divided the organization into a radical hardline Minority and a pro-Soviet Majority. Several other splits occurred in both groups. Details of the splits are discussed in Rahnema, *Re-birth of Social Democracy in Iran?*.
- 35 On some of the populist positions of the Tudeh and Fedayeen *Aksariat* (Majority) on political democracy, a free press, and the democratic rights of women and ethnic and religious minorities, see Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-defined Revolutionary Movement*, London: Macmillan, 1994 and 1996.
- 36 Workers Path was formed by a group of prominent political prisoners after the revolution, advocating an immediate move towards socialism. It is still active in Kurdistan and elsewhere outside Iran.
- 37 An extreme radical pro-Maoist organization that evolved out of the religious radical Mujahedeen-e Khalq. The organization does not exist anymore, though some of the founding members are active.
- 38 This Maoist organization was formed by Iranian students abroad, mostly in the US, who returned to Iran after the revolution. A section of the organization launched a rural guerrilla action, which failed completely and was eliminated.
- 39 A radical Iranian Kurdish Left organization advocating socialism for Kurdistan and Iran. After the revolution, it merged with several smaller groups and formed the Iranian Communist Party. A group split off from within the organization and formed the Iranian Workers Communist Party. The former is active in Kurdistan and the latter mostly outside Iran.
- 40 This party emerged out of a split in the Tudeh Party in 1987, rejecting Leninist policies and advocating political democracy and social justice.
- 41 Iran Statistical Centre, *Statistical Yearbook* [in Persian], Tehran, 1998, p. 88.
- 42 See R.L. Daft, *Organization Theory and Design*, New York, 1992, pp. 160–1, and Saeed Rahnema, *Organization Structure: A Systemic Approach*, McGraw-Hill/Ryerson, 1992, pp. 44–5.

INDEX

- Abrahamian, Ervand 14, 37–8, 232
 Action Group for Free Elections 167
 'Adalat Party: *see* Edalat Party
Adineh publication 51, 63n69
 Afary, Janet 7–8
 Afghanistan 20, 213
 Africa, migration to 87
 Afshar, Iraj 67–8, 81
 Afzali, Bahram 243
 Agayev, Bahram 161, 162
 Agayev, Imran 161
 Agayev, Kamran 161
 Agayev, Muharram 161
 agriculture, commercialized 86
 Ahmad Shah 87, 89
 Ahmadzadeh, Mas'ud 191, 199, 200
 Akhundzadeh, Ruhullah 91, 108
 Al-e Ahmad, Jalal: cultural nationalism
 31; *Gharbzadegi* 14, 44–5, 269, 270;
 Iranian identity 247; Maleki 166–7;
 Tudeh Party 42
 Alam, Asadollah 180–1
 Alavi, Bozorg 166
 Algeria 195, 199, 212–13, 272
 Aliakbarzadeh, Ali Akbar 160
 Alikhanov, Mehmed Qoli 101, 102
 All-unions Council of Tehran 281
 Amani, Sadeq 193
 American embassy hostages 47, 238,
 239, 248–9n18
 Amin, Turaj 140–1
 Amini, Ali 182
 Amir-Fazli, Isma'il Khan 133, 137, 138,
 140, 141
 Amirkhizi, Isma'il 132
 Amu Ughli, Haydar Khan: *see* Haydar
 Khan
Andisheh va honar periodical 42
 Anglo-Iranian Oil Company 173, 282
 Anglo-Iranian oil disputes 179
 Anglo-Russian Convention 68–9
 Anglo-Russian invasion 23
 Angola 218
anjumans (urban councils) 68, 132
 anti-communism 38
 anti-democracy 43
 anti-feminism 213, 219–20
 anti-imperialism: clerics 223; Jangalis
 100; Khomeini 7, 40, 192, 193, 210;
 Leninism 35; Marxism 33; post-
 Comintern 232; press 71; revolution
 233; socialism 36n18; Tudeh Party
 47, 60n35; women's rights 209;
 Zibakalam 43
 anti-shah movements 190, 192, 202–3
 anti-veil protest marches 11, 209, 213
 anti-Zionism 232
 Aram, Bahram 191
 Arani, Taqi 44
 Araqi, Mahdi 193
Arash periodical 42
Aravud newspaper 71
 Arfa, Hasan 138
 Armed Propaganda Theory 199–200
 armed struggle 197–8, 201
 Armenian nationalists 90
 Armenian social democrats 7, 67, 72–4,
 81, 131
 Army of Islam 91
 artisans 71, 87
 Asgaroladi, Habiballah 193
 Ashkhabad (Ashgabat) 128, 129, 150
 Ashraf, Hamid 191
 Ashraf Dehghani organization 239
 Ashuri, secretary 150
 assassination: Bihbahani 78, 80, 96;
 intellectuals 63n66, 294; Islamic

- Republic 49, 211, 241; Islamists 260;
 Mansour 193
 Assembly of Experts 237, 272, 273
 assimilation policy 154
 Association of Iranian Communists 213
 Association of Islamic Councils 288
 Atabaki, Touraj 4, 9–10
 authoritarianism 32, 250
 autonomous republics 24, 119
Ayandegan newspaper 32, 47, 61n48, 212
Azadi publication 47
Azadi-ye Iran periodical 150
 Azerbaijan: Autonomous Government
 24, 119; Britain 91; Communist Party
 of Iran 10, 94, 152, 156–7;
 Democratic Party 166–7;
 Government Gendarmerie 134;
 Himmat Party 8, 85, 88, 93; Iranian
 migrants 9–10, 87, 131, 148–9, 281;
 Lahuti 139; nationalism 91;
 nationalists 91; nationality 24, 32;
 revolt 43, 169; *see also* Communist
 Party of Azerbaijan
 Azerbaijan Provincial Council 69
 Azerbaijani Revolutionary Committee
 112
 Azizbekov, Meshedi Azizbeyk-uglu 88,
 89

 Badamchi, Muhammad Ali 132
 Badizadegan, Ali Asghar 191
 Bagirov, Mir Jafar 160
 Bahais 76, 160
 Bahar, Malik al-Shu'ara' 70
 Bakhtiyari–Democrat coalition
 government 75
 Baku: Bolsheviks 89–90, 92, 93; civil war
 90; Democrat Party 149, 162–3n12;
 Ehsanollah Khan 10, 150–1; ethnicity
 88, 89; Himmat Party 90, 131;
 Iranian Culture Society 153; Iranian
 migrants 8, 99; Iranian Organization
 of Social Democrats 68; Islamic
 workers 91–2; living conditions 154;
 oilfields 87, 131, 147, 148; Ottoman
 army 91; political parties 149;
 poverty 154; Russian Social
 Democrat network 150; Social
 Democratic Party 252; Soviet forces
 90; trade unions 231
 Baku Committee 91–2
 Baku Commune 91
 Baku Congress (1920) 8, 106–10;
 Bolshevik Revolution 106; Haydar
 Khan 100, 107–9; Iranians 28, 107–9;
 Jangali movement 85–6, 109;
 Sultanzade 110–12
 Baku meeting (December 1931) 157–8,
 160
 Banisadr, Abolhasan 48, 223, 239, 246
 Baqa'i, Mozaffar 10, 167, 179
 Baqir Khan 69
 Baratov, General 124
 Basil, Joseph 71
 Basir, Ne'mat 161
 Ba'th 20
Bayraq-i 'Adalat: see *Beyraq-e 'Edalat*
 Bazargan, Mehdi: Freedom Movement
 50, 168, 247; government 47, 290;
 Liberation Movement 193; military
 trial 195–6; NUW 216–17
 Bazargani, Muhammad 191
 Behbahani: *see* Bihbahani
 Beheshti, Ayatollah 239
 Behrooz, Maziar 4, 11, 31, 57n6,
 265–6n7, 266n10, n11
 Beria, Lawrientij Pawlowicz 159
 Bernstein, Edward 251
Beyraq-e 'Edalat 87, 89, 127–8, 149
 Bicherakov, Lazar 124
 Bichiz, Husayn 140
 Bihbahani, Sayyid 'Abd Allah 77–8, 80,
 96
Bisutun periodical 123–4
 Blumkin, Yakov 23
 Bobbio, Norberto 263, 264
 body/commodification 221
 Bolshevik Revolution 90; Baku Congress
 106; Left 3, 4, 8, 40; Marxism-
 Leninism 43
 Bolsheviks: Baku 89–90, 92, 93;
 Eurocentrism 85, 98, 99, 249n27;
 gender 217–18; Gilan 8, 101;
 Government Gendarmerie 128, 135;
 Himmat Party 98; Jangali movement
 101; Kirmanshah 123; naval forces
 23; proletariat 249n27; propaganda
 136; purged 158; territoriality 88;
 Turkestan 97–8
 bomb making 95
 Brest-Litovsk treaty 124
 Britain: Azerbaijan 91; denounced 136;
 Gilan 101; imperialism 151, 174–5;

- India 174; influence 29; shah 102; Shiraz 127
- Broido, Eva 88
- Browne, Edward G. 70
- Bukharai, Muhammad 193
- Buniatzadeh, D. 89
- capitalism: commercialism 103; dependent 47; industrial 38; Iranian revolution 79; Left 30; means of production 79; Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza 232; Transcaucasia 87
- cash crops 86
- Caspian Fishing Company 176
- Caucasus 87, 147–8, 150, 156
- censorship 32, 125
- census of working-class 297–8
- Central Asian Society, London 76
- Central Bureau of Muslim Communist Organizations 96
- Central Council of United Trade Unions 58n23
- Central United Council 282
- Chalangarian, Arshavir 69, 108, 281
- Chaqueri, Cosroe 56n5, 82n5
- Charter of Cooperation 261
- Chiang Kai-Shek 169
- Chile 5, 26, 215, 227n35
- Chilingarian, Arshavir: *see* Chalangarian
- China 5, 171, 200, 272
- Chinese Communist Party 204n6
- Chista* periodical 51
- citizenship rights 38–9
- Civil Code 286, 287
- civil disobedience 197
- civil society 51, 292
- class 218, 285; *see also* middle class; working class
- class struggle 153, 199, 270
- clerics 293; anti-imperialism 223; Fedayeen 222; gender issues 225–6; Gilan 24; Islamic Republic 272–3; Islamic Right 40; Islamization 221; Khomeini 47; Left 229; middle class 51; modernization 45; NUW 216–17; popular support 50, 247; populism 50, 247; women 225; xenophobia 211; *see also* *ulama*
- clerics' funds 293
- coalition government 166
- Coalition of Islamic Associations 193, 197
- Cold War: geopolitics 4, 29; imperialism/socialism 43–4; Lahuti 146n119; Left 1, 38, 55n1
- Comintern: First Congress 99; Iran 163n34; Iranian communists 152, 153, 158, 252; Roy 231; Sayfi 155, 157; Sultanzade 103, 104–5, 231
- Commissariat for the Affairs of Nationalities 96
- Committee for the Revolution Liberating Iran 150–1, 161
- Committee of National Defence 126
- commodification of body 221
- communism 4, 25
- Communist League 254
- Communist Party of Azerbaijan: Congress 94; Iranians 152–3, 154, 156–7, 159; leadership criticisms 156–7; national liberation 102; *see also* Edalat Party; Himmat Party
- Communist Party of Iran 296; Azerbaijan 10, 94, 152, 156–7; Caucasus 150; Central Committee 73–4, 108, 110–11; education of members 243; founded 1, 20, 40; Haydar Khan 112, 231; Kuchek Khan 101; land reform 104; members killed 241; membership characteristics 242; Minority Faction 252, 256; post-coup 135; rebellion 108; schism 85; Sultanzade 102–4, 155; Sultanzadeh 155; Turkestan 150; *see also* Edalat Party
- Communist Party of Iran (Baku) 8, 113
- Communist Party of Iraq 20
- Communist Party of the Soviet Union 3, 152, 154, 204n6
- Communist Party of Sudan 218
- Communist Union 295
- Communist Unity: *see* Peykar
- Communists' League: *see* Peykar
- Confederation of Iranian Students 26, 42, 46, 234–5, 253
- confessions 34
- conspiracy theory 173–4
- Constitutional Revolution: Armenian social democrats 67, 81; Haydar Khan 95, 96; intellectuals 231; Islamic right 40; mullahs 35; reformism 251; religion 269; secular

- right 40; social democrats 7, 19, 85;
trade unions 281
- constitutionalists 69
- copper mines 148
- Cossack Brigade 69, 129–30, 140
- Cossacks: Democrat Party 130–1, 133,
142; Government Gendarmerie 126,
136–7; Jangali movement 101, 135
- Council of Guardians 50, 273, 290–1,
300n26
- coup (1921) 24, 113, 134, 281
- coup (1953) 23, 26, 196; Maleki 168;
Tudeh Party 194; US/UK support 25,
192, 231–2, 253, 282
- Cronin, Stephanie 8–9
- Cuba 195, 200, 227n35, 272
- cultural nationalism 30–1, 32, 33
- Cultural Revolution 31, 49, 52–3, 239
- Dailami, Pezhmann 8
- Dashnak Armenian press 71
- Dashnaks 74, 90
- Davtdzhan 151–2
- democracy 75–6, 250, 263, 264, 280–1
- Democrat Party 58n15, 67–8;
Azerbaijan 166–7; Baku 149,
162–3n12; Cossacks 133, 142;
Government Gendarmerie 119, 125;
Haydar Khan 8–9, 96; *Iran-i naw* 40,
77; Khiyabani 104, 132, 142; local
branches 70; Mukhbir al-Saltanah
138; nationality 75–6; press 70; Tabriz
104, 131–4; Taqizadah 7–8, 70, 74–5;
Turkistan 99–100; working-class
members 75; World War I 97; *see also*
Armenian social democrats; social
democrats
- Democratic National Front 47
- Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan
257, 260, 262
- Democratic Party of the People of Iran
257, 260
- deportations 159
- Derrida, Jacques 63n69
- dhimmis* 76
- dictatorship 263–4
- al-Din Shah, Muzaffar 68
- dissidents 50, 76, 232
- Djilas, Milovan 171
- Dovom-e Khordad* 261
- Dumas, Alexandre 70
- Dzhaparidze, P.A. 89
- Edalat Party 149, 163n13, 281; Baku 87;
Gilan Republic 150; Government
Gendarmerie 127, 128; Haydar Khan
107; Himmat Party 92, 93–4; Islam
89; Lahuti 119; liquidated 99–100;
localism/internationalism 91–4;
populism 89; Russian empire 8;
Turkistan 98–9; *see also Beyraq-e*
'Edalat; Communist Party of Iran
- education: class 285; communists 243;
Persian language 149; women 68,
124, 214
- Efendiev, Himmati leader 98
- Egypt 213
- Ehsanollah Khan: accusations against
160; arrested 161; Baku 10, 150–1;
execution 162; letters 161–2;
Soviet–Iranian relations 152, 157;
Temporary Revolutionary
Committee 105
- election candidates 237
- Elm va zendegi* periodical 42, 178
- Engels, Friedrich 39
- Enlightenment 271, 275
- Eshaq, Eprim 42, 167
- Eshkevari, H. Y. 276
- Eskandari, Soleyman Mirza 97, 125
- ethnicity 32, 77, 88–9, 89, 159
- Ettehad School 149, 154
- Eurocentrism 44, 85, 98, 99, 249n27
- executions: gender patterns 241, 243;
Iranian migrants 160; Islamic
Republic 49, 211, 241; Islamists 240;
political prisoners 48; professionals
241; Tudeh Party 243, 244; *see also*
assassination
- exile: constitutionalists 69; Haydar
Khan 96; Khomeini 192; Lahuti 124;
Left 53; Mojahedeen 53; purges 29;
Resulzade 82n11; socialist reformism
256–60; Taqizadah 78
- factionalism 158
- factories 284
- Faidayan: *see* Fedayeen
- Family Protection Act 221–2
- Fanon, Frantz 270
- Farangestan* journal 40
- Fardid, Ahmad 44
- Farhang-e towse'eh* journal 51
- Fasl-e sabz* journal 52
- fatwas* 77, 269, 275

- February Revolution 89, 123, 126
 Fedayeen (Fedaian, Fedayin)
 (Organization of Iranian People's
 Fedayeen, OIPF) 26, 31, 233, 253,
 254, 261, 301n34; *Aksariat/Aghaliat*
 221, 222, 254, 295, 296; American
 hostages 248–9n18; clerics 222; end
 of 260; Fedayee Organization 237,
 257, 266n10; gender issues 214;
 imprisonment 234; Islamists 223, 240;
 Left Wing 254; MKO 199; NUW 214,
 215–17, 220–2; patriarchy 220; post-
 coup 253; post-revolution 13; press
 212; recognition by IRP 239–40; split
 254, 256, 265n5; Tudeh Party 202;
 violence 197; women's issues 213,
 214, 218; Workers Freedom 257
 Fedayin-i Khalq *see* Fedayeen
 federalism 99
 female sexuality 219, 221
 feminism 219–20, 223
Ferdowsi magazine 42
 Fifteenth Khordad Foundation 293
 Firooz, Maryam 218
Firqah-i Kargar (Workers' Party) 123–4
 food prices 86
 Foucault, Michel 272, 277
 Freedom Movement 50, 168, 234, 246,
 247
 freedom of press 40
 freedom of speech 31–2
 freemasonry 176
 FRELIMO 218
 French Revolution 21, 38–9, 57n8
 fundamentalism 222, 230, 233, 293
 Furuhar, Daryus 168

 Ganji, Akbar 268, 276
Gardun publication 63n69
 gender issues: Bolsheviks 217–18; class
 218; clerics 225–6; executions 241,
 243; intellectuals 219; Islamic
 Republic Party 224; OIPF 214; wages
 291
 gender politics 218
 geopolitics 4, 20, 25, 29, 147
 German Democratic Republic 3
 German Social Democratic Party 39,
 251
 Germany 4, 101, 141–2, 290
 Ghafari, Heybat 256, 259
 Ghaffarzadeh, Assadullah 89, 90, 149,
 150
gharbzadegi (West-struckness) 31, 44–5,
 246–7, 269, 270
 Ghassemloo, Abdol-rahman 257
 Gilan Republic: Bolsheviks 8, 101;
 Edalat Party 150; guerrilla attack
 190; Haydar Khan 231; Jangali
 movement 1, 85–6, 100–6; Reza Shah
 125; rise and fall 2, 6, 23–4; as Soviet
 republic 40, 101; Sultanzade 105
 Gilan Revolutionary Committee
 members 161
 girls: marriage age 222, 224; puberty 224
 globalization 31
 Gorky, Maxim 86
 Government Gendarmerie: Azerbaijan
 134; Bolsheviks 128, 135; Cossacks
 126, 136–7; Democrat Party 119, 125;
 deserters 128–9; Edalat Party 127,
 128; Haydar Khan 128; Lahuti 119,
 122–3, 125–6, 138; mutiny 137–8;
 rebels 139; Reza Khan 138; wages
 delayed 129, 137, 139
 Gramsci, Antonio 45
 Great Terror (*Yezhevshchina*) 158–62
 Greece 263
 Group of Fifty-three 41, 44, 52, 166
 Guardianship of the Jurist 272
 guerrilla movement 21; anti-shah
 movements 190; Behrooz 4–5, 11;
 cadres 202; Gilan 190; inexperience
 200; Islamic Republic 203; Islamists
 201; machismo 220; NIRT 189;
 reorganization 198–9; SAVAK 197;
 urban 235; violence 197–8; *see also*
 Fedayeen; Mojahedeen
 Guevara, Che 270, 272
 Guliev, Dzh. B. 92, 94

Habl al-Matin newspaper 122
 Haider Khan: *see* Haydar Khan
 Hajibi, Amir (Ghulam Riza) 71
 Hale, Sondra 218
 Halliday, Fred 4, 6
 Hamas 293
Hammal newspaper 150
hamshari (fellow countrymen) 148–9
 handicraft production 86
 Hanifnezhad, Muhammad 191
Haqiqat magazine 213
 Haqshenas, Torrab 191

- Hartwig, N.H. 69
 Hasanzadeh, Hamdollah 160
 Hashemi-Rafsanjani, Ali-Akbar 49–50, 51
 Hashemite monarchy, Iraq 20
 Hashemzadeh, Molla Baba 160
 Hashimi, Mir Husayn Khan 134
 Haydar Khan Amu Ughli 40, 68; alleged assassination attempt 78, 95; Baku Congress 100, 107–9; Communist Party of Iran 112, 231; Constitutional Revolution 95, 96; Democrat Party 8–9, 96; early life/education 95; exiled 96; Gilan Republic 231; Government Gendarmerie 128; Lahuti 122; Leninism 107; Minimum Programme 150; October Revolution 95; Pavlovich 112–13; Rahim Khan 73; Revolutionary Party of Iran 97–8, 99, 101, 107; Revolutionary Society of the World 97; in Russia 96–7; Tabriz 95; Tehran 95; Ter Hacobian 80–1; Turkestan 106; World War I 96
 Hedayat, Sadeq 42
 Heidegger, Martin 44, 63n69
 Hejab 11, 209, 213, 221, 222, 225, 273; *see also* veil-wearing
 Held, David 264
 Hemmat Party: *see* Himmat Party
 Heydar Khan: *see* Haydar Khan
 Hezbollah 210, 215, 223, 276, 293
 Himmat Party 149; Azerbaijan 8, 85, 88, 93; Baku 90, 131; Bolsheviks 98; Edalat Party 92, 93–4; non-socialist 85; split 92; suppressed 89
 Hishmat, Amir 125
 Hizbollah: *see* Hezbollah
 hostage-taking 47, 238, 239, 248–9n18
 House of Labour 288
 human rights 76, 275–6
 Hume, David 275
Hürriyat newspaper 149
 Huseynzadeh, Dadash 155
 Hussein, Imam 269, 270
 Ibrahimov, Sayfollah 155–6
 identity/culture 247
 ideology 28–9, 43–4, 238, 246
 Ijlal al-Mulk 139, 140
 IMF 49–50
 imperialism 26, 43–4, 151, 174–5; *see also* anti-imperialism
 India 87, 174
 Indonesia 5
 industrialization 15, 87, 148, 280, 281–2
 intellectuals: assassination 63n66, 294; Constitutional Revolution 231; culture 30; dissent 50; gender roles 219; Islamic 297; Left 15, 42, 51–2, 60n40, 280–1; middle class 45; revolution 33; social democrats 39; *see also* religious intellectuals
 intelligentsia: *see* intellectuals
 International Women's Day 32
 Iran–Iraq war 239, 274, 292
Iran-e farda newspaper 50, 62–3n65
Iran-i naw journal 70–2; Armenian social democrats 7; Democrat Party 40, 77; Lahuti 122; political terrorism 78–81; Resulzade 68; Ter Hacobian 68, 74
 Iran Independent Party 149
 Iranian Communist Party: *see* Communist Party of Iran
 Iranian Culture Society 153
 Iranian migrants: Azerbaijanis 9–10, 87, 131, 148–9, 281; Baku 8, 99; Caucasus 87, 147–8; ethnicity 88; executions 160; imprisoned 159; nationality issue 152–3; NKVD 160; passivity 90; peasantry 86–7; political activism 281; taxation 149; transport 147; Turkestan 147–8; work permits 148
 Iranian Organization of Social Democrats (Baku) 68 *see also* Organization of Social Democrats and Social Democratic Party of Iran (SPDI)
 Iranian Workers Communist Party 301n39
Iranshahahr journal 40
 Iraq 20
 Ishaq, Eprim: *see* Eshaq, Eprim
 Iskandari, Sulayman Mirza: *see* Eskandari, Soleyman Mirza
 Islam: Baku Soviets 90; Edalat Party 89; intellectuals 297; Marxism 32–3; politics 235, 246; secular forces 24, 35; social democrats 50; womanhood 224
 Islamic Associations 284, 286, 288–93

- Islamic Guards 223
 Islamic Labour Party 288
 Islamic Left 26, 48–9, 50
 Islamic Renaissance 271
 Islamic Republic 250; assassinations 49, 211, 241; authoritarianism 32; clerics 272–3; electoral success 246; executions 49, 211, 241; guerrillas 203; Islamic Left 48–9; Khomeini 189–90; Kurds 47; Left 5, 7, 11, 12, 37–8; MKO 203; Mojahedeen 274; reign of terror 48; repression 4, 48; *showras* 15; social democrats 73–4; totalitarianism 238; Tudeh Party 43, 295; working-class 46
 Islamic Republic Party: dissolution 49; founding 193; gender rights 224; liberalism 61–2n55; power 238; revolution 234; takeover 48
 Islamic Revolution 225, 274, 293
 Islamic Revolutionary Committees 292
 Islamic Revolutionary Guards 293
 Islamic Right 40
 Islamic Workers' Councils 291–2
 Islamicization 14, 209, 221, 225, 239, 277–8
 Islamists: assassination 260; executions 240; Fedayeen 223, 240; female sexuality 219, 221; Freedom Movement 246; guerrillas 201; Labour Law 291–2; Left 230, 234, 245–6; liberals 246–7, 263; National Front 246; punishments 273; religious intellectuals 269–72; repression 240; Tudeh Party 240; workers' councils 283
 Israfilbekov, S. 89
Jame'e-ye salem 51
 Jangali movement 197; anti-imperialism 100; Baku Congress 85–6, 109; Bolsheviks 101; Communist Party of Iran (Baku) 8, 113; Cossacks 101, 135; Gilan Republic 1, 85–6, 100–6; land reform 100
 Jangali rebellion 126, 150, 151
 Japan 290
 Javadzadeh, Mir Javad: *see* Peshehvare
 Javid, Salamollah Madadzadeh 153–5
 Jazani, Bizhan 191, 196, 199–200, 300n15
 Kadivar, Mohsen 276
 Kakh-saz, Nasser 256, 258
 Kangavari, Mohammad Ja'far 150
 Kant, Immanuel 275
 Kar publication 47, 214, 237, 248–9n18
 Kar va kargar newspaper 52, 275
 Karmozd journal 52
 Kashani, Ayatollah 26, 179
 Kashkuli, Iraj 194
 Katouzian, Homa 10–11, 265n4
 Kautsky, Karl 39, 251, 260, 281
 Kavburo 110
 Kavkraiikom 92–3
 Kayhan-in-exile newspaper 244
 Keddie, Nikki 200
 Kenyatta, Jomo 270
 Kermani, Mirza Aqa Khan 57n11, 251
 Keshtgar, Ali 256, 257–8
 Keshtgar Group 256
 Ketab-e jom'eh periodical 48
 Khachaturian, Vasu 69
 khalq (people) 190, 198, 202, 203n3, 240
 Khameh'i, Anvar 42, 52
 Khamenei, Hojjat al-Islam 273
 Khanbaba-tehrani, Mehdi 194
 Khaneh-e Kargar (Workers' House) 275
 Khanukaev, Avenir Avisalumovich 95, 105–6, 110
 Khatami, Mohammad: economy 62n59; elected 14, 51, 225–6, 261, 274, 296; moderates 295; reform movement 2; second term 54; student protests 53
 Khiyabani, Shaykh Muhammad: Azerbaijan Gendarmerie 134; coup against 133–4; death 138, 142; Democrat Party 104, 132, 142; National Government 132–3; Tabriz 104, 131–2
 Khoiniha, Prosecutor-General 245
 Khoiski, Fathali Khan 91
 Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah: anti-imperialism 7, 40, 192, 193, 210; back-to-work 290; clerics 47; cultural nationalism 33; death 274, 294; dissidence 232; exile 192; Hejab 11, 209; hostage-taking 47; Islamic Republic 189–90; Leader of Revolution 273; Left 27, 210, 220, 244–5; Mosaddeq 26; political Islam 235; populism 46, 210–11, 217; social welfare 293; Tudeh Party 47; women's issues 222–3

- Khordad Movement 274, 276–7
 Kianoori, Nooreddin 224
 Kirmanshah 123–4, 126–7
 Kirmanshahi, Lahuti: *see* Lahuti
 Kolakowski, Leszek 63n69
 Kolomiitsev, Ivan Osipovich 123–4
 Komala 239, 253, 254, 295
Kommunist newspaper 110, 111
 Korea 169
 Kuchek Khan, Mirza: betrayed 24;
 Communist Party of Iran 101;
 guerrillas 23; Jangali rebellion 100,
 126, 150; national liberation 112;
 Revolutionary Committee of
 Azerbaijan 109–10; *Slovo* 105; Soviets
 102; Sultanzade 111
 Kumaleh: *see* Komala
 Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran 32,
 213, 253
 Kurdistan 32, 195, 213, 239, 257, 260
 Kurds: Islamic Republic 47, 48; Left 235,
 301n39; Soviet Union 24; suppressed
 212; tribes 123, 134; women 213
- labour force/women 286, 287–8, 291
 Labour Law 58n23, 288, 289, 290–2
 labour market 86–7
 labour movement 231
 labour shortage 148
 Lahuti, Abulqasim 8–9; autobiography
 142–3n2; Azerbaijanis 139; Cold War
 146n119; early life/education 3,
 118–20; early poems 70; Edalat 119;
 escape from Tabriz 141; exiled to
 Istanbul 124, 125; Government
 Gendarmerie 119, 122–3, 125–6, 138;
 Haydar Khan 122; *Iran-i naw* 122;
 Kurdish background 120, 121, 123–4;
 Pars magazine 124; poetry 120–2,
 141–2; proclamations 140; Rasht
 121–2; socialism 124; Soviet Union
 118, 141–2; Tajikistan 141; translator
 142
 Lahuti rebellion 118, 137–41, 142
 Lajevardi, Asadallah 193
 land reform: class struggle 199;
 Communist Party of Iran 104;
 Jangalis 100; Maleki 10, 179, 183;
 privatization 86–7; seizures 47; White
 Revolution 192
 Lashai, Kurosh 194
 Lebanon 293
- Left 38; Bolshevik Revolution 3, 4, 8, 40;
 clerics 229; Cold War 1, 38, 55n1;
 critiques 43, 59n31, 244–6;
 democracy 250; elimination of 223–4;
 historical role 1–2, 6–7, 19–20, 37–9;
 impact 33–4; intellectuals 15, 42,
 51–2, 60n40, 280–1; international
 20–1; Iranian exiles 53; Islamic
 Republic 5, 7, 11, 12, 37–8; Islamists
 230, 234, 245–6; Khomeini 27, 210,
 220, 244–5; Kurds 235, 301n39;
 nationalization 283; Pahlavis 13, 30;
 populism 237–8; post-revolutionary
 expansion 236, 253–4; radical 203n3,
 295–6; religious politics 12, 229–30;
 repressed 41, 262–3, 280, 297;
 revolution 27; secular intellectuals
 45–6, 47, 53–4, 236; Soviet Union 2;
 women's issues 11–12, 32, 220, 243;
 women's movement 213–17; workers'
 movement 294–7; working class 3, 5,
 14, 262; *see also* socialism
 Left Unity: *see* Peykar
 Left Workers' Unity 262, 296
 Lenin, V.I.: April Theses 89; Iran 101,
 103, 108; Mikoyan 92; revolution 85;
 women's issues 217–18
 Leninism 13, 35, 107, 110
 Liakhoff, Colonel 69
 liberal democracy 39, 271
 liberalism 32, 34–5
 liberals 246–7, 260, 263
 Liberation Movement of Iran 193
 liberation movements 193, 200
 living conditions 52, 154, 284
 Lundberg, Colonel 125, 138
 Lyotard, Jean-François 63n69
- McLennan, Gregor 264
 Macpherson, C.B. 264
 majles (parliament) 39–40, 68, 69, 76
 male hegemony 219, 225, 243
 Maleki, Khalil 10, 265n4; Al-e Ahmad
 166–7; arrested 183, 184–5; biography
 165–8, 185n1; British imperialism
 174–5; coup 168; death 168;
 imprisoned 10, 166; land reform 10,
 179, 183; Marxism 10, 177, 185;
 Marxism-Leninism 167; Mosaddeq
 10, 180–2; National Front 177–8;
 Socialist League of the Popular
 Movement 168; Socialist Tudeh

- Society 252; Stalinism 167, 183;
Third Force 7, 25, 42, 169–72, 193,
252–3; Toilers' Party 10, 252; Tudeh
Party 10, 166–7; women's rights 10,
179, 183
- Malikzadah, Hasan Khan 134
- Mansour, Hasan Ali 193
- Mao Zedong 169, 171, 204n6, 272
- Maoism 4, 194, 201, 204n6, 301n37
- Maoist groups 234, 253
- Maraghehi, Haji Zeinalabedin 86
- March Days 90, 91
- Marling, Charles 69
- marriage age 222
- martyrdom 120
- Martyrs Foundation 293
- Marx, Karl 39, 229, 259, 265
- Marxism: anti-imperialism 33;
democracy 264; Gramsci 45;
guerrillas 201; Islamic movement
32–3, 45; Left 19, 31; Maleki 10, 177,
185; MKO 191, 201; revolutionaries
9; semi-feudalism 30; Shariati 272;
Stalinist 45; tsarist armies 3
- Marxism-Leninism 40–1, 43, 53–4,
56–7n6, 167, 196
- Marxists 48, 64n80, 201, 203
- Mashayekhi, Mehrdad 57n6
- Mashhad 128, 129–30, 136
- massacres of civilians 131–2
- Matin-asgari, Afshin 6–7, 59n27
- Mensheviks 88, 158
- middle class 42, 45, 51, 262, 285
- Migrants 100; *see also* Iranian migrants
- Mikailian, Avetis: *see* Sultanzade
- Mikoyan, Anastas 92–3, 94, 161, 164n45
- Miliband, R. 251
- militancy 210, 280
- Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
292
- Mirsepasi, Ali 12–13, 57n6
- Mirza, Ahmad : *see* Ahmad Shah
87
- Mirzayan, first secretary 151–2, 153
- MKO: *see* Mojahadeen
- MKO (ML) 191–2, 201
- Moderate Party 71, 77, 78–81
- modernization 45, 229, 276–7, 280
- Moghaddam, Val 36n18, 56n5
- Moghissi, Haideh 11–12, 14–15, 56–7n6
- Mohammad Ali Shah 68, 69, 73, 96,
129, 165
- Mohsen, Sa'ad 191
- Moini, Habatollah 256
- Mojahed* magazine 241
- Mojahadeen (MKO) 45, 47, 191, 193,
199, 201, 203, 233, 234, 241, 300n24;
Bihbahani 78; exiled 53; free press
212; Hezbollah 223; ideology 238;
Islamic Left 48; Islamic Republic 26,
274; marginalized 239; post-coup
253; Secret Centre 131; sectarianism
31; Tabriz 68, 69, 132; workers'
councils 289–90; *see also* MKO (ML)
- monarchism 40
- morality squads 224, 286
- Mosaddeq, Mohammad: Maleki 10,
180–2; National Front 24, 43, 192,
253; nationalism 282; nationalization
of Caspian shipping 176; overthrown
2, 25, 192, 193, 232; Popular
Movement 167; religion 269; Third
Force 168; Tudeh Party 26; women's
enfranchisement 180; *see also* coup
(1953)
- Mosafer, Ahmad 150
- Mosavatists: *see* Musavatists
- mosques 292
- Mostaz'afan and Janbazan Foundation
293
- Mozambique 218
- Muhammad Ali Mirza *see* Mohammad
Ali Shah
- mujahadin: *see* Mojahadeen
- Mujahedin Khalq Organization: *see*
Mojahadeen (MKO)
- Mukhbir al-Saltanah, Governor General
133, 138–9, 142
- mullahs 35
- Mur, Leo 151
- Musaddiq: *see* Mosaddeq
- Musavat, Riza 91, 125
- Musavatists 91, 154
- Mushir al-Dawlah 133, 139, 140
- Muslim National Council 91
- Muslim Nationalist Party of Baku 91
- Muslim Savage Division 90
- Muslim Socialist Bureau 91
- Mutahhari, Ayatollah Morteza 221
- Muvaqqar al-Saltanah, Habib Allah 73
- Nabavi, Ebrahim 52
- Nadir Shah 79
- Nagah-e no* journal 63n69

- Naneishvili, Victor Ivanovich 101, 102
Naqd-e agah periodical 48, 51
 Narimanov, Nariman Najaf-uglu 88, 89, 112, 151, 158
 Nasir al-Mulk, Abu al-Qasim Khan 75
 National Committee of Khurasan 136
 National Council of Resistance 239
 National Democratic Front: censorship 32, 212; coalition attempt 47; Left faction 256; socialism 237
 National Democratic Front of Iran (NDFI) 253, 254
 National Front 231; as coalition 172; dissidents 232; formation 167; Islamists 246; Maleki 177–8; Mosaddeq 24, 43, 192, 253; revolution 234; SAVAK 182; second 168, 180, 181–3, 192, 193; third 168, 193; Tudeh Party 25, 42
 National Government 126, 132–3
 National Iranian Radio and Television 189
 national liberation 102, 112
 National Salvation Committee 75
 National Union of Women (NUW): Bazargan 216–17; clerics 216–17; Fedayeen 215–17, 222; OIPF 214, 215–16, 220–2
 nationalism: Azerbaijan 91; bourgeois 101; ideology 28–9; Mosaddeq 282; Soviet Union 21–2; women's rights 212–13
 nationality issues 32, 75–7, 152–3
 nationalization 176, 237, 280, 283, 290
 Nawruz, Ali 124
 Nawzari, Mahmud 136
 Nayeri, Iraj 256
 Nazibzadeh, Akbar 160
Negah-e no quarterly 51
Negain publication 42
 Nejat-hoseini, Mohsen 197
Neshat newspaper 52
 New Insight: Ghafari 259; Keshtgar 257–8; Rahim-khani 258; Rezai 259
 Nicaragua 227n35
 Nikkhah, Parviz 195, 211
Niruy-e Sevvom newspaper 176
 Nizam-al-Saltanah, National Government leader 126
 NKVD 10, 152, 160
 non-capitalist development 31, 32
 Nuri, Fazlollah 44, 68, 76, 269
 Nyerere, Julius 270
 Obukh, Batirbek Loqman-uglu 101, 102
 Occupied Territories 293
 October Revolution 89–90, 95, 127
 oil industry: Baku 87, 131, 147, 148; nationalization 280; strikes 46, 289; workers' organizations 282
 oil reserves 4, 25
 oil revenues 30
Omid-e Iran weekly 47
 opposition movements 24, 52
 Ordzhonikidze, Sergo 93, 109, 112, 154
 Organization of Communist Unity 239
 Organization of Iranian People's Fedayeen (OIPF): *see* Fedayeen
 Organization of National Republicans of Iran 261, 266n19
 Organization of People's Fada'i Guerrillas: *see* Fedayeen
 Organization of Revolutionary Workers 254
 Organization of Social Democrats 71, 131
 Organization of the Iranian People's Mojahedin guerrillas: *see* Mojahedeen
 Organization of the People's Crusaders: *see* Mojahedeen
 Ottoman army 91, 101
 Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza (Muhammad Riza) Shah: capitalism 232; foreign media 193; Maleki 10; overthrown 5, 11, 27; reform 197–8; regime 25, 43, 189, 250; Tudeh Party 3, 42, 59n31, 282; US 24, 30; *see also* White Revolution
 Pahlavi, Reza (Riza) Shah: assimilation policy 154; Azerbaijan 9; consolidation of power 151; Cossacks 135, 136–7; coup (1921) 113, 134, 178, 193; dictatorship 24; Ehsanollah Khan 10; Gilan 24, 125; Government Gendarmerie 138; Left 41, 231, 252; reformist 40; regime 9, 142, 250, 281–2; repression 14–15, 29; Tabriz insurrection 140–1
 Pahlavi dynasty: confiscated properties 293; democracy 13; Left 13, 30; modernization 45, 229, 280; repression 4; West 44

- Paknezhad, Shokrollah 254
 Pakzad, Mehrdad 256
 Palestine 195, 199
 Palestine Group 256, 258, 266n9
 para-statal organizations 293
Pars magazine 124
 Pasyan, Ali Quli Khan 127–8
 Pasyan, Muhammad Taqi Khan 119, 135–6
 patriarchy 218–19, 220
 Patriotic Union of Kurdistan 213
 Pavlovich, Mikhail 95, 104, 112–13
Paykar: see Peykar
 peasantry: Iranian migrants 86–7; Left 238; oppressed 71; passivity 200; revolution 103; strikes 88; taxation 105–6
 People of Iran Party 168
 People's Army 199
 People's Democratic Party 296
 People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan 20
 Persian empire 189
 Persian Gulf 189
 Persian language 149, 153, 154
 Persian translations 70
 Peshehviri, Ja'far 87, 102, 112, 119, 149, 166
 petit bourgeoisie 111, 285
 Petras, J. 263
Peygham-e emruz newspaper 47
 Peykar 239, 254, 266n8, 295; anti-Khomeini 31; Maoist 253; membership 234, 241
 piece workers 288
 Pilossian, Vram 7, 67–8, 72–4, 77–8
 Pishavari: see Peshehviri
 Pishehviri: see Peshehviri
 Plekhanov, Georgi 39, 69, 72
 Pokrovsky, M. N. 104
 Poland 29
 police 34
 political activism 156, 281
 political prisoners 48, 235
 political satire 52
 Popper, Karl 275
 popular culture 45
 Popular Movement 167, 182
 populism: clerics 50, 247; Edalat Party 89; Khomeini 46, 210–11, 217; Left 237–8; post-revolutionary 211–12; Shi'i Islam 46; socialism 221
 Poulantzas, Nicos 264, 299n12
 poverty 62n58; Baku 154; Islamists 211; Left 211; repression 263–4; urban 286, 288
Pravda newspaper 111
 pregnancy leave 291
 presidential elections (1997) 296
 press: anti-imperialism 71; Armenian 71; censorship 32, 125, 212; closures 32, 53; freedom of 40, 212; Left 42, 47–8, 51–2, 213–14; middle class 51; parliamentary debates 70–1; poetry 122; religious intellectuals 63n68; women writers 71; see also individual publications
 privatization, lands 86–7
 production, means of 79
 professionals executed 241
 proletariat 87, 99, 249n27, 296
 protest 52–3, 296
 Przeworski, A. 263
 public sector 286, 287
 Puladin, Mahmud Khan 137, 138
 punishments 273
 purges: Bolsheviks 158; Iranian exiles 29; leadership 3, 4; Left 49; Stalin 3, 4, 29, 41, 158; universities 49
 Puyan, Amir Parviz 191, 196, 199

 Qaffarzadeh: see Ghaffarzadeh
 Qashqai, Bahman 194
 Qavam al-Saltanah, Ahmad 136, 166, 167
 Qum 122–3

 radicalization 27, 195–6
Rah-e Azadi 64n80
 Rah-e Kargar 254, 262, 295
 Rahim Khan 73
 Rahim-khani, Nasser 256, 258
 Rahimi, Mostafa 61n48
 Rahnema, Saeed 13, 14–15
 Ra'isdana, Fariborz 52
 Rajavi, Mas'ud 191, 239
 Rasht 68, 101, 121–2, 126
 Red Army 4, 99, 101, 104, 127
 Red East train 97, 108–9
 Red Star Group 266n15
 reformists 251, 260
 religion: Constitutional Revolution 269; ethnicity 77; expansion of establishment 233; Marx 229;

- Mosaddeq 269; state 45; working-class 288
- religious intellectuals: Islamists 269–72; post-revolution 268; press 63n68; repressive policies 50–1
- religious politics 12, 229–30
- repression: Islamic Republic 4, 48; Islamists 240; Left 41, 262–3, 280, 297; Pahlavis 4, 14–15, 29; poverty 263–4; religious intellectuals 50–1; victims 241
- Resulzade, Mehmet Emin 8; editorship 71; exile 82n11; *Iran-i naw* 68; nationality 75, 77
- returning to one's roots 270
- Revival Party 40
- revolution: Lahuti 119; Left 27; Lenin 85; peasantry 103, 200; Red Army 104; Turkestan 85; urban areas 200
- revolution (1979): anti-imperialism 233; capitalism 79; Left 23, 233–4; militants 280; preparation for 253; women's issues 212; working-class 46–7, 283
- revolutionaries: capitalism 79; history 77; imprisonment 80, 161; Lahuti 124; Left organizations 262; reformists 251; Russian/Transcaucasian 79; Tabriz 69, 118; Tehran 69–70; Turkestan 106; vocabulary 268, 269–70; women 216, 221; working-class 265
- Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan 109–10
- Revolutionary Council 246
- Revolutionary Organization of the Tudeh Party 194–5, 201
- Revolutionary Party of Iran 97–8, 99, 101, 107
- Revolutionary Republican Party of Iran 252, 256
- Revolutionary Society of the World 97
- Reza Shah: *see* Pahlavi, Reza Shah
- Rezai, Bijan 259
- Rezvani, Mohsen 194
- Right wing, religious/secular 40
- Riza Shah: *see* Pahlavi, Reza Shah
- Rodinson, Maxime 230
- Rosmer, Alfred 106
- Rowbothan, Sheila 216
- Roy, M.N. 103, 104–5, 231
- Ruhani, Hosein 191
- Russia 3, 29, 126, 148, 171; *see also* Soviet Union
- Russian army 3, 9, 126–7, 131–2
- Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) 93, 105–6; *see also* Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party
- Russian Revolution 80
- Russian Social Democrat network 150
- Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party 39, 71, 88–9, 90, 131, 149–50; *see also* Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)
- Russo-Japanese War 149
- Ruznamah-i Majlis* newspaper 71
- Sadeq, Mohsen 191
- Sadiqi, Gholamhossein 181
- Saedzadeh, Mohsen 276
- Safarov, Georgii Ivanovich 97–8
- Sahabi, Ezzatollah 50
- Shahand* publication 244
- Salam* publication 53
- Sanjabi, Karim 181
- Sartipzadih, Ali Asghar 140
- Sattar Khan 69
- SAVAK: Freemasonry 176; guerrilla movement 197; National Front 182; Palestine Group 266n9; ROTPI 195; torture 235; Tudeh Party 194, 202; underground groups 193; working class 15, 282
- Sayfi (Abdolazadeh) 155, 156, 157–8
- Second Constitutional Period 70–2
- Secret Centre 69, 131
- secret police (NKVD) 10, 152, 160
- sectarianism 31, 32, 34
- sectoral employment 283–4, 297–9
- secular forces: and Islam 24, 35; Left 45–6, 47, 53–4, 236; modernity 229; radical organizations 232; West 276–7
- self-employed 285, 286, 287
- Senghor, Leopold 270
- Shabastari, Muhammad 71, 82n9, 140
- Shabistari, Haj Muhammad Ibrahim: *see* Shabastari, Muhammad
- Shahed* newspaper 167, 169
- Shahram, Muhammad Taqi 191, 211
- Shamlu, Ahmad 48
- shantytown dwellers 286, 296
- Sharabi, Hisham 233, 240
- Sharafkandi, Sadeq 257
- sharia* (law system) 273–4, 275, 276

- Shariati, Ali 14, 31, 247; Freedom Movement 50; Islamic Renaissance 271; Islamicization 221, 277; Marxism 272; revolutionary vocabulary 269–70; Shi'i 269; students 271–3; Westoxication 45
- Shaybani, Habiballah 138, 140
- Shihab, Colonel 138
- Shi'i Islam: civil society 292; female sexuality 219; hierarchy 300–1n30; Islamic Revolution 274, 293; martyrdom 120; MKO 191; populism 46; Shariati 269; Tudeh Party 45
- showras* (urban councils) 15, 283
- Shuster, Gendarmerie 125
- Simko 134
- Sipahsalar Agreement 129, 130
- Siyahkal attack 11, 190, 191
- Slovo* 105, 109
- social democracy 1, 2–3, 8, 39, 50, 131–4
- Social Democratic Party of Iran (SPDI) 39, 149, 252, 281
- social democrats: Constitutional Revolution 19; Left 54; marginalized 40; working class 69; *see also* Armenian social democrats
- social justice 258
- social reformers 251–6, 260
- Social-Revolutionaries Party 149
- social welfare 293
- socialism 28; anti-imperialism 36n18; feminism 219–20, 223; history of 34, 230–1; imperialism 43–4; influence 297; Lahuti 124; liberalism 34–5; nationalization 237; populist 221; rift 80–1; scientific 264–5; women's rights 237; workers' state 295–6; *see also* Left
- Socialism in One Country 9, 40–1
- Socialist League 10, 42, 168, 178–9
- Socialist Society of the Iranian Masses 42
- Socialist Tudeh Society 252
- soldiers' committees 127
- Soleimani, Behrooz 256
- Soltanzadeh: *see* Sultanzade
- Sorkin, G.Z. 109
- Soroush, Abdulkarim 14, 33, 268, 274, 275–7, 278n15
- Soviet citizenship 152–3
- Soviet Union: Afghanistan 20; Allies 4; Armenian nationalists 90; autonomous republics 24, 119; collapse 2, 13, 21; deportations 159; ethnic homogeneity 159; Great Terror 10; Hitler's invasion 141–2; idealization 34; Iranians 9–10; Jangali rebellion 151; Kuchek Khan 102; Lahuti 118, 141–2; Left 2; Maleki 167; nationalism 21–2; secret police (NKVD) 10; Socialism in One Country 9, 40–1; troops 25; Tudeh Party 2, 4–5, 58n21, 252; *see also* Communist Party of Soviet Union
- Sovintertrop* 99
- Stalin, Joseph 204n6; class struggle 153; death 162; Haydar Khan 96; Himmat 89; purges 3, 4, 29, 41, 158
- Stalinism 204n6; Leninism 110; Maleki 167, 183; Marxism 45; Socialism in One Country 40–1; Tudeh Party 7, 43
- Staroselsky, Colonel 129–30, 131
- state/religion 45
- strikes 282–3; oil 46, 289; peasantry 88; political reform 68, 296; Social Democratic Party 281
- Struggle: *see* Peykar
- students: abroad 301n38; activism 53, 194–5, 202–3, 235; Islamic 49; protests 52, 53; Shariati 271–3; women 62n56; *see also* Confederation of Iranian Students
- Sultanzade, Avetis Sultanovich 8; Baku Congress 110–12; Baku meeting 158; Comintern 103, 104–5, 231; Communist Party of Iran 101, 102–4, 155–6; family background 95, 98–9; Gilan 105; Kuchek Khan 111; petty bourgeoisie 111
- Sun Yat Sen 171
- Sunni Islam 293
- Suny, Ronald G. 88
- Supplemental Oil Agreement 167
- Supplementary Constitutional Laws 75, 76
- surveillance 284
- Swedish officers 125–6
- Swietochowski, Tadeusz 93
- Tabriz: *anjuman* 68, 132; Armenian social democrats 131; besieged 68, 165; Democrat Party 104, 130–4; Haydar Khan 95; Iranian Cossacks 130–1; Lahuti rebellion 118;

- Lundberg 125; Mojahedeen 68, 69, 132; rebel gendarmes 138, 139, 140–1; revolutionaries 69, 118; Russian army 131–2; social democracy 1, 131–4
Tajaddud committee 132, 137, 138
 Tajikistan 118, 141
 Taleqani, Ayatollah Mahmud 50, 193, 216
 Tamadon School 149
 Taqiye, Naqi 155
 Taqizadah, Sayyid Hasan: Democrat Party 7–8, 70, 74–5; exile 78; implicated in killing 78; Muslims/Armenians 67–8; nationality 75; Pilossian 72–4; provisional government 69–70; removed from majlis 77–8; Revolutionary Society of the World 97; Supplementary Constitutional Laws 76; Ter Hacobian 71–2
Tashkilat-e Zanan (Women's Organization) 218
 Tashkilis 97
 taxation 86, 105–6, 149
 Taymurtash, court minister 151, 152
 Tblisi 148, 159
 Tehran 68, 69–70, 73–4
Tehran-Mosavvar publication 47
 Tehran University 53
Tekâmül newspaper 71
 telephone workers 75
 Temporary Revolutionary Committee 105
 Ter Hacobian, Tigran: Dashnaks 74; Haydar Khan 80–1; *Iran-i naw* 68, 74; letters and essays 7–8, 67–8, 69, 74–81; nationality 76–7; Taqizadah 71–2; terrorism 78–81
 territoriality 88, 94
 terrorism 48, 78–81, 131–2, 196–7; *see also* Great Terror
 Third Force 19, 172, 256; Maleki 7, 10, 25, 42, 167–72, 183, 193, 252–3; Mosaddeq 168; Tudeh Party 42; world context 170–2; *see also* Socialist League
 Third World countries 263–4
 Tito, Marshal 171
 Tobacco Protest 28
Tocsin newspaper 128
 Toilers' Party 10, 167, 179, 252
 Tolstoy, Leo 70
 torture 235
 totalitarianism 238
 trade unions: Baku 231; Constitutional Revolution 281; Left 264; repressed 41; telephone workers 75; Tudeh Party 231; working class 230–1
 Transcaucasia 68, 87, 94
 transport infrastructure 147
 Trotsky, Leon 97, 124
 tsarists: *see* Russia
 Tudeh Military Network 119
 Tudeh (Tudah) Party 36n17, 41–3, 238, 282; Afghanistan 20; anti-imperialism 47, 60n35; coup (1953) 194, 196–7; eliminated 48, 167, 192; executions 243, 244; Fedayeen 202; Islamic Republic 43, 295; Islamists 240; isolationism 24–5; Khomeini 47; Maleki 10, 166–7; Matin-asgari 59n27; middle class 42; Mosaddeq 26; non-capitalist development 31; Pahlavi regimes 3, 42, 59n31, 245, 282; reformed 24; revolution 13, 234; SAVAK 194, 202; Shi'i 45; Soviet Union 2, 4–5, 58n21, 252; Stalinism 7, 43; *Tashkilat-e Zanan* 218; trade unions 231; treason charge 42–3
 Tupchi, Fath Ali Khan Saqafi 137
 Turkaman Sahra 239
 Turkestan: Bolsheviks 97–8; communism 87, 94; Communist Party of Iran 150; Democrat Party 99–100; Edalat Party 98–9; Haydar Khan 106; Iranian migrants 147–8; Red East train 97; revolution 85; revolutionaries 106; working class 106–7
 Turkey 87
 Turkomans 235

ulama 76, 77–8, 190, 201, 275
Ummat 269, 270, 271
 UN Declaration of Human Right 275
 unemployment 286, 288
 Union of People's Fedaian 257, 262, 296
 Unity Consolidation Bureau 52–3
 Unity of Action for Democracy 262
Unity of Labour 281
 universities 49, 52–3, 62n56; *see also* students
 utopia 269

 veil-wearing 32, 212; *see also* Hejab

- Vietnam 3–4, 5, 169, 195, 199, 200, 272
 violence 48, 196–7
 Vosuq, Naser 42
 Vusuq al-Dawlah 132, 133
- wages 291
 Wells, H.G. 106
 Western/Eastern blocs 170–1
 Western influence 44, 59n32, 59–60n33,
 245–7, 276–7; *see also gharbzadegi*
 White, Stephen 106
 White Guards 124
 White Revolution 30, 43, 184, 192
 women students 62n56
 women's committees 286
 women's enfranchisement 180
 women's issues 51, 52; anti-imperialism
 209; Association of Iranian
 Communists 213; clerics 225;
 education 62n56, 68, 124, 214;
 Fedayeen 214, 218; Hezbollah 210;
 Islam 224; Khomeini 222–3; Kurdish
 213; labour force 286, 287–8, 291;
 Left 11–12, 12, 32, 220, 243; Lenin
 217–18; Maleki 10, 179, 183;
 Marxism-Leninism 56–7n6;
 nationalism 212–13; public sector
 employment 286, 287; revolutionaries
 216, 221; socialism 237; state
 bureaucracy 224–5; Western influence
 59–60n33; writing in press 71
 women's movement 31–2;
 enfranchisement 58n23, 180;
 Islamicization 209; Left 213–17;
 militancy 210; revolutionaries 221
 Workers Communist Party of Iran
 64n78, 261–2, 296
 workers' councils 15, 46, 283, 288–90
 Workers Freedom 257
 workers movement 264, 282, 284, 294–7
 Workers Path Organization 47, 253,
 301n36
 workers' state 295–6
 working class: activism 1, 28; census
 297–8; democracy 264; Democrat
 Party 75; industrialization 15, 280,
 281–2; Islamic Republic 46; Left 3, 5,
 14, 262; living conditions 52; religion
 288; revolution (1979) 46–7, 283;
 revolutionaries 265; SAVAK 15, 282;
 sectoral employment 283–4, 297–9;
 segmentation 284–5; social democrats
 69; trade unions 230–1; Turkestan
 106–7
 working-class movement 14–15, 280–3
 working conditions 71
 World Bank 49–50
 World War I 96, 97
 Wright, E.O. 299n11, n12
- xenophobia 173, 176–7, 211
- Yezhevshchina* (Great Terror) 158–62
 Yifrim Khan 122
Yoldash newspaper 149
 Yousef Eftekhari group 282
 Yugoslavia 170–1
- Zafar al-Dawlah Muqaddam, General
 Hasan 133, 141
Zahmat newspaper 150
 Zapatista movement 24
 Zarafshan, Naser 52
 Zarghami, Azizallah Khan 137
 Zedd-e Tashkilis 97
Zhizn' Natsional'noinei publication 98,
 104, 106, 111
 Zibakalam, Sadeq 43
 Ziya, Sayyid 135, 136
 al-Ziya, Abu: *see* Shabastari