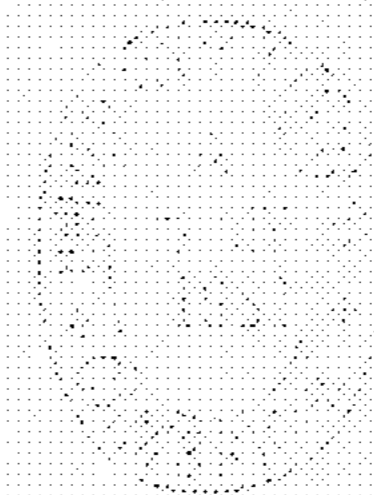


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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MODERN IRAN

Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979

Homa Katouzian



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TO THE MEMORY OF DR MUHAMMAD MUSADDIQ

for his development of a genuinely *Iranian* concept of democracy,
and his lifelong struggle for its realisation

8. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the socio-political passivity of Shi'ism was shaken up by the heterodoxy of the Shaikhs, and the heresy of the Bābīs. This was accompanied by a series of significant urban revolts and disturbances, which could not have been purely due to sectarian religious sentiments. But their subsequent defeat, and the banishment of the Bābī leaders, led to developments which emphasised the movement's sectarian religious character, and destroyed its dynamic socio-political quality.¹⁰
9. By contrast, in the latter half of the nineteenth century Shi'ite leaders and preachers participated in the struggles against the state without proposing any substantial change in the existing principles of the faith. Thus their confrontation with the state was direct, and its purpose – expressed within religious terms of reference – explicit. The Tobacco-Régie incident was the most significant of these direct confrontations.
10. The basic demands of the Persian Revolution were well within the theory and history of Shi'ism. Their success could have meant a greater voice for Shi'ite leaders in the affairs of the state. The state itself was weak, divided and dominated by foreign powers. The religious leaders could not possibly have remained passive towards the vocal and active movement of the majority of their followers. The mosques, theological colleges and religious charities were financed mainly by regular payments and posthumous endowments of the propertied classes behind the revolution. Therefore, in the first few years, Shi'ite leaders and preachers were almost totally united in supporting the revolutionary cause.
11. The Persian Revolution, like all others, had its own moderate and radical tendencies. Therefore, it was not surprising that after its initial successes factionalism began to develop within its leadership and among its ranks. There were also personal rivalries (which did, and do, matter). But among those religious dignitaries (as distinct from common preachers, some of whom were simply bribed by Muhammad Ali into changing sides) who first began to doubt, and then oppose, the revolutionary cause, fear of damage to the faith itself must have played an important role. They were afraid, not without cause, that constitutionalism would lead to European modernism, which would weaken religious faith in the community. Yet it remains true that, both in number and in authoritative weight, the great majority of religious leaders remained faithful to the revolution until its final triumph in 1909.

In its first stage, the revolutionary movement had enjoyed the support of many prominent religious leaders, as well as ordinary preachers and theological scholars. Among the leading *'ulamā* of Teheran, Sayyed Muhammad Tabātabā'ī and Sayyed 'Abdullah Behbahānī remained faithful to the revolution until its final triumph; Shaikh Fazlullah Nūrī went along with it until the succession of Muhammad Ali Shah, having been a somewhat

reluctant fellow-traveller of the revolutionary leaders; and Sayyed Abulqāsim Imām Jum'eh quickly changed sides even before the revolution had achieved anything. However, when Muhammad Ali began to conspire against the constitution, and the National Assembly (*Majlis*) which it had created, it was Shaikh Fazlullah Nūrī who led the reactionary 'religious' front against the revolution, and in favour of his own obscure notion of *Mashrū'eh*.

The *Majlis* tried to do its best to accommodate Nūrī's and Muhammad Ali's combined pressures, by taking them at their word, and making provisions for a greater supervision of statutory legislation by the most prominent leaders of the Shi'ite community. But neither those two nor their domestic and foreign (i.e. Russian) supporters could be satisfied by such compromising measures. It is unlikely that Muhammad Ali, his despotic henchmen or his Russian allies were unduly worried about the possible damage caused to the Shi'ite faith by a system of constitutional monarchy. This leaves us with Nūrī, and the small group of religious leaders and preachers gathered around him.

To begin with, Nūrī's slogan of *Mashrū'eh* lacked a clear content: it involved criticisms of *Mashrū'eh*, and allegations that it would harm the faith; it was expressed in passionate statements denouncing the revolutionary leaders as Bābīs, heretics, infidels, and so forth, but it did not contain a description of *Mashrū'eh* as an alternative system of government. It could not possibly have led to the unprecedented situation of a system of government by Shi'ite leaders, for this would have been even less acceptable to the Shah – the most powerful supporter of *Mashrū'eh* – than constitutional monarchy. Therefore, it could only have been a device for the Shah to re-establish a somewhat modified form of traditional despotism; for some religious dignitaries to add to their social and political power and influence; and for Nūrī himself to defeat his rivals, especially Behbahānī, and become the most important political *mujtahid* in the country. Indeed, Nūrī must have entertained the illusion of sharing power (either on his own, or as a member of the religious leadership) with Muhammad Ali. Yet this was an illusion which could not have materialised, even if they had succeeded in defeating the revolutionary movement: in a despotic system of whatever form, ultimate power is neither divisible nor subject to contract; therefore, once a person (or a group of people) is associated with the state, his political as well as economic power cannot be *independent* from it. Indeed, Shi'ite leaders had enjoyed their independent power and prestige precisely because of their usual lack of direct association with the despotic apparatus.

While Nūrī was apparently concerned about the ill effects of *modern legislation* on the faith, it is likely that he was more worried about the inevitable reduction in the judicial powers of religious leaders, in consequence of the establishment of a *modern independent judiciary*. For, apart from trying the less important penal cases (and especially those of a 'moral' nature – drinking, petty theft, adultery, and so on) many religious leaders had developed the habit of judging private civil litigations concerning property.

paid a further compensatory £1 million (in 1920) under pressure from the Iranian government. Whether or not the compensation was adequate must, for want of genuine information, be left to speculation.¹⁴

Domestic volatility and foreign intervention had created a state of social, economic and psychological insecurity which was manifested in the moral and financial greed and corruption of the post-revolutionary governments. It was never clear whether departmental estimates were related to real (actual and planned) expenditures, or to the size of the pockets of the departmental heads and their assistants. Usually, the more politically powerful a departmental head, the larger the allocation actually made to the department and/or to his privy purse. In his classic work *The Strangling of Persia*, Morgan Shuster, the conscientious American financial adviser (who was officially appointed in 1910 in order to modernise Iranian public finance) has given us a vivid account of this and many other aspects of the Iranian political economy: on many occasions he would have to spend hours haggling with powerful Iranian officials over their allocations, for he knew that much of the payments would eventually find an illicit outlet, one way or another. His own mission was abruptly terminated in 1911, when a Russian ultimatum for his dismissal obliged the government to comply, in spite of an unyielding resistance by the National Assembly. Those indigenous Iranian elements who saw in Shuster an incorruptible technocrat threatening their financial 'interests' must have heaved a sigh of relief. If we have to search for a Thermidor after the Persian Revolution, then this episode is the nearest to such a betrayal of the ideals of the revolution. For on that fateful day a great revolutionary general (Ephrim Khān) led the troops which occupied the National Assembly and brought its resistance to the ultimatum to a forceful end. Yet, it is both ironic and illuminating that the Thermidor of a genuine historic revolution had to be strongly associated with – though not entirely determined by – the wishes of a foreign power.

Henceforth, the Iranian people's vision of every aspect of social and economic reality – its agents, defenders and critics – was primarily and profoundly determined by an assessment of three basic elements: official bribery and embezzlement, imperialist conspiracies, and the activities of the domestic allies, agents or spies of imperialism. This simple model has remained the most popular means of social and economic analysis down to the present day: there is, at any time and with regard to any general or partial problem, a well-designed foreign conspiracy (sometimes going back several years, if not decades) which controls the situation and determines the outcome with the help of the domestic, indigenous agents of imperialism, who make up the bulk of the corrupt and embezzling public officials. Iran has been exposed to many imported modern ideologies since the First World War. Yet a careful study and analysis of the practical attitude of even the most rigorous ideological movements would betray the strong influence of the above historical vision merely disguised in complex and mystifying forms.

NOTES

1. See Ahmad Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūteh-yi Irān* (Teheran: Amir Kabir, 1968); Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran* (London: Frank Cass, 1966); and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972); Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran 1785 – 1906. The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972).
2. For example Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūteh*; Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion*; E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution 1905 – 1909* (Cambridge, 1910); Mehdi Malik-zādeh, *Tārīkh-i Inqilāb-i Mashrūṭiyā-yi Irān*, vols 1–7 (Teheran, 1949–56); Firāudūn Ādamīyāt, *Fikr-i Demukrāsī-yi Ijtimāʿī der Nihzat-i Mashrūṭiyā-yi Irān* (Teheran, 1975); Ibrāhīm Fakhrāʾī, *Gilān dar Jumbūhī-yi Mashrūṭiyāt* (Teheran: Jibi Books, 1972); Nāzīm al-Islām Kirmānī, *Tārīkh-i Bidārī-yi Irānīyān* (Teheran, n.d.).
3. These are some of the well-known characteristics of the rise of 'commercial capitalism' in western Europe. See, the appendix to Ch.3, above.
4. See Ch.2 above, and especially some of the notes concerning the absence of socio-economic security or predictability for all individuals, owing to the arbitrary nature of despotic power. The high degree of social mobility was an inevitable consequence of this system. Iranian history is full of examples of individuals who, either on their own merits, or through personal favours, or indeed because of circumstances, have risen from the lowest 'ranks' to the highest positions. Nādir Shah Afshar, Amīr Nizām, and Reżā Shah Pahlavi are only the most well-known examples of this regular pattern.
5. See Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958). For a constructive critique of Berlin's argument (within its own, European context) see 'Berlin's Division of Liberty' in C. B. Macpherson's *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
6. The immediate cause of the flogging was the governor's personal anger at the intervention of some influential people on behalf of one of the two merchants. However, when this merchant's son broke down at the sight of the beating, the governor ordered him to be flogged as well, even though there had been no charges of speculation against him. The other merchant was also a colonel in the army! The governor himself ('Ata' al-Dawleh) later became a supporter of the revolution, and was duly flogged for it on the orders of Muhammad Ali Shah. Such small details may be helpful in gauging the nature of Iranian society, and its history. See Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūteh*.
7. Muhammad Ali had already made his reputation when, as the Crown Prince and governor of Azerbaijan, he had ordered the murder of three prominent intellectuals (Rūhī, Kirmānī and Khabīr al-Mulk), who had been accused of complicity in the assassination of Nāṣir al-Dīn. Sayyid Hasan Taqī-zādeh, a leading young revolutionary radical, had later told Sayyid Muhammad Ali Jamāl-zādeh (the aged Iranian writer) that he and other younger revolutionaries had been so worried about the Shah's death (and, therefore, Muhammad Ali's succession) before his approval of the draft constitution that they had begged the Shah's personal physician to try to keep him alive until the document was ready for the royal assent. (The story was quoted to me by Jamāl-zādeh himself.)
8. For a description and analysis of the hopes and aspirations, as well as confusions and illusions, of the modernised younger intellectuals, see Chs 5 and 6, below.
9. However, God's rule on earth will be fulfilled only through the advent of the Twelfth Imām, the Mahdī or Redeemer. This automatically rules out the

establishment of a theocratic state led by religious leaders who do not regard themselves as representatives of God or the Mahdī, but see themselves as merely the latter's worldly deputies by virtue of learning and the adherence of the Shī'ite community. There have been a number of heterodox or heretical Shī'a movements whose leaders have claimed to have special callings beyond those of the ordinary religious leaders, often ending up by claiming to be the Mahdī himself. Such was the well-known case of Sayyed Ali Muhammad Shīrāzī, known as the *Bāb* (i.e. the 'link' between the Mahdī and the faithful), and the less well-known case of Sayyed Muhammad Musha'sha', who founded a local dynasty in eastern Khūzistan in the fifteenth century. For further information on the latter case, see Ahmad Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Panjād Sāleh-yi Khūzistān* (Teheran: Gām-Pāidār, 1977).

10. The circumstantial evidence strongly suggests that the Bābī uprising of the mid-nineteenth century was an anti-despotic political movement dressed (as usual) in a religious garb, though this does not mean that those who participated in it did not believe in the early Bābī ideas. It was the first countrywide politico-religious movement since the rise of the Safavids, whose earlier pseudo-theocracy, and later integration of the religious leadership into the state, had stripped the Shī'ite faith of its historical anti-establishmentarian force for three centuries. In fact, with the degeneration of the Safavid state, some worldly religious leaders gained a great deal of political power, and their influence was the cause of a lot of political mistakes which weakened the state, and helped the Afghan invasion of the Iranian hinterland. The most well-known example of these religious dignitaries was Mullā Muhammad Hāqir Majlisī, who, apart from his disruptive political influence, has had the greatest share in proliferating unreliable *akhbār* (or Shī'ite 'traditions' as opposed to *usul* or doctrines), and promoting superstitious beliefs, through his writings.

Therefore, it was not surprising that Bābism, itself an offshoot of the Shaikhīs, was both a social movement against the state, and a religious heresy within the broader Shī'ite faith. Indeed, if the early Bābīs had chosen their tactics *vis-à-vis* the religious community and its leaders more carefully, avoiding the appearance of a heretical sect, and attracting the general sympathy of the community as a whole, it is likely that the impact and outcome of the movement would have been significantly different. However, the subsequent division of the sect into the Azalīs (or Bābīs), and the Bahā'īs, reduced the former (Bābī/Azalī) group to a small band of fundamentalist Bābīs who, *as individuals*, supported the *Mashrūteh* Revolution. But the Bahā'ī community was opposed to *Mashrūteh*. For earlier (Iranian) accounts and interpretations of these movements and events, see Lisān al-Mulk's *Nāsikh al-Tavārikh*, and Ahmad Kasravī's *Bahā'igari*. See also Muhammad Ali Khunji, 'Tahqīqī darbāreh-yi Mazāhib-i Bābī va Bahā'ī', *Andīshah-yi Naw*, 1, no. 3 (Bahman 1327AH/January 1949AD). For two different, but equally valuable, European approaches to the subject, see E. G. Browne in H. M. Balyuzi (ed.), *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahā'ī Faith* (London: Ronald, 1970), and Algar, *Religion and State in Iran*.

11. Quoted in Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūteh*, p. 528. Khurasānī, who was regarded as the Most Learned *Marja'*, was even more committed to the revolutionary cause than his two colleagues, and this involved a lot of real hardship, even to the extent of putting his life in danger. See Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūteh*, pp. 380–5. Nūrī's most important ally among the religious leaders in Teheran was Akhūnd Mullā Muhammad Āmulī. For a specimen of the views of the supporters of *Mashrūteh*, see their long public statements, reprinted in Kasravi, *Tārīkh-i Mashrūteh*, especially the one on pp. 432–8, where they attack the proliferation of newspapers, the provision for the representation of Jewish, Christian and Zoroastrian

minorities, and so on; describe any group of ten members of the *Majlis* as comprising 'four materialists, one Bābī, two European types, and three Twelver Shī'ites who are absolutely ignorant or completely illiterate'; and claim that, because of the slogans of 'liberty and fraternity', 'a Jewish man now sodomises a Muslim boy, and another assaults a chaste woman'.

12. This change of attitude is clearly noticeable in the works of the political poets and writers of the period, such as 'Ishqī and 'Arif.
13. The leaders of the Provisional Government themselves later realised their own mistake. This was implicitly admitted by Sayyed Hasan Mudarris (the Minister of Justice in that government, who later became the leader of the opposition in the *Majlis*) in a meeting of the Sixth Session of the National Assembly. See Husain Makki (ed.), *Duktur Musaddiq va Natqāy-i Tārīkh-i Ū* (Teheran: Īlmi, 1946) pp. 96–8. Another leading figure of the Provisional Government was Sulaimān Mirzā Iskandari, who, as one of the earliest (though honest) victims of Iranian pseudo-modernist ideas, later became a leading advocate of Rezā Khān, and opponent of Mudarris, in the Fourth and Fifth Sessions of the *Majlis*. See further Ch. 5, below.
14. For more detailed data and information on economic matters, see Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800–1914* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1971), and J. Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran, 1900–1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), as well as their references. See further Mustafā Fāteh, *Panjāh Sāl Naft-i Irān* (Teheran, 1956).

acquired rural estate near Teheran. However, the provincial army commanders began to send threatening letters to the *Majlis*, and, apart from that, many of its independent members were not altogether convinced that Reżā Khān's complete withdrawal would be in the country's best interests. Thus, a delegation of *Majlis* deputies, led by highly respectable independents such as Mustawfī al-Mamālik, Mushīr al-Dawleh and Dr Muşaddiq, ceremoniously visited Reżā Khān at his retreat and brought him back to Teheran.

The republican movement was scrapped, and Reżā Khān, now reinstated in office, paid a visit to Qum (where – after the formation of the new kingdom of Iraq – many of the *Marāji' al-taqiūl* now lived) and made his peace with the leading religious dignitaries. Furthermore, he adopted a very conciliatory attitude towards Mudarris, and in a private conference conceded some of his political demands.²⁵

This was a major defeat for Reżā Khān, but not a complete triumph for Mudarris, who seems to have overestimated the significance of his success for a brief, but crucial period: Mudarris had won the battle, not suspecting that he was about to lose the war. Between April 1924 and November 1925, when the Qajar dynasty was overthrown, Reżā Khān played his hand very carefully, especially with regard to religious affairs and, above all, his relations with Qum. For example, he himself, at the head of a group of army generals, participated in the annual religious processions mourning the martyrdom of Imām Husain, and organised a number of the mourning services which are traditionally held on such occasions.²⁶

Meanwhile, a bizarre episode occurred which has never been satisfactorily explained. In July 1924, rumours that a *saqqā khāneh* (public fountain founded by charity to commemorate the martyrs of Karbila) had performed a miracle were quickly followed by passionate public demonstrations in which most of the slogans were against the Bābis (by whom were meant the Bahā'īs), and in the course of these the American vice-consul, taking photographs of the crowd, was lynched and killed. Both Reżā Khān (in league with 'the British') and Mudarris and his followers (also in league with 'the British') were, at the time, accused of instigating the disturbances. Whatever their origin, it is highly unlikely that there was a specific plot against the life of the American diplomat (which is a favourite view of all the commentators), but the event played into the hands of Reżā Khān, whose domestic and foreign well-wishers (including Moscow Radio) described it as the work of the feudal reactionary opposition. It led to the declaration of martial law, and further restrictions on the press.²⁷

By the time the opposition woke up to Reżā Khān's new strategy of a direct bid for total power, it was too late to do much about it. In August 1924 they tabled a motion of censure against the very person of the Prime Minister, accusing him of 'active rebellion against the Constitution'. The motion was debated in a charged atmosphere, involving physical struggle both inside and outside the *Majlis*, but it was eventually withdrawn, because of the strength of the majority and the fears of some opposition deputies for their own safety. It

was after this failure that Mudarris tried to use Shaikh Khaz'al of Muhammareh by encouraging him to challenge Reżā Khān as a usurper, and invite Ahmad Shah (the Qajar monarch) to return home from Paris *via* his own stronghold in Khūzistan. But Reżā Khān moved quickly, went to the province, effectively arrested Khaz'al and returned to Teheran a national hero.²⁸ Meantime, he played on Mudarris's vanity by making an honourable peace with him – a fatal mistake which the self-assured opposition leader must have bitterly regretted within a few months.

In mid-October 1925 a simple motion – signed by a number of deputies, including some who until recently had been in opposition – was tabled in the *Majlis* demanding the abolition of the Qajar dynasty and the temporary transfer of the royal title to the Prime Minister, until (according to the provisions of the Constitution) a constituent assembly had ratified the decision. The opposition – now sunk to a handful of deputies, some of whom had decided not to attend, with or without apologies – desperately tried to use delaying tactics, but to no avail. Of the fourteen deputies led by Mudarris, *he alone* raised his powerful voice, shouting that even if they took 'a hundred thousand votes it would still be illegal', and stormed out of the *Majlis* without delivering a formal speech. Four of the independents – Taqi-zādeh, 'Alā, Muşaddiq and Dawlat-Ābādī, in that order – delivered speeches against the resolution. All these speeches were reasoned, and, in that sense, moderate. They all included praise for the achievements of the Prime Minister and support for his continuation in office, but they argued that the proposed resolution would be of no practical benefit, or that it had to be applied according to proper constitutional procedures. In particular, Muşaddiq, who delivered an extremely well-prepared, reasoned, and yet emotional speech, said that he was opposed to the move because, if it turned the Sardār into a powerless constitutional monarch, the country would lose the leadership of a very able politician, and if it turned him into a despot (which he very well knew would be the case) it would be against the achievements of the Persian Revolution: he would not support such a cause no matter whether he was 'abused', 'cursed', 'killed' or even 'mutilated'. The speeches were answered, one by one, by four members of the majority faction, in a moderate tone. The assembly divided, and the motion was carried overwhelmingly. The Qajars fell, and an exciting chapter of Iranian history ended.²⁹

Both the elections for the Constituent Assembly and its deliberations, which ratified the previous decision of the *Majlis* and conferred the royal title on Reżā Khān and his male issue, were no more than a farce: they can have surprised few men other than Sulaimān Mīrzā Iskandari, the parliamentary socialist leader, who only then discovered that he had been deceived by the 'bourgeois nationalist leader' whom he had so consistently supported.³⁰ Yet it is also true that only a few men – this time Muşaddiq among them – could conceive of the long-term implications of this event. In fact, just after Reżā Khān's coronation, early in 1926, the light-hearted urban crowd made up

these people as long as there is no brutality. . . . The common people are delighted to have at last a strong man at the head of affairs.' Loraine's *personal* role was decisive in making the British Foreign Office accept Reza's overthrow of Shaikh Khaz'al (in 1924) in spite of pressures brought by Sir Percy Cox and others in favour of the latter. The Foreign Office documents show that Shumyatsky's belief that Khaz'al's open challenge to Reza Khan had been part of a British conspiracy to mobilise 'the feudalists' against 'centralisation and bourgeois democratic progress' was completely unfounded. They also refute the later Iranian view that 'the British' had simply decided to sacrifice one of their agents (i.e. Khaz'al) in favour of another (i.e. Reza). Indeed, those who 'analyse' modern Iranian history purely in terms of perpetual foreign conspiracies may be surprised to know that, at the news of Reza Khan's coronation, the head of the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office described him as 'a usurper'. Early in 1923, Curzon himself had warned Loraine not to trust Reza Khan, who was, in Curzon's words, 'quite capable of talking sweet and acting sour'. Still earlier, Armitage-Smith, the British Financial Adviser to Iran, had described Reza to the Foreign Office as a person who 'betrayed everyone who has been with him, and hates H. M. G. [His Majesty's Government]'. See Waterfield, *Professional Diplomat*, esp. Chs 6–12. See further Makkī, *Tārīkh-i Bīst Sāleh-yi Irān*, vols I–III.

There can be no doubt that both Britain and Russia were keen to preserve and promote their respective interests in Iran. My emphasis on the above issues is intended to show their errors of judgement, which were mainly due to their misunderstanding of the nature of Iranian society through theoretical preconceptions based on European history and experience. Furthermore, I wish to provide evidence for Iranians themselves that (a) the *uncritical* application of such theories by Right and Left alike is bound to be misleading; and (b) that for a real understanding of the forces and events of the Iranian political economy, both in the past and at present, a knowledge of the *internal* factors and tendencies is absolutely indispensable.

14. *Divān-i Mirza Abulqāsim 'Arif-i Qazvīnī* (Teheran: Saif-i-Āzād, 1946) p.270.
15. 'Ishqī Kulliyāt, pp. 222–32, 350, and 334.
16. See *Divān-i Farrukhi*, ed. H. Makkī (Teheran: Ilmī, 1953).
17. In a speech in the *Majlis* in 1921, Mudarris said that 'Muslim Persia must be Muslim and Iranian', and in another (1923) speech he said that he had once told the Ottoman Prime Minister, 'If anyone crosses Iranian borders without our permission we shoot him, if we can, irrespective of whether he wears the [Persian] *kulah*, the religious *turban*, or the *chapsau*. . . . Our religious practice is our very politics, and our politics are our very religious practice . . .' (quoted in Makkī, *Tārīkh-i Bīst Sāleh-yi Irān*, vol. II). There is a great deal of further evidence which shows that Mudarris was neither a modern nationalist *nor* a religious fanatic, but a democratic Shī'ite political leader.
18. He was murdered (in 1938) on the orders of Reza Shah, after nine years of solitary confinement in a desert citadel in the province of Khurāsān.
19. See Khājah Nūrī, *Bāzīgārān-i 'Asr-i Talā'*, pp. 159–63.
20. See, Makkī, *Tārīkh-i Bīst Sāleh-yi Irān*, vol. III, pp. 172–3.
21. See, Mustawfī, *Sharh-i Zindigānī-yi Man*, vol. III.
22. He was 'insulted' by Reza Khan, and resigned in protest, even though Reza tried, by modifying his words, to persuade him to stay in office. See *ibid.*; Makkī, *Tārīkh-i Bīst Sāleh-yi Irān*, vol. III; Khājah Nūrī, *Bāzīgārān-i 'Asr-i Talā'*.
23. For example, in a poem on the subject, the poet-laureate wrote, 'Dar pardeh-yi jumbūri, kūbad dar-i Shāhi; / Ma hikhabar u dushman-i tammā' zirang ast' ('In the guise of republicanism, he is trying to become king: we are naïve, and the

greedy enemy is canny'). See M. T. Bahār, *Divān . . .* (Teheran: Amir Kabir, 1954) vol. I.

24. See further M. T. Bahār, *Tārīkh-i Muktaṣar-i Ahzāb-i Siyāsi dar Irān* (Teheran, 1944); Khājah Nūrī, *Bāzīgārān-i 'Asr-i Talā'*; Dawlat Abādī, *Hāyat-i Yahyā; Makkī, Tārīkh-i Bīst Sāleh-yi Irān*.
25. See, for example, *ibid.*, vol. III; and Khājah Nūrī, *Bāzīgārān-i 'Asr-i Talā'*.
26. In fact, leading religious dignitaries in Qum and Iraq were on good terms with Reza Khan, and at no time did they make any public move against him. On the contrary, in 1922 he was honoured by being sent a sword from the treasury of a holy shrine in Karbila, and even in May 1924 he was further sent a 'picture' of Imām Ali from the treasury of the Imām's own shrine in Najaf (accompanied with a letter from a *Marya'* in Qum), which were delivered with pomp and circumstance. See especially Makkī, *Tārīkh-i Bīst Sāleh-yi Irān*, vol. III.
27. One of the slogans of the demonstrators – 'This unprincipled Bābī has rebelled against the people' – was definitely aimed at Reza Khan. The popular view that this had been a British plot to prevent American companies from being granted concessions to explore for and exploit oil in northern Iran is all the more remarkable in that the proposed concessions had fallen through over two years *before* this event. However, a comprehensive trade treaty with Russia had been concluded in June 1924, and this *may* have been in the minds of some of those who organised and led the demonstrations. On the basis of all the existing evidence, it looks as if, whether or not there had been an organised plot, various conservative, democratic, and opportunistic factions opposed to Reza Khan – perhaps including the Royal Court – took advantage of the demonstrations in order to attack him. It is extremely unlikely that either he or any of the foreign powers was involved in the episode.
28. Contrary to the speculations of Makkī, Khājah Nūrī and others, and, of course, the Iranian popular myth, the overthrow of Khaz'al was not a political manoeuvre designed by the British government and executed by Reza Khan. On the contrary, all the available evidence shows that the move was made by Reza himself, the British Foreign Office was divided on how to *respond* to his move, and only Loraine, who as early as 1922 had described Reza Khan as 'the winning horse', had, with some qualification, believed that the Foreign Office should not honour the British government's earlier commitment to defend Khaz'al. See further 13, above.
29. See Makkī, *Duktur Muṣaddiq*, as well as all the other Persian sources cited in the above notes. The night before, an assassination attempt on the life of poet-laureate Bahār had led to the murder of a journalist who had been mistaken for the leading opposition deputy. That same night, some wavering supporters of Reza Khan in the *Majlis* were 'invited' to a private meeting where they were made to pledge their support for the motion that was to be tabled next morning.
30. The socialist leader had candidly believed that Reza Khan would honour his agreement with him, and become an *inheritable* royal dictator. But, once he had discovered his 'mistake', he refused to vote for the ratification of the *Majlis* decision in the Constituent Assembly, and disappeared from Iranian politics until 1941. A number of leading opposition figures, in and out of the *Majlis* – for example, Hāyerī-zādeh and Sayyed Abulqāsim Kāshānī – were both 'elected' to the Constituent Assembly, and voted for the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty.
31. The British were also claiming that any such agreement would be unacceptable, because the same (Tsarist) Russian subject who had acquired a concession before the First World War had sold it to a British subject.
32. In this period, the Perso-Soviet trade agreement concluded between Reza Khan

and, later, military organisations, which had survived intact and in full operation, were torn apart – piece by piece – by a ruthless and savage oppression, and the party leaders did nothing but further demoralise their membership by talking about an 'imminent' uprising – at times, even giving dates, but cancelling them at the eleventh hour!²

A full explanation of this bizarre behaviour is surely not as simple as both the party leadership and their critics (in and out of the party) have normally made it out to be. But the answer must be sought in a combination of the leadership's habitual ease in coming to terms with conservative, rather than democratic, forces; the attitude of the Soviet Union, especially once the Shah-Zāhedī régime had become established; and the character of the individuals in control of the party. Whatever else they may or may not have been, the leaders of the Tūdeh Party were no revolutionaries.

The Shah-Zāhedī Régime, 1953–5

THE NATURE OF THE RÉGIME

Ordinary people have, at times, an unerring instinct in recognising facts as they are. The régime that took over after the coup had emerged from a broad alliance which justified the common title of the 'Shah-Zāhedī régime'. This can be seen not only from the elements who supported the coup, but also from the resulting Cabinet, the composition of the Eighteenth Session of the *Majlis*, and the general attitude and policies of the Zāhedī government.

The cabinet was headed by Zāhedī himself, who was an able army officer, a conservative politician and, in general, the kind of person who may make a good ally but a bad servant: he had already been a prominent officer before Reżā Khān's enthronement; and he had played a leading role both in the arrest of Shaikh Khaz'al and in the defeat of the Kurdish rebel leader Ismā'il Āqā Simitqū before 1926. In 1941, as the military governor of Isfahan, he had been arrested and banished to Palestine by the British occupying forces, because of his secret contacts with German agents. He had even been Minister of the Interior in Muşaddiq's first cabinet, although not for long. The Finance Minister in Zāhedī's cabinet was Dr Ali Amīnī, grandson of a Qajar king and a Qajar prime minister, a big landlord, and an able and strongly willed politician who had also served in one of Muşaddiq's cabinets. Others were a mixture of old-school politicians and important army generals.

The election to the Eighteenth *Majlis* was, of course, not free. It was impossible for any of Muşaddiq's supporters, let alone the Tūdeh Party, to be elected. It was not even open to political mavericks such as Dr Mużaffar Baqā'ī, who was not content to be elected without protesting against the state control of the elections. Yet, men such as Hāyerizādeh, and Muhammad Derakhshish (the anti-Tūdeh but independent, leader of the teachers' union)

were allowed to get into the *Majlis*. And, more significantly, the *Majlis* itself was dominated by influential landlords and other conservatives, primarily seeking their own personal and class interests rather than nurturing His Majesty's private aspirations to total power. This was also largely – though not entirely – true of the Nineteenth *Majlis*, in which individual deputies still carried a lot of weight and influence.

Thus, the 1953 coup did not impose a despotic system: it established a conservative-authoritarian régime. In fact, as we have seen in the foregoing chapters, Iranian despotism is incompatible both with power-sharing of whatever kind, and – at its worst – with any legal or traditional check or balance. It is significant that in their recantation letters the members of the Tūdeh Party, even including the party General Secretary, were made to declare their loyalties not only to the Shah, but also – at times even more emphatically – to the Islamic faith. It is also significant that Falsafī, the able religious preacher, was given a weekly programme on the state radio in which, for many years, he did not merely deliver religious sermons and counsel, but also engaged in biting polemics against 'materialists', Muşaddiq and the Popular Movement.³ It was only after the dismissal – and it was a dismissal – of Zāhedī early in 1955 that power began to become gradually concentrated in the hands of the Shah himself, until the chain was broken by the economic and political crisis of 1960–3.

Between 1953 and 1960, the régime that ruled in Iran evolved from a conservative plutocracy towards a more personal dictatorship. It was not despotic in the Iranian sense of that term.

POLITICAL PERSECUTIONS

The coup was followed by wholesale arrests. Muşaddiq, his cabinet members, and the influential former deputies loyal to him were arrested and imprisoned. Leaders of the Popular Movement parties, such as Khaḥlī Malekī and Dāriyūsh Furūhar, were likewise thrown into gaol. The unconstitutional practice of trying political prisoners in military tribunals – which became notorious between 1964 and 1978 – dates back to this period. Muşaddiq himself was tried in an open military court, where he conducted his case with great courage and dignity, as well as political skill: the great parliamentary opposition leader – unmatched in the whole of the *Majlis* history, except by Sayyed Hasan Mudarris – had been given a forum suited to his best capacities, and he made the most of it. He declared that he was still the constitutional Prime Minister; he produced documentary evidence that the régime itself regarded the 19 August putsch as a *coup d'état*, not a 'national uprising'; he defended the law and the cause of the popular democratic movement; and he openly attacked British and American imperialism for interfering in the destiny of the Iranian people. He wept, laughed, shouted, went on hunger strike, and – once or twice – fainted. And all that the British and American

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growing concentration in the capital was primarily due to the flow of migrants from other towns and cities because of better social and economic prospects, the concentration of bureaucracy in Teheran (to which any Iranian applying for a passport had to come, wherever his home), and modern attractions such as drive-in cinemas. The peasantry grew relatively poorer, but the urban 'middle class' increased in number, and enjoyed a significant rise in income and consumption. They began to buy refrigerators, television sets, and so on – all of which were imported – on hire purchase.

The emergence of *urban* dualism – of a complete sociological division within the urban population – is a product of this period: formerly, the old residential quarters had included families of *all* ranks. High officials, older families, merchants, ordinary artisans, and petty traders lived side by side in the same city quarters (or *Mahallāt*). Clearly, rich and poor houses were very different in every respect; but, by and large, they were built on the basis of traditional Iranian architecture. More significantly, this ensured social contact between different classes: the rich were in daily contact with the ordinary, the poor and even the beggars. But all this began to change when new wealth led, in the case of Teheran, to an entirely unplanned movement towards the northern parts of the city, into new houses the building of which was facilitated by the state's free grants of urban land to army officers and the higher civil servants. The damage was completed when the poor immigrants began to settle in the declining districts: and the departure of the rich left no local influence for the environmental protection and renovation of the old districts by city authorities. In the southern parts of Teheran, many old houses with large tree-shaded gardens were levelled off by property speculators, who built new little hovels in their place – and no one cared. Meanwhile, tremendous social and psychological pressures were applied to those older families which had fallen behind in the race, to make them move out of their traditional districts at all costs. The sense of community which, in spite of class differentiation, had always been present in Iranian cities was lost – perhaps for ever.

The growth of state expenditure was most visible in the expansion of the military-bureaucratic network: the conscript army was 200,000 'strong'; the state bureaucracy included 260,000 men, a lot of whom were underemployed. Yet the unplanned expansion of secondary (and, to a much smaller extent, higher) education had given rise to an army of jobless school-leavers and graduates, who, because of the state strategy of investment, could not be accommodated in productive activities! Therefore, the state was obliged to provide them with disguised hand-outs by giving them a desk in an office and making life even more difficult for the unfortunate masses who did not have contacts in higher places. Meanwhile, unemployment among the unskilled urban labour force was rising fast.

In 1960, the cumulative balance-of-payments deficit, unemployment and a high rate of inflation, burst the bubble of the 'open-door policy', Rostovian 'economic growth' (before Rostow), hire-purchase consumerism, and positive

nationalism all at once. This was followed by two years of economic depression, political instability, and a fierce power struggle, out of which the Shah's pseudo-modernist (petrolic) despotism was born to cause unprecedented damage and destruction to Iranian society.

NOTES

1. Dr Kiyānūri claims to have telephoned Muşaddiq, but Dr Firaidūn Kishāvarz, a former member of the party Central Committee, has recently cast doubt on the truth of this claim, because, he says, there are no witnesses to this but Kiyānūri himself, whose testimony he does not trust. See Kishāvarz, *Man Muttaham Mikunam* . . . (Teheran: Ravāq, 1977).
2. A few months after the coup, the party Executive Committee published a pamphlet 'analysing' the coup, the Party's role, and so on. This blames the coup on the 'bourgeois leadership' of the Popular Movement, and has to be seen to be believed; see *Darbāreh-yi Bist-u-hasht-i Murdād* (1954). However, the Executive Committee retracted some of its positions in the earlier pamphlet in a later one issued in December 1955 (i.e. two and a half years after the coup), which, apart from familiar 'theoretical analyses', says nothing about the party role during and immediately after the coup, and 'explains' the complete failure of its leadership in the intervening period in terms of which the following is a specimen:

In the first few months after 19 August [i.e. the coup], some relatively strong Blanquist tendencies dominated the Party. The Central Committee, instead of fighting against these incorrect tendencies, was itself taken by them, and followed them. In this period, we made a number of tactical mistakes. . . . The negative effect of such decisions was that the Party was not paying sufficient attention to the most important issue of the day, that is, the problem of protecting the Party organs from the enemy's offensives.

3. In addition to that, in 1954 – 5 Falsafī was given the task (through the state radio) of leading a sudden and, apparently, unprovoked attack on the Bahā'ī community, which ended with the official confiscation of the community's centre in Teheran (*Hazīrat al-quds*), and its use as the headquarters of the martial-law administration (which was later turned into the SAVAK); this is probably why in its issue of 3rd June 1955 *Nabard-i Mellat*, the conservative Islamic newspaper, compared the martial-law administration to a centre for Islamic propaganda. (In a recent interview with *Ittilā'āt*, Kāzīm Hasībī has revealed that the campaign was launched on the request, to the Shah, of Āyatullah Burūjirdī, the then *Marja' al-raqlid* in Qum.)
4. After 'Abbāsī's arrest they literally sat back for days hoping that they would manage to obtain his release through the intervention of Sayyed Zīā Ṭabā Ṭabā'ī but in the meantime they took no security measures whatever in order to protect their military network and its documents. (The details of this catastrophe were known to many political activists. But they have now appeared in a series of articles in the weekly magazine *Umūd-i Irān*, April – May 1979.)
5. Qarānī had personally contacted a number of opposition leaders, including Khalfī Malekī, who told me that he had hesitated to believe that Qarānī was sincere in his strong criticisms of the régime. At the time of writing (March 1979), General Qarānī is the army chief of staff in Bāzargān's provisional government. (*Postscript*.)