

CONSTITUTIONALISM, SOCIAL DEMOCRACY, AND
NATIONALISM, AND THE FIRST
COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN
IRAN, 1905-1921

by

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To my Wife and Son, Brandi and Aiden

And to my father, whose journey to the United States I owe my existence

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ABSTRACT

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Western expansion into Iran during the latter half of the nineteenth century had a significant impact on the country's social, economic, and political development. By the turn of the century, Western ideas of constitutionalism and social democracy had infiltrated Persian society, which set the foundation for modern revolutionary movements to emerge and challenge the traditional social and political order of Persian society. This thesis analyzes the revolutionary movements in Iran during the first two decades of the twentieth century and argues that the failure of these movements can be attributed to internal factionalism in Persian politics and foreign involvement on the political scene in Iran.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first quarter of the twentieth century was a critical period in Iranian history. For the first time, Persians from different social classes joined together to challenge the uncontested arbitrary rule of the Qajar dynasty. Their inclination to question the arbitrary rule of the monarchy sparked a process of change that enabled Western ideas of constitutionalism, social democracy, and communism to take hold in the political arena. This study endeavors to explain the fate of these ideas in Persia during the first two decades of the twentieth century and to analyze the factors that contributed to the demise of the revolutionary movements that derived from them. Ultimately, internal factionalism and foreign involvement played the most prominent part in destroying the Constitutional Revolution, the social democratic movement, and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran.

The transition from a traditional society to one infused with revolutionary fervor began during the latter half of the nineteenth century, when Western expansion altered the economic and social structure of Iranian society. As Great Britain and Russia increased their presence in Iran and gained control of the economy, Western ideas of constitutionalism and social democracy infiltrated Persian society. Before long, Persians of all classes coalesced to form a revolutionary movement that called for national liberation and the establishment of democratic institutions. The newly formed intelligentsia and merchant classes united with the clergy in a joint effort in 1906 to limit

the authority of the Shah and established a constitutional form of government. The diversity of beliefs within the revolutionary movement, however, soon exposed the ephemeral nature of the coalition of reformers. Unable to agree on the reforms to be implemented, those who demanded change started to divide along ideological lines, which increased factionalism within the movement and allowed the monarchy to regain its absolute authority. The movement was kept alive by the more radical factions, which eventually succeeded in deposing the Shah and reinstating the National Assembly, but factional problems as well as foreign intervention thwarted the movement once again, leaving Persia in chaos as the Great War approached.

Despite the fact that the end of the Constitutional Revolution brought to Iran a period of disintegration, two fundamental changes occurred in Iranian society that brought about another revolutionary movement. First, the increase in cultural contacts between the northern regions of Iran and Caucasia, where a plethora of ethnically diverse revolutionaries had been involved in promoting the ideas of social democracy, introduced radical ideas of social democracy and communism to Iran. Second, after the Tobacco Rebellion in the late nineteenth century, the social structure of Iranian society changed dramatically. Increasingly, Iranians were starting to identify with a national community. By participating in nation-wide protests against a common enemy, the populace began to abandon previous notions of tribalism and provincialism, which had caused communal solidarity and political isolation in Persian society for centuries, for a more unified national identity. The exploitative manner in which Western powers conducted affairs in Iran only furthered this development, resulting in a nationalist uprising during the Great War.

These two fundamental changes culminated in a revolutionary movement that took the form of an independent Soviet republic in Northern Iran. However, ideological differences and inconsistent Soviet foreign policy severely weakened the revolutionary movement, which collapsed in 1921 as Reza Khan and his Cossack brigade marched into Gilan to regain control of Northern Iran.

The failure of these revolutionary movements to bring about any significant progressive change in the political sphere of Iranian society is evident by the reign of Reza Khan, who took power in 1924. Analyzing the internal and external factors that contributed to the failure of the revolutionary movements in the first two decades of the twentieth century in Iranian history helps explain why Reza Shah was so successful in bringing all of Persia under his command. It also sets the stage for understanding the way in which the Persian communist movement developed during the Pahlavi era.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION: OPENING THE DOOR FOR SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The influx of Westerners into Iran during the latter half of the nineteenth century introduced liberal ideas to Persian society, which eventually caused a drastic increase in hostility among various social groups in Iran towards the central government. The Qajar Dynasty's submission to foreign demands of concessions and business monopolies gave the traditional middle and clerical classes a justifiable reason to come together and challenge the Shah's authority. Moreover, as the historian Janet Afary put it, the "increased contact with the more democratic and industrialized institutions of the West also encouraged Iranian intellectuals to call for a reform of their traditional society, to demand greater political representation, and to ask for limits on the authority of the absolutist government."¹ The Tobacco Protest of 1891-92 represented the breaking point for those individuals who harbored resentment towards Naser al-Din Shah. Afterwards, the discontented social classes led a seventeen year struggle against the monarch to unfetter the chains of absolutism. On August 5, 1906, Muzaffar al-Din Shah conceded to the demands of the constitutionalists by appointing Mushir al-Dawleh, a liberal-minded politician, to the premiership and signing a proclamation to convene a National Assembly that would have legislative power over the monarchy. However, not long after the establishment of the First National Assembly, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali

¹ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 3.

Qajar Shah, the monarchy abolished the constitution, which led the country into a bloody civil war.

The period of constitutional struggle before the civil war began demonstrates the determination and resolve of those Iranians who identified with a larger national community and collaborated with individuals from different classes in their society to achieve social progress. It also provides the historical context needed to understand how the social democratic movement emerged in Iran, for many of the constitutionalists who dedicated their efforts to the struggle for a constitution were social democrats who continued the fight against the Shah during the civil war. By participating in the struggle for a constitution, these revolutionaries opened the door for social democratic organizations throughout Iran to establish political authority. Although this period of constitutional struggle was brought to a standstill by internal factions among the constitutionalists and external pressures by foreign countries, it created the foundation on which the social democratic movement would be built.

The Tobacco Rebellion is the most significant protest in Persian history because it represented the collaboration of different social groups to achieve a common goal. As the historian Evrand Abrahamian stated, “[t]he crisis revealed the fundamental changes that had taken place in nineteenth-century Iran. It demonstrated that local revolts could now spread into general rebellions; that the intelligentsia and the traditional middle class could work together; and that the Shah, despite his claims, was a Titan with feet of clay.”² During the 1890s, Naser al-Din Shah implemented a policy of providing concessions to foreign businessmen, the most important of which was obtained by the

² Evrand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 73.

Englishmen Major G. F. Talbot in 1891, which granted him unrestricted rights to sale and export tobacco in Persia for fifty years. The deal caused so much commotion that it sparked a massive protest, in which the entire population boycotted the use of tobacco and eventually forced the Shah to annul the concession.³

Although the protesters were successful in forcing the government to eliminate the tobacco concession, the victory resulted in Naser al-Din Shah shutting down all progressive programs, fearing that any further reforms might serve as the spark that would ignite a revolution. Along with ending concessions to foreign businesses, he outlawed the liberal newspapers, *Akhtar* and *Qanun*, and refused to support secular schools such as Dar al-Fonun. Moreover, the tobacco incident reduced British prestige in Persia and allowed the Russians to gain a more favorable position of influence. Jean-Baptiste Feuvreir, an army doctor and physician for the Shah during the Tobacco Rebellion, wrote in his diary about the extent to which the rebellion discredited the British and worked to the advantage of Russia:

There is no doubt that the action of Russia has counted for much in the events which have just taken place. It is the eternal struggle for influence between the Russians and the English. This time the Russians have won beyond all hopes, for the Amin al-Sultan (Persian Prime Minister), understanding that the policy he has hitherto followed is condemned, has been clever enough to change it in time to avoid his fall, and to arrive at a good understanding with them. . . . The Russians ought to congratulate themselves on this result.⁴

Although the cancellation of the concession was interpreted by some as an important blow to British domination in Persia, important influential reformists, such as Sayyed

³ For an account of the affairs of the Tobacco Rebellion, see Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: The Tobacco Protest of 1891-1892* (London: Cass Press, 1966).

⁴ Jean-Baptiste Feuvreir, *Trois ans à la cour de Perse* (New edition: Paris, 1906). For a complete translation of the entries dated February 10 and 11, 1892, see Edward Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 55-57.

Jamal al-Din “al-Afghani,” saw it in a different manner. In 1892, an appeal that he wrote to the chief Shi’i ulama began to circulate throughout the major cities in Iran. In the letter, he blamed the economic and social problems in Persia on the Shah and tried to convince the ulama that the monarch had to be deposed:

[The Shah] hurried quickly, with precipitation, and made agreements and covenants with the Europeans, not caring about what they contain of treachery and dishonor, and without reflecting about the great loss which will be caused by their consequences. . . . This enormous responsibility which the Shah undertook against himself through his madness will excite the hatred of Russia and will push her to oppose the English by taking possession of Khorassan. The English will not be backward in doing the same fearing that Russia might seize all, and as a precaution, because the boundary of Khorassan touches that of India.⁵

He remarked further that “dethronement [of the Shah] is the only means to save the country of the Muslims out of this predicament.”⁶ His words were so influential that they caused the Iranian government to counter with accusations that Jamal al-Din was a heretic and unbeliever, and that he had “for many years, in Russia and Afghanistan, called himself a Sunni, and had even written in newspapers against the Shi’is.”⁷

Jamal al-Din had gained a reputation as an influential radical before these appeals against the Persian government were made public. Already in 1891, Naser al-Din Shah sent five hundred horsemen to the holy shrine of Shah Abdul Azim, where the Sayyid was taking refuge, to arrest the religious leader and deport him to the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire.⁸ However, the Shah’s attempts to suppress the influence of his

⁵ Jamal al-Din, “Appeals to the Shi’i Ulama to Depose Naser al-Din Shah,” translation in Nikki Keddie, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran: the Tobacco Protest* (London: Frank Cass & Co. LTD, 1966), appendix IV, 148-149.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁷ Nikki Keddie, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn “Al-Afghānī,” a Political Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 369. The Sayyid was originally born in Iran, but later claimed to have been born in Afghanistan in order to eliminate any claim by the Shah that he be turned over to the Iranian government for punishment.

⁸ For an account of this incident, see the *London Times*, 12 January 1891, p. 5.

adversary ultimately failed, for on Friday, May 1, 1896, just three days before his fiftieth anniversary as ruler of the Qajar Dynasty, he was assassinated by Mirza Muhammad Reza Kirmani, a devoted student and follower of the religious leader. When asked by the Persian officials in his cross-examination who his associates and sympathizers were, he replied:

Those who share my beliefs in this city and country are many in all classes. . . . You know that when Sayyid Jamal al-Din came to this city all the people, of every class and condition, alike in Tehran and in Shah Abdul Azim, came to visit and see him, and heartened to his discourses. . . . So he sowed the seed of these lofty ideals in the ground of men's hearts, and they awoke and came to their senses. Now everyone holds the same views that I do; but I swear by God Most High and Almighty, who is the Creator of Sayyid Jamal al-Din and of all mankind, that none save myself and the Sayyid was aware of my purpose or intention to kill the Shah.⁹

Although the Sayyid was not the only influential figure who brought reformist ideas to the discussion of Iranian politics, he did contribute to bringing about active social participation in criticizing the absolutism that had long dominated Persian politics since the beginning of time.

Muzaffar al-Din Shah was Naser al-Din Shah's successor. He was not as ruthless a leader as his father and even sought to pacify the opposition by increasing land taxes, decreasing court pensions, inviting companies to build modern institutions, bringing electricity and a telephone system to various cities, allowing the publication of foreign liberal newspapers, such as *The Firm Cord (Habl al-Matin)*, and advocating the creation of organized societies among the populace. However, his attempts were futile, for even though many of his progressive policies coincided with the demands of the reformists, they despised him for collaborating with foreigners by handing out concessions and

⁹ *Procès-Verbal of the Cross-Examination of Mirza Muhammad Reza of Kirman*; full translation reprinted in Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 63-85.

hiring Western advisors. Moreover, his liberal policies alienated the conservative clerics. They exerted the most influence over the lower classes, and many of them were more than willing to cooperate with the free thinkers and liberal intellectuals to create a form of government that they felt would ultimately give them more power in society.

Among the many concessions that were negotiated under Muzaffar al-Din Shah, the most exploitative and long lasting was obtained by an Englishman named William Knox D’Arcy. In March 1901, D’Arcy sent his business associate, Alfred Marriot, to Tehran to negotiate a concession that would give him the right to search the land for oil. On May 28, 1904, the Shah ratified the agreement and granted D’Arcy “for sixty years the right to find, exploit, and export petroleum” in an area covering 480,000 square miles. In return, the Shah received 16 percent and “20,000 fully paid-up shares of £1 each . . . as well as £20,000 in cash.”¹⁰ Rumors circulated that the Shah used these profits, as well as others obtained from loans provided by the Russian government, to finance his lavishly expensive trips abroad. According to one source, members of his cabinet “had not received their pensions for three years while Muzaffar al-Din Shah continued to go on expensive trips to Europe.”¹¹ As a report from the British consul in Iran pointed out, misappropriation of government funds by the Shah severely weakened Persia’s economic situation:

The condition of Persia had been for some time growing more and more intolerable. The Shah was entirely in the hands of a corrupt ring of courtiers who were living on the spoils of the Government and the country. He had parted with the treasures inherited from his father, and with most of the Imperial and national domain. He had thus been obliged to have recourse to foreign

¹⁰ Laurence Lockhart, “The Emergence of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, 1901-14,” ed. Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 317.

¹¹ Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 35

loans, the proceeds of which he had spent in foreign travel or had lavished on his courtiers. There was a yearly deficit, and the debt of the country was growing daily.”¹²

Such was the Shah’s reputation when he mistakenly appointed Belgian administrator, Joseph “Monsieur” Naus, to minister of customs. In an attempt to raise funds, Naus proceeded to reform the customs bureau by increasing taxes on local merchants. This was not the first time that a Shah tried to raise funds in such a manner. In 1895, Naser al-Din Shah instituted a law requiring “both local and foreign merchants to pay a 5 percent uniform tax. The law reduced the profit margin of many local merchants, and made their goods less competitive within the country.”¹³ Strong opposition to the law of 1895 led to its cancellation, and attempts to reestablish it in 1899, 1900, and 1903 all resulted in riots in various cities, leading one *Times* correspondent to the conclusion that the situation in Persia “might have serious consequences for that country, these being chiefly due to unbearable economic conditions.”¹⁴ It’s a wonder why Muzaffar al-Din Shah and his advisors did not learn from the mistakes of the past, for Naus’ actions would be one of the main catalysts that propelled the constitutional movement forward.

Not only were the new custom reforms damaging to merchants, but moneylenders, members of the ulama as well as the nobility, landlords, and artisans all had something to fear. As one historian stated: “Money lenders joined the protests because they had not been paid by the treasury for several years. . . . Both members of the nobility and the ulama feared that Naus would lower their pensions or tax the vaqf land . .

¹² Great Britain, *Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Persia* (London, 1909), “Memorandum Furnished by His Majesty’s Legation at Tehran,” [cd. 4581], no.1, p. 1.

¹³ Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 34.

¹⁴ London *Times*, 21 Aug. 1903, p. 4.

. [and] landlords feared a proposal to carry out a land tax reform.”¹⁵ And a Calcutta newspaper, *Habl al-Matin*, published an article stating that artisans were seeking to “force the government to encourage home industries and to protect them against growing competition from Russian industrial products.”¹⁶ By 1905, the Shah was faced with a drastically growing opposition that exceeded all class boundaries. What is more, radical revolutionary ideas from the Caucasus and Russia were being introduced into Persian society.

The drastic increase of Persian migrant workers crossing the border into Russian territory during this period had a drastic effect on the spread of revolutionary ideas throughout Iran. The Russo-Japanese War in 1904 forced the Tsarist government to recruit Russian laborers for military service, which caused an increased need for migrant workers from Iran, who were entering the Caucasus by the thousands in search of employment. In the year 1905 alone, approximately sixty-two thousand passport-bearing migratory workers crossed the border from Iranian Azerbaijan searching for work in Russia (Table 1). As the British military attaché at Teheran, Thomas Gordon, wrote in his account of his travels in Iran a decade earlier: “Baku swarms with Persians, residents and migratory. They are seen everywhere – as shopkeepers, mechanics, masons, carpenters, coachmen, carters, and laborers, all in a bustle of business, so different from Persians at home. Climate or want of confidence produces indolence there, but here and elsewhere out of Persia they show themselves to be active, energetic, and very

¹⁵ Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 35.

¹⁶ Gad Gilbar, “The Big Merchants and the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906” *Asian and African Studies* 2, no. 3 (1976): 301; quoted in *Ibid*.

intelligent.”¹⁷ According to Soviet historian Z. Z. Abdullaev, this drastic increase “in the force of migration from Iran to Russia was the result of the limited growth of the capitalist elements in Iran itself, together with the rapid development of capitalism in Russia, with its demand for a huge mass of cheap labor.”¹⁸ Many of these individuals were exposed to the ideas of the Russian Social Democratic Workers’ party (RSDWp) and had first-hand experience of the Russian Revolution of 1905, so when they went back to Iran, they brought the radical ideas of the Russian Revolution with them. As one writer from Iran explained in a letter to the British Orientalist Edward Browne, the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1905 on Iranian radicalism cannot go unnoticed:

I will try to put before you briefly the essential points of this popular uprising. Under the late [Prime Minister], Ain al-Dawlah, the country has been going to rack and ruin. The Persians can stand a great deal of misgovernment, but even they could no longer support the tyranny and mismanagement of this Minister. Moreover, the Russian Revolution has had a most astounding effect here. Events in Russia have been watched with great attention, and a new spirit would seem to have come over the people. They are tired of their rulers, and, taking example of Russia, have come to think that it is possible to have another and better form of government.¹⁹

Eventually, the revolutionary ideas that were spreading from Russia to Iran manifested themselves in the form of secret societies. Established in Tabriz, the Secret Center (*Markaz-i ‘Amiyun*) was created by intellectuals influenced by Marxism. Ali Karbala-i (also known as Ali “Monsieur”), a Tabriz intellectual who Mahdi Malikzadah, son of the prominent constitutionalist Malik al-Mutakallimin, described as the “pulse of the revolutionary movement in Tabriz,” established the Secret Center where reformist

¹⁷ Thomas Gordon, *Persia Revisited* (London: E. Arnold Press, 1896), 8.

¹⁸ Z.Z. Abdullaev, *Promyshlennost i zarozhdenie rabocheho klassa Irana v Konse XIX nachale XX vv.* (Baku, 1963); published in Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), selection 5, p. 50.

¹⁹ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 129.

intellectuals met and discussed revolutionary ideas.²⁰ Working closely with the Secret Center and also influenced by the ideas of Marxism was the Social Democratic party, established in 1905 in Baku by revolutionaries from the RSDWp. Headed by Narim

Table 1: Persian legal migration over Asiatic frontiers of Russia (1900-1906)²¹

Year	To Russia	From Russia
1900	67,304	57,844
1901	71,909	55,449
1902	83,684	61,749
1903	93,385	69,323
1904	78,779	63,814
1905	67,966	60,031
1906	95,132	60,524

Narimanov, an Azerbaijani school teacher who later became the president of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan, the Social Democratic party played an important role in spreading revolutionary ideas into Iran. Although not officially formed on Iranian soil, the organization focused on the working conditions of Iranian migrant workers employed in the Baku oil fields. Eventually, according to a letter written to the Russian Marxist, Georgi Plekhanov, by the Armenian revolutionary, Joseph Karakhanian, the party made its way to Iran, where it began as a study group: “In Tabriz some supporters of Social Democracy have promoted the excellent idea of formulating and developing social-

²⁰ Mahdi Malikzadah, *Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-I Iran* [History of the Constitutional Movement in Iran], vol. 1 (Tehran: Ilmi Press, 1984), 399.

²¹ Reproduced in Cosroe Chaqueri, *Origins of Social Democracy in Modern Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 81.

democratic viewpoints by systematic reading and debates.”²² Another Armenian social democrat who had joined the Social Democratic party in Iran, Archavir Tchilinkirian, wrote in a letter to the leader of German Social Democracy in 1908 that the “Social-Democratic party of Tabriz has, . . . since its inception, been engaged in disseminating the principles of Marxism – that is to say, of International Social Democracy.”²³

Thus, in 1905, the stage was set in Iran for a modern revolutionary movement to take place. The merchant and artisan classes were disappointed with the heavy tax burden placed on their goods and products; the clergy, influenced by the ideas of religious reformers such as Jamal al-Din, were demanding an end to exploitative concessions that the Shah was handing out to the ‘infidel’ foreigners; and the newly emerging intelligentsia, inspired by Marxism and the Russian Revolution of 1905, were looking to establish progressive change. Despite their differences, they all held in common the belief that the Shah’s absolute power should be restricted.

In late spring of 1905, the Shah left Teheran to go on a pilgrimage to Meshed. After hearing about their ruler’s plans, reported the *London Times*, “a considerable body of merchants, who were afraid of extortion during the absence of the Shah, fled to the sacred city of Shah Abdul Azim, seventeen miles from Tehran, as a protest against the Shah’s departure.”²⁴ The shrine of Shah Abdul Azim had already become a popular place to hold demonstrations. In the holy month of Muharram, people in large cities filled the streets to demonstrate their loyalty to Islam. One of the leading constitutionalist clerics,

²² “Joseph Karakhanian to Georgi Plekhanov,” 15 September 1905; published in Cosroe Chaqueri (ed.), *The Armenians of Iran, the Paradoxical Role of a Minority in a Dominant Culture: Articles and Documents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 311.

²³ “Archavir Tchilinkirian to Karl Kautsky,” 16 July 1908; published in Chaqueri, *ibid.*, 313.

²⁴ *London Times*, 6 May 1905, p. 9.

Sayyid Abdullah Behbehani, decided he would use this popular month to excite the masses against the government, so he circulated a picture among the people that showed the Belgian minister Monsieur Naus, who was in charge of Persia's finances, at a party dressed in religious robes. Taking the picture as an insult to their religious mores, the crowd became hostile and demanded Naus' dismissal from office. Since the merchants were already upset with the custom reforms, they did not hesitate to take action by closing the bazaars. By May, the bazaars were closed and many of the protesters made their way to the holy shrine, but the crown Prince convinced them to disperse by promising that the Shah would handle the situation and dismiss Naus when he returned from his pilgrimage.

In December, another set of strikes broke out in response to the violent behavior of the Tehran governor and the unfulfilled promises made by the crown. Ahmad al-Dawlah, governor of Tehran, brutally beat two merchants for not complying with his wish that they reduce sugar prices. His actions resulted in yet another large crowd taking "bast" in the holy shrine, this time demanding the dismissal of the Tehran governor, the dismissal of Naus (who was still minister of customs), and the establishment of a House of Justice. *Times* reported that "[a]bout a thousand merchants and mullahs recently left the city in order to protest against the government of the Shah [and seeking] a representative assembly elected by mullahs, merchants, and landowners."²⁵ After a month, the governor realized he could not suppress the protesters, so he contacted the Shah, who gave in and "made some vague promises as to the granting of popular representation and the reform of justice and administration By January, the refugees

²⁵ London *Times*, 23 January 1906, p. 3.

were brought back to Tehran in the Shah's own carriage, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd."²⁶ He agreed to dismiss the governor and establish a House of Justice that would comply with the rules of Islam.

During this protest, the first sign of disagreement between the various classes that had joined together against the Shah became noticeable. The problem centered on the definition of a House of Justice. Whereas the conservative clerics wanted nothing more than an assembly that would have the ability to send grievances and appeals to the monarchy when it did not agree, other reformists stressed the need for a legislative body and a constitution, and even they were divided on the issue of whether or not the constitution should require all citizens to follow Islamic law.

Despite these disagreements, popular discontent with the absolute power of the monarchy increased, for the Shah still had not fulfilled his promise to convene a House of Justice. In late April, the religious leaders sent him a petition, asking that he carry out his promised reforms.²⁷ The appeal did not produce the results the reformers wanted, for the Shah would not agree to relinquish any of his power. Edward Browne commented on the situation in Iran after the Shah received the petition, saying that "so far from improving, matters got steadily worse. Spies were everywhere; the streets were full of Cossacks and soldiers; and no one was allowed to go about the streets later than three hours after sunset."²⁸

On July 17, 1906, after the Shah made it apparent that he was not going to give in to the constitutionalists, the Tehran police arrested an influential religious figure named

²⁶ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, "Memorandum Furnished by His Majesty's Legation at Tehran," [cd. 4581], no. 3, p. 2.

²⁷ *London Times*, 28 April 1906, p. 6.

²⁸ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 115.

Muhammad Sultan al-Va'izin for speaking out against the government. When Behbehani ordered his theology students to attack the prison and set Muhammad Sultan free, police forces opened fire on the protesters, which resulted in the death of a young theology student. Protesters carrying the young student's body took to the streets, but they were overpowered by government troops. Seeing they had no chance against the soldiers, the protesters asked permission from the Shah to leave the city and retire to Qom, where they had received word from Grant Duff, the British Chargé d'Affaires, that it would not be unlawful for them to take refuge in the British Legation. By this time, the movement had gathered a large amount of people that. According to Edward Browne, "as Taqizada expressed it, the road between Tehran and Qom 'was like the street of a town.' This event, which took place on July 21, is known amongst the Persians as the Great Exodus."²⁹ After only two days, the *Times* reported that "students, heads of guilds, shopkeepers, artisans, and others [who took refuge at the British Legation] numbered 858, and more [were] coming."³⁰ Eventually, business in Iran came to a standstill, for the number of individuals taking refuge at the British Legation astonishingly exceeded ten thousand, all of them refusing to leave until the government dismissed premier Ain al-Dawlah and granted a representative assembly (*Majles*). Moreover, although the laws were not yet mentioned, "a constitution, or *mashruteh*, began to be discussed by the advanced reformers."³¹ By August, the Shah had given in to popular demand. He dismissed the prime minister and signed a proclamation for the establishment of a

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁰ London *Times*, 24 July 1906, p. 5.

³¹ Keddie, Nikki, *Roots of Revolution* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), 73.

National Assembly. The constitutionalists had finally emerged victorious in their struggle, at least for the time being.

The First Majles opened on October 7, 1906. Iran had entered a new era, and the reformers responded by taking advantage of their newly acquired ability to represent their country. The laws establishing the election process to the Majles were ratified on September 9, and by December 30, Iran officially had a constitution, which consisted of fifty-one articles that significantly limited the power of the Shah and his council. Although the electoral laws limited parliamentary representation to the traditional middle and upper classes, some of the provisions helped stimulate the growth of independent revolutionary organizations. For example, article nine of the electoral laws called for the formation of councils, known as *anjumans*, which would monitor elections to the Majles in order to assure that the election process proceeded lawfully. Gradually, these *anjumans* gained more authority and evolved into influential political organizations that were independent of the central government. As one historian explained, these political organizations “sprang up all over the country to debate political issues and in some cases to dispense welfare services, conduct literacy classes, and even run local governments.”³² When discussing the rapid growth of the *anjumans*, another historian noted that, “[i]n the capital, over thirty appeared on the political arena. Some, such as the Society of Guilds, Society of Scribes, and the Society of Theology Students, were professional associations.”³³ Although some conservative *anjumans* were formed in support of the monarchy, the majority of them were antiroyalist political societies that, in the words of

³² John Foran, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Iran’s Populist Alliance: A Class Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911,” *Theory and Society* no. 20 (1991): 795-823, 805.

³³ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 88.

at least one British observer, gave the central government “a good deal of anxiety, for [the *anjumans*] appear[ed] to aim at a sort of local autonomy, and the [local] Governors [were] powerless to deal with them.”³⁴ The most important *anjuman* in promoting revolutionary ideas was the Society of Azerbaijanis, organized by the social democrat Haydar Khan Amu Ughli, an electrical engineer from the Caucasus who belonged to the RSDWp and helped establish the Iranian Social Democratic party in Baku. With a membership of around three thousand individuals, this political organization was the largest and most important in promoting socialist ideas, for the leading members later formed the first branch of the Social Democratic party on Iranian soil and became influential promoters of Iranian communism.

This was the political scene when Mohammad Ali Shah took the throne. The constitution had just been ratified, reform ideas were spreading throughout the country, the radical *anjumans* (especially in Tabriz) were increasingly gaining support, and the liberal-minded reformers had the upper hand in the National Assembly. As Janet Afary pointed out, the First Majles enjoyed a great deal of success in establishing progressive reforms:

It significantly curtailed the powers of the monarchy and made government ministers responsible to the delegates in the Majles. It gave administrative and financial autonomy to the provinces through the election of provincial and departmental *anjumans* . . . balanced the budget, decreased the salaries of the Qajar princes and the Shah, and abolished the *tuyul** land allotments. The constitution of 1906 established the framework for secular legislation, judicial codes, and courts of appeals, which reduced the powers of the royal court and the religious authorities and established a free press.³⁵

³⁴ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Spring-rice to Grey,” [cd. 4581], no. 17, p. 16.

* *Tuyul* refers to a system of land allotment similar to that of the European fief, in which land or land revenue is granted to certain individuals for their service to the state.

³⁵ Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 63.

However, it did not take long before the delegates started to divide along ideological lines. Whereas, in the struggle to obtain for their country a constitution, the reformers were united in their effort to limit the power of the monarchy, once that goal was achieved, the clerical and conservative constitutionalists started to criticize the radical reformers for pushing for more progressive social changes. The clerical constitutionalists never anticipated the revolution bringing about such radical ideas as the granting of religious freedom and equality to all Persian citizens, irrespective of their creed. As Edward Browne stated, the clergy “certainly did not approve of all the democratic ideas of the Popular party, and many conflicts took place between these two factions.”³⁶ In effect, the conservatives were not receptive to the idea of having a constitution that was not guided by the rule of Islam.

Traditionally, the religious elite in Iranian society served as the intermediary between the state and the people. Edward Browne pointed out that, “like the Irish priests, the Persian *mullas* are an essentially national class, sprung from the people, knowing the people, and . . . suspicious of administrative innovations.”³⁷ Since the doctrine of Shi’i Islam denied legitimacy to secular power, legal legitimacy ultimately resided in the ulamas, for they were the keepers of the faith on earth.³⁸ As a result, any attempt by the state to impose its authority independent of the will of the ulama resulted in conflict. After the granting of a constitution, however, the conservative ulama allied with the state in order to resist the growing demand in the Majles for a European-style constitution. On June 21, 1907, the prominent conservative cleric Shaikh Fazlullah Nuri, who made a

³⁶ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 146-147.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ See Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1785-1906* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), chapter 1.

name for himself by supporting the Shah and advocating limitations on the constitution, took sanctuary at the Shah Abd al-Azim Shrine, where he began a propaganda campaign against the ratification of the Supplementary Constitutional Laws, in which he accused the constitutionalists of being “atheists, freethinkers, Babis, and the like.”³⁹ Although his campaign did not prevent the ratification of the constitutional laws, he did succeed in bringing about certain provisions in them, such as the one establishing a committee of mujtaheds to “thoroughly investigate the Bills brought in by the National Assembly, and reject every one of these Bills which is contrary to the sacred precepts of Islam, in order that it may not become law.”⁴⁰ The conflict continued, however, and by December 15, Shaikh Nuri had collaborated with the Shah in an attempted *coup d’etat* against the Majles, which led to the closing of the bazaars in Tehran and the occupation of the “principal square” in the city for the day.⁴¹ The coup was unsuccessful, but the reactionary forces established a strong support base that would later serve to discredit the Majles and thwart the constitutional movement.

Another problem that contributed to the ideological divisions within the First Majles was the issue of land reform. Some peasant communities, primarily in the northern regions, saw in the struggle for a constitution a chance to express their grievances through formal petitions to members of the local *anjumans* and the Majles: “Most letters of protest, which were published in the newspapers, came from the provinces [They] often began with enthusiastic expressions of support for the revolution, the constitution, and the Majles. As time passed, however, and as the

³⁹ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 148.

⁴⁰ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Translation of the Persian Constitutional Laws,” [cd 4581], no. 59, p. 64.

⁴¹ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Marling to Grey,” [cd 4581], no. 70, p. 75.

villagers became somewhat disillusioned with the Majles, the letters would begin instead with declarations of impatience and anger.”⁴² In some areas, the grievances turned into problems for the landowners. As the British chargé d’affaires, Edward Spring-Rice, reported in July of 1907: “Agrarian troubles [in Resht] continue. The villagers in some districts still refuse to hand over to the land-owners and to the foreign grain importers the portion of cocoons to which they are entitled.”⁴³

In response, some of the more radical members of the Majles spoke out against the local landowners in favor of establishing land reforms that would benefit the peasants. Ahsan al-Dawlah, the Majles’ most persistent advocate of land reform for the peasants, wrote an open letter to the other delegates in the Majles on behalf of the peasant population, in which he pointed out how important their work was to Persian society:

You prominent men who represent fifteen million people of Iran and are sitting in this castle of Sulaiman! . . . Do you know that all your wealth and riches, your strength, depends on our very existence though we are wretched creatures? Do you realize that if in this critical moment and period of insecurity in the nation we go on a strike – at a time when we have suffered much because of rioting, insecurity of the nation, murder, and plunder – you will be destroyed by famine and hunger, and your riches and your elaborate parks will in no way help you out?”⁴⁴

However, it did not have the impact he desired, for many of the members in the Majles were landowners who had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. As the historian Janet Afary pointed out, the delegates from the landowning class, which made up twenty percent of the First Majles, were “unsympathetic towards social and economic reforms such as the abolition of the tuyul land allotment and reform of land taxes, which

⁴² Quoted in Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 151. For a detailed discussion of the letters and petitions sent by the peasants during this period, see *Ibid.*, 151-162.

⁴³ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Spring-Rice to Grey,” [cd. 4581], no. 34, p. 43.

⁴⁴ “Congratulations,” *Majles*, 14 August 1907, no. 157, 4; quoted in Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 165-166.

increased their share of taxes.”⁴⁵ Although the First Majles eventually inaugurated some land reforms, such as the abolition of the tuyul land allotment, they had more to do with placing these revenues into the hands of the Majles and out of the hands of individuals than with ending the landowners’ control over the land. Such reforms did contribute a great deal to the budget surplus in October of 1907, but created deeper divisions between the radical, moderate, and conservative factions within the Majles.⁴⁶

Ideological divisions and propaganda campaigns were not the only problems the first Majles had to face. On August 31, British and Russian representatives met in St. Petersburg to sign the Anglo-Russian Agreement (figure 1), which carved Iran into separate spheres of influence, giving Russia dominion over the North while the British controlled the South. The agreement was designed “in order that in the future misunderstandings [between England and Russia] may be avoided, and in order to avoid creating a state of things which might in any respect whatever place the Persian Government in an embarrassing situation.” Both governments specifically pointed out that they were not trying to discredit their commitment to Persia’s independence: “[The two Governments] testify that they sincerely desire not only the permanent establishment of equal advantages from the industry and commerce of all other nations, but also the specific development of [Persia].”⁴⁷ However, this was not the prevailing attitude in Persia, especially among intellectual reformers. A series of articles that appeared in the newspaper, *Hable al-Matin*, stressed the damaging effects the agreement would have on Iran’s independence: “All discriminating and well-informed persons suspect that, in view

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁶ For statistics on the budget of 1907, see Edward Browne, *The Persian Constitutionalists* (London: Central Asian Society, 1909), 8-9.

⁴⁷ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Grey to Spring-Rice,” [cd. 4581], no. 40, p. 48.

of our negligence and ignorance, the signing of this Agreement will be shortly followed by the end of Persia's independence and autonomy."⁴⁸ The latter interpretation was not far from the truth, for after the agreement, as one historian explained, "Russia adopt[ed] a more hostile attitude towards the constitutional movement. The Cossack Brigade and its Russian officers began to openly intervene on behalf of the Shah [and] the British Foreign Office adopted a more sullen attitude toward the constitutionalists, urging them to back the Shah and to allow Russia to pursue its objectives in Iran."⁴⁹ Thus the Anglo-



Figure 1: the respective spheres of influence in Iran after Great Britain and Russian signed the Anglo-Russian Agreement⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Hable al-Matin*, 10 September 1907, no. 112; published in Brown, *The Persian Revolution*, 179. For a complete translation of various articles published in *Hable al-Matin* dealing with the ruinous effects of the agreement, see *Ibid.*, 175-189.

⁴⁹ Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 132.

⁵⁰ "Heartland, Eurasian Review of Geopolitics: Geopolitical maps;" accessed from http://www.eheartland.com/geopolitical_maps_europe_asia.html, 11 May 2006.

Russian Agreement of 1907 weakened the Majles' authority. Although the majority of the assembly strongly opposed the agreement, they were not included in the negotiations and therefore had no bearing on the decision that was made.

The problems created by the divisions between the conservative and radical members of parliament and the Anglo-Russian Agreement eventually provided Mohammad Ali Shah and his conservative supporters, who did not like the idea of having a European-style constitution, with an opportunity to curtail the radical movement. After the unsuccessful coup against the Majles, matters continued to get worse. In February of 1908, there was an assassination attempt on the Shah's life. As Percy Sykes, pro-royalist brigadier-General and representative of British interest in Persia, said of the incident: "[A] bomb was thrown at His Majesty's motor-car and killed one of its occupants. The Shah himself was in a carriage and escaped. It is only fair to His Majesty to point out that he had every reason to believe that this outrage was organized by his political enemies, who never ceased to attack him in the Assembly and in the press."⁵¹ In the months that followed, according to Sykes, "representatives of Russia and Great Britain were urging moderation." However, their efforts were futile, for the Shah was determined to crush the opposition:

Early in the morning of June 23, the Cossack brigade and other troops surrounded the Baharistan, and artillery fire was opened from guns posted all round the building. Casualties were inflicted and panic ensued. The Nationalists dispersed, and some reached safety at the British Legation; but seven of the eight leaders were caught. . . . [The Russian Cossack officer colonel] Liakhoff was appointed military governor of Teheran and administered the city under martial law.⁵²

⁵¹ Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 3d ed., vol. 2 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1963), 415

⁵² *Ibid.*, 415-416.

After his victory, the Shah closed the Majles, which officially ended Iran's first experiment with a democratically elected assembly.

The first constitutional period in Iran illustrates the effectiveness of various social groups coming together for the purpose of achieving political change. The successful implementation of democratic institutions for the first time in Iranian history resulted from the cooperation between the various discontented classes in combating the absolute power of the monarchy. Once it became apparent that the Shah planned to open the country to Western influence and provide benefits to foreign businesses, the coalition of reformists took action and successfully transformed Iranian politics from absolutism to constitutional monarchy.

However, the ephemeral nature of the reformist coalition soon became apparent, for once the constitution was ratified and the National Assembly elected, disagreements about the nature of reform ensued. Armed with the influential ideas of the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the RSDWp, the more radical constitutionalists increased their reformist demands by pursuing more social changes, while the conservative clerics shunned any type of change that did not conform to the rule of Islam. Moreover, the question of land reform divided the liberal delegates into those who supported peasant rights and those who did not. The ideological differences between the emerging factions ultimately served to benefit the monarchy, for the new Shah was able to capitalize on his conservative base of support by destroying the Majles and purging all the prominent constitutionalists he could find. Nevertheless, although Iran's first experiment with a democratically elected assembly ended with the triumph of the reactionaries, one cannot underestimate the impact it had on the social forces at work within the country, for the

democratic foundation that was established during the first phase of the Constitutional Revolution enabled those revolutionaries who survived the wrath of Mohammad Ali Shah's purges to reemerge with the support of social democratic ideas from the North.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT AND THE SECOND PHASE OF CONSTITUTIONALISM

The Shah's successful coup against the Majles might have ended the first democratically elected assembly in Iranian history, but it did not end the struggle for a representative form of government. After Mohammad Ali Qajar Shah abolished the constitution, he declared martial law and proceeded to eliminate the opposition by arresting thirty-nine constitutionalists. Of those who were captured, Malek al-Motakallemin and Mirza Jahangir Khan were the first to be executed. According to the historian Mehdi Malakzadeh, the illegal execution of these two constitutionalists had a negative impact on the Shah's reputation: "After the execution of [these two constitutionalists], which was carried out in the most savage way, many domestic and foreign observers complained to the Shah about the illegal way in which the executions took place, so the Shah proceeded to set up a court to try the remaining insurgence legitimately in order to eliminate opposition."¹ Unfortunately for the Shah, this did not have the desired effect, for the resistance movement gained strength as the surviving radicals set up a revolutionary stronghold in Tabriz, where they fought a bitter civil war against the monarchy in support of the constitution. Although the revolutionaries in Azerbaijan who fought against the monarchy were fighting for the restoration of the constitution, many of those involved were affiliated with the social democratic movement

¹Mehdi Malakzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab-i Mashrutiyat-I Iran* [History of the Constitutional Movement in Iran], vol. 4 (Tehran:Ilmi Press, 1984), 806; trans. Mohammad Borougerdi.

that had emerged in response to the contacts made with Caucasian revolutionaries. Trained revolutionaries from Transcaucasia and radical reformers of the Iranian constitutional movement set up social democratic organizations that advocated social change, and their involvement in the constitutional struggle after the Shah's coup brought about the restoration of constitutionalism in 1909. Moreover, the ideas to which these revolutionaries subscribed strengthened the ideological foundation upon which the first Communist party in Iran would later build.

However, there were significant ideological and theoretical differences among the social democrats about the application of reform within Iranian society that were never reconciled. Not only did these differences weaken the Iranian government and allow foreign powers to gain control of the country during World War I, they also created a long lasting division within the left-wing movement that contributed to the decline of the communist movement in Iran during the 1920s.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 had an enormous impact on revolutionary developments in Iran. Even before the revolution, the ideas of the Russia Social Democratic Workers' party (RSDWp) were influencing the immigrant Iranian merchants and workers in Baku.² The Baku oil fields in Sanbuchi and Balakhani alone employed over ten thousand Iranian workers each, all of whom, according to the Persian constitutional historian Ahmad Kasravi, "blamed the Iranian government for the

² As mentioned in chapter one, already in 1903 a branch of the RSDWp had been established in Baku to represent the Muslim working population. According to various sources, Iranian immigrant workers in Baku participated in the general strikes of July 1903 and December 1904. See Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 87-88.

hardships they were experiencing.”³ General Hassan Arfa, a long time loyal officer to Reza Shah, commented on the Iranian population in Baku when he visited there for the first time in 1914:

In Baku I already felt myself in Iran as more Azeri Turkish was heard in the streets than Russian. The town was dusty and completely lacking in the aristocratic charm of Tiflis, the air being permeated by the smell from the oilfields. Apart from the mixed indigenous population of Shia Moslems and the Armenians and Russians, there were some fifty to sixty thousand Iranians who came every year from the neighboring districts of Ardebil, Ahar and Serab in Iranian Azerbaijan to work in the oilfields and in the docks of the port, returning to Iran after six or seven months.⁴

Thus, according to his account, well after the second constitutional struggle had taken place, the number of Iranian migrant workers employed in the oil fields of Baku was extremely high. These migrant workers continued to make a living in the oil fields of Baku for at least a decade after the Russian Revolution of 1905, which supports the idea that the revolutionary activity established by the RSDWp reached an increasing number of Iranians throughout the years – a fact that would later contribute to the Bolshevik influence in the region after the October Revolution.

The RSDWp had been involved in efforts to organize the Muslim workers in the Baku oil fields since the early 1900s, and in 1903, according to historian Tadeusz Swietochowski, a “handful of young natives, mainly among the intelligentsia . . . had formed a debating circle and the next year initiated propaganda activity directed at their countrymen.”⁵ Before long, the debating circle transformed into a revolutionary organization named Himmat (Endeavor). It is important to note that Swietochowski’s

³ Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-I Mashrutah-yi Iran* [History of the Iranian Constitution] (Tehran: Amir Kabir Press, 1984), 193-195; trans. Mohammad Borougerdi.

⁴ Hassan Arfa, *Under five Shahs* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1965), 41.

⁵ Tadeusz Swietochowski, “The Himmat Party: Socialism and the National Question in Russian Azerbaijan, 1904-1920,” in *Cahiers du Monde Russe et Soviétique*, vol. XIX, no. 1-2 (Jan.-June 1978): 119.

interpretation differs greatly from Soviet accounts of the establishment of the party, for he points out that, although those who created the party were members of the RSDWp, their actions were independent of the RSDWp. In fact, according to this interpretation, the Himmat organization was created by certain individuals who felt that the RSDWp committee in Baku had failed to create agitation among the Muslim community in the region. On the contrary, the Soviet interpretation of the party's organization emphasized the important role of the RSDWp:

An important part in the transmission to the people of Persia of Russian Revolutionary experience . . . was played by the emigrants from Persian Azerbaijan who had gone to Russia in search of work. According to Tsarist authorities their number had reached 62,000 by 1905. By 1911 the number had increased to 200,000. The Persian emigrants working in the oil undertakings of Baku were drawn into the economic and political struggle . . . They felt the influence of socialist ideas spread by the Hemmat organization which was led by M. Azizbekov and A. Dzhaparadze and which had been founded in 1904 by the Bolsheviks for work among the Muslim population.⁶

Such a description tended to credit the Bolsheviks for establishing the Himmat party. Nonetheless, although the Himmat party worked closely with the RSDWp as well as the Armenian Hnchak and Dashnak parties, it had a separate agenda geared towards establishing democratic demands for the progressive Muslims. According to the party program, the organization was dedicated to "preserving the interests and ameliorating the conditions of the poor, workers, and employees of commerce," and promoted ideas such as freedom of opinion, expression, association, press, the right to strike, the right to universal suffrage, an eight-hour work day, and the distribution of land to the tiller.⁷

⁶ I.M. Reysner, "The Russian Revolution of 1905-07 and the Awakening of Asia," *Sovetskoye Vostokovedeniye*, no. 2 (1955): 20-22; quoted in "The Borderlands of Soviet Central Asia," *Central Asian Review*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1956): 292-293.

⁷ "Programme et Statut de L'organisation Musulmane Social-Democrate Himmat," 22 December 1909; published in Cosroe Chaqueri, *La Social-democratie en Iran: articles et documents* [SDI] (Florence: Mazdak, 1979), 125.

By 1905, the party had established a strong radical reputation, as two prominent revolutionary organizers, M. A. Azizbakov and Narim Narimanov, joined the organization leadership. However, it was not long before the Stolypin Reaction by the Tsarist government emerged and repressed the revolutionary elements in Russia, causing a decline in the party's efforts. As one historian explained: "With some of its leaders (such as Narimanov, Afandiyav and Sardarov) arrested and others (Rasulzada, Abilov, Buniatzada and Tagizada) having taken refuge in Persia along with hundreds of rank and file, the party, organizationally weak, showed little staying power."⁸ Despite the repression of the Tsarist government, the party reorganized and met in Ghanja in 1909 to establish the party program.

Closely linked to the Himmat party was the Organization of Social Democrats, founded by Narimanov in 1906. Although little is known about its early stages, by 1907 the party had already established a political program similar to the RSDWp. Of the fourteen demands drafted by the Baku branch of the organization in January 1907, the most important were:

- a) Limiting the powers of the absolute monarch;
- b) Granting workers the right to vote, irrespective of their income or wealth, not foreseen in the Fundamental Laws of Iran;
- c) Holding parliamentary elections based on universal suffrage;
- d) Distributing the large landed estates among the peasants and introducing legal protection for peasant ownership in land;
- e) Granting democratic rights to workers, such as the freedom of association, speech, and assembly and the right to strike.⁹

⁸ Swietochowski, "The Himmat Party," 122.

⁹ *Ershād*, no. 10, 14 January 1907; quoted in Chaqueri, *Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 123.

Bolshevik involvement in establishing both the Himmat party and the Organization of Social Democrats was significant. Many of the founders were affiliated with the RSDWp and contributed to drafting the party programs. As one historian explained, “Narimanov translated the program of the RSDWp into Azeri . . . [and] Persian, which with further alterations was adopted by the Organization of Social Democrats.”¹⁰ However, it is important to note that the intention was not to promote Bolshevik interest in Iran, but rather to promote political consciousness among the immigrant workers in Baku in order to eliminate the negative reaction their immigration had on the labor movement in the area. Their presence in the Baku labor force hampered the social democratic movement because the employers could use them to break strikes. Immigrant workers migrated because they were desperate for work, so they could not afford to participate in the struggle for higher wages and better working conditions. An article published in the Baku newspaper, *Barinskii Rabochii*, explained the situation well in September of 1908:

Many causes imperil, to the point of paralyzing, the workers’ struggle for the betterment of the conditions of work and the conservation of the amelioration already won. One of its principal causes lies in the permanent presence of a reserved army – the army of the unemployed. The impoverished class of peasants hangs about in towns, around factories, and enterprises in search of a loaf of bread. Chased out by famine, they cross the seas and oceans, take refuge in other countries, in foreign lands. Tortured by unemployment and its sequels (starvation, cold, sickness, etc.), they are prepared to do any work at the lowest wage rate. They are ready to work day and night to feed themselves and their starved wives and children. In hundreds and thousands they arrive from villages and towns in production centers, and by their threat of competition, they cast fear upon workers. Their permanent presence renders capitalists haughty and reassured, permitting the latter to pressure the workers. . . . The struggle against the unemployment, against the presence of the reserved army, and the conditions leading to its existence, is the task of the proletariat of all the countries. And every event that facilitates or makes this struggle more

¹⁰ Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 82.

difficult must interest and does interest workers everywhere profoundly. It is from this perspective, that of direct interests of the labor market in Baku, and the interests of all proletariat, that we view the events that have been taking place in the Near East, in Iran, and Turkey. The victory of the Persian people over old absolutism, the introduction of reforms and of liberty will contribute to the development and blossoming of the county . . . and the influx of Iranian workers into other countries – principally here in Baku – will diminish perceptibly, a fact that will facilitate the struggle of Baku workers for their conditions of life.¹¹

Although the struggle to awaken the immigrant workers would be difficult, success was achieved, as is evident by the involvement of many migrant Iranian workers in the various strikes that occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century and the success achieved by the social democratic organizations explained above. Joseph Stalin, who was a labor leader in Baku during the time when efforts were being made to mobilize the immigrant workers, wrote a declaration on behalf of the RSDWp Baku Committee that praised the Iranian workers for their involvement in the general strike in December 1904, claiming that it symbolized their political awakening: “From ‘amsharas’ and ‘pack animals’ we, at one stroke, became men, fighting for a better life. That is what the December strike and the December agreement gave us. But that is not all. The main thing the December struggle gave us was confidence in our own strength, confidence in victory, readiness for fresh battles, the consciousness that only ‘our own right hand’ can shiver the chains of capitalist slavery.”¹²

Once the migrant workers were mobilized and leadership of the organizations stabilized, the social democratic ideas they advocated became popular. Undoubtedly the experience of participating in the various strikes in the region influenced the migrant

¹¹ *Krasnyi Arkhiv*, no. 105 (1941): 13-14; published in Chaqueri, *Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left*, 86-87.

¹² Joseph Stalin, *Works*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Foreign Language Publication House, 1953), 175; first published in leaflet form from The Baku Committee of the R.S.D.L.P on December 13, 1909.

Iranian population – led by the leadership of the revolutionary organizations at the time – to promote the ideas of social democracy in Iran when they returned to their homes. As one historian commented, the migrant workers’ seasonal return to Northern Iran “was bound to spread the word that a different kind of life, one improved through political struggle, was possible.”¹³

As a result, it did not take long for the Organization of Social Democrats in Baku to extend its influence to Northern Iran. The multitude of migrant workers returning to their families and the intellectual leaders seeking refuge in Iran from the Tsarist government led to the establishment of many branches of the organization, the most important of which in Tabriz was called the Secret Center. As earlier mentioned, the Secret Center was headed by Ali Monsieur, who made contact with members of the Himmat party during his stays at Istanbul and Tiflis. Once the Secret Center established itself, the members created an army known as the *Mujahidin* (loyal fighters), for the purpose of defending the constitutional form of government and protecting the rights of the Majles.* An interesting feature of the *Mujahidin* is the religiosity maintained by its members. In fact, all of the early social democratic organizations in Iran fighting for the reestablishment of the constitution demonstrated some form of religious commitment. Although they were hated by the conservative ulama for their lack of traditional religiosity, the social democratic organizations supported the Shi’i religion. As one historian said, “the traditional RSDWp program had called for separation of religion and

¹³ Chaqueri, *Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left*, 95.

* The term *Mujahidin* holds two different meanings, the first of which is explained above and refers to the fighters connected to the social democratic movement. As the struggle evolved, and the civil war commenced in Tabriz, the term referred to *any* loyal volunteer fighter who devoted his/her life to the restoration of the constitution. It is important to distinguish the two meanings in order to eliminate the notion that all revolutionary fighters carrying the name *Mujahidin* in the civil war were social democrats.

state and creation of secular schools, but Narimanov had considered these issues so sensitive that he deleted them from the program of the Himmat Party.”¹⁴ It was not customary for the RSDWp to allow an organization affiliated with its cause to advocate religious slogans, but the need for Muslim support for the cause of social democracy in the Azerbaijan and Northern Iranian regions was so urgent that the leaders deemed it necessary, for they were aware that the traditions of Islam were imbedded in the minds of the people, and any attempt to eradicate that tradition would result in failure. Instead of calling for the elimination of religious influence, the social democrats, according to the British Orientalist Edward Browne, who personally knew many Persian democrats, were “careful on all occasions to emphasize the fact that true Islam is democratic, and that their aims are inspired by and conformable with the Muhammadan religion.”¹⁵ This fact would eventually have an effect on the communists’ attempt to establish revolutionary support among the peoples in the East.

The *Mujahidin* organization improved tremendously with the arrival of revolutionary social democrats from Transcaucasia, who supported the newly emerging branches in Iran. They brought with them the revolutionary skills needed to solidify the radical movement. Spring-Rice reported the growing influence of the *Mujahidin* fighters in the various regions of Northern Iran:

A spirit of resistance to oppression and even to all authority is spreading throughout the country. The leaders are unknown. The inspiration seems to come from the North, perhaps from the Caucasus. A feature of the present agitation is the growth of secret societies. There are bands of “devotees” in Baku and Northern Persia sworn to devote their lives to the good of their country and the destruction of its enemies. Tehran is full of societies, some of which hold public

¹⁴ Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 86.

¹⁵ Edward Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1910), 147.

meetings; others are bound by common rules, although the members are, in general, unknown to each other.¹⁶

The influence of the Transcaucasian revolutionaries solidified the social democratic movement in Iran by contributing more than any other group to the successful restoration of constitutionalism. Vlass Mgeladze (also known as Tria), an experienced Georgian Menshevik revolutionary who participated in both the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the Tabriz civil war, reported that many of the Transcaucasian revolutionaries responded to the Tabriz social democrats' appeal to the RSDWp for aid.¹⁷ In a letter written to Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov, the Armenian revolutionary from Caucasia, Vasso A. Khachaturian, wrote how important his revolutionary organization had been in contributing to the struggle for a constitution in Persia:

After the bombardment of the Majles, while the battle was going on between the revolutionaries and reactionaries, we, the Caucasians, started to follow closely the development of events [in Persia]. Our comrades began to go to Tabriz to participate [in the struggle]. In the first days of August the Baku Social-Democratic Workers' Organization decided to send rifles and bombs to the Persian revolutionaries. A detachment departed from Baku on 28 August. It was composed of [*Mujahidin*] who arrived in Tabriz on 18 September, having traveled all this time while fighting their way through [the territory controlled by] reactionary khans. Comrades from Tiflis arrived before those of Baku. These Caucasians worked very hard, and because of their knowledge of military techniques were of utmost service.¹⁸

Overall, nearly 800 well trained and experienced revolutionaries provided aid to the struggle in Tabriz. In the words of one historian, “[t]he arrival of Transcaucasian revolutionaries in August 1908 lifted the morale of the besieged residents of Tabriz. The

¹⁶ Great Britain: *Correspondence*, “Spring-Rice to Grey,” [cd. 4581], no. 26, p. 25.

¹⁷ See Vlass Mgeladze, “La Caucase et la revolution persane,” *Revue du Monde Musulman*, vol. 8 (1911): 324-333.

¹⁸ “Vasso A Khachaturian to Georgi V. Plekhanov,” November 1908; published in Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Armenians of Iran, The Paradoxical Role of a Minority in a Dominant Culture: Articles and Documents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 325.

Georgians [in particular] were experienced fighters who greatly improved the army of the *Mujahidin*.”¹⁹

The Armenian Hnchak and Dashnak parties also contributed a great deal of support to the Tabriz struggle. Although a history of violent conflict existed between Caucasian Armenians and Persian Muslims, the Tabriz struggle took precedent over ethnic rivalries. As the Dashnak party organ, *Droshak*, declared: “The religion of freedom makes brothers of those two religiously different elements, [which] for centuries have learned to hate each other under subjugation.”²⁰ Moreover, the participation of Armenians in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution was stimulated to a greater extent by the Tsarist government’s role in supporting the Iranian monarchy and its domestic policy towards its Armenian subjects in Russia: “Russian confiscation of Armenian Church properties in 1903 and the Stolypin crackdown in 1908 directly influenced the Dashnaktsutiun’s view of Russia as one of Armenia’s foremost enemies, not the champion of its rights.”²¹ Hence, by supporting the causes of constitutionalism and democracy in Iran, the Armenian social democratic revolutionaries were also fighting against the Russian Imperial government. As a result, the social democrats’ struggle in restoring the constitution in Iran crossed ethnic lines and consisted of a diverse coalition of revolutionaries who saw in the struggle an opportunity to defeat the antidemocratic forces of the Qajar Dynasty and the Tsarist government.

¹⁹ Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 237.

²⁰ “Parskastan: ariunrusht hetadimutiune,” *Droshak*, no. 11-12, November-December 1908; quoted in Hourii Berberian, *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2001), 90.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

By July of 1908, the social democratic forces at work in Iran had gained tremendous strength, and the various organizations started focusing their activities on the constitutional struggle. With the support of the Secret Center and the Transcaucasian revolutionaries, two prominent revolutionary leaders, Sattar Khan and Baqir Khan, established a stronghold for revolutionary activity in Tabriz in order to defend the constitutional form of government that was bombarded a month earlier by Mohammad Ali Shah and the Cossack Brigade. Three months later, a conference was held in Tabriz for the social democrats to assess the amount of social democratic activity to be conducted in the struggle for a constitution. There existed by July of that year two political factions within the Tabriz Social Democratic Group.²² Archavir Tchilinkirian, an Armenian social democrat from Tabriz and a leader of the Tabriz Social Democratic Group, wrote a letter to Karl Kautsky, leader of the German Social Democracy party, to inform him of the ideological division that existed in Tabriz and to seek his opinion on whether or not the revolution in Persia was progressive. According to Tchilinkirian, both factions agreed that Iran must first pass through a capitalist stage of development before the struggle for a socialist revolution could begin, but they disagreed on the way in which the social democrats were to participate in politics during the transitional period. The first group believed that foreign investment could speed up the process of capitalist development. However, since the revolutionaries opposed foreign investment, they

²² Also known as the Social Democratic party, The Tabriz Social Democratic Group emerged as a study group after the Russian Revolution of 1905. Although the organization was not officially a part of any other social democratic organization, evidence shows that the members had strong ties to the Armenian Hinchak Party and the Organization of Social Democrats, for on November 19, 1908, a treaty of friendship was signed by the above mentioned organizations. For a reprint of documents in French pertaining to the creation of the Tabriz Social Democratic Group, see Chaqueri, *SDI*, 33-34. For an overview by the same author, see *Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left*, 148-149.

claimed that the “Persian revolution is in no way progressive; the thinkers of this ilk claim that the movement is directed against foreign capital as the only factor capable of contributing to the economic development of the country – a movement that, in sum, aims at hindering the progress of European culture.”²³ The second group supported the revolutionary movement because it belonged to the masses: “[T]he supporters of the second viewpoint affirm that the movement is progressive because it is directed against the feudal order – because it is the movement of the masses exploited by the landlords, the movement of the petty and high bourgeoisie (not industrial but commercial) against the landed proprietors, who keep the population in poverty by their hoarding practices and who prevent the development of trade.”²⁴ According to this view, social democrats should support the revolutionary movement because it would pave the way for the growth of a capitalist class in Iran.

Tchilinkirian informed Kautsky that a conference was set to convene soon and expressed hope that he would reply with his advice within a reasonable time frame. In his reply, which was received by the social democrats in August, Kautsky rejected the view that European investments in Iran were progressive and argued that foreign loans hindered the growth of indigenous capitalism in a country. Pointing out the positive aspects of the anti-foreign element of the revolution, he stated that “[a] hostile attitude towards foreign capital is not necessarily reactionary, even though heavy industry and railroads are as important for Iran as for other countries. [However,] capitalist development has now begun in Iran and perhaps it will develop even faster if it is not

²³ “Archavir Tchilinkirian to Karl Kautsky,” July 1908; published in Chaqueri, *The Armenians of Iran: Articles and Documents*, 313-316 (quote on p. 314).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

exploited by foreign capital.”²⁵ Moreover, Kautsky argued that the Iranian social democrats “have a duty to participate in the democratic movement” alongside the bourgeois and petty bourgeois democrats. Although the establishment of democracy would not end the political struggle, it “will open new struggles that were virtually impossible to wage under the previous despotic rule.”²⁶ Therefore, according to Kautsky, the Iranian revolutionaries had to await the “triumph of democracy” before taking the revolution to the next stage of socialist development.

Although Kautsky’s reply to the social democrats in Tabriz alleviated the tension between the two factions about foreign investments in Iran, it created other problems that would have a lasting effect on the development of the social democratic movement after the reestablishment of the constitution in 1909. His assertion that Iran had to experience the “triumph of democracy” before entering the socialist stage of development was rejected by the radical social democrats who wanted to begin the struggle for social democracy immediately. The conference of the Tabriz Social Democrats, held on October 16, 1908, address this issue directly. At the conference, Tchilinkirian and his radical supporters, including the social democrat from the RSDWp committee in Baku, Vasso Khachaturian, argued that the capitalist stage of development had already taken place in Iran, due to the fact that a proletariat and small artisan class had already been established. Since these prerequisites for the revolutionary struggle already existed in society, the main concern for social democrats should be to “organize the proletariat to

²⁵ “Karl Kautsky’s Reply,” 1 August 1909; published in John Riddell (ed.), *The Communist International in Lenin’s Time, Lenin’s Struggle for a Revolutionary International, Documents: 1907-1916, The Preparatory Years* (New York: Monad Press, 1984), 62.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

give it class consciousness for the struggle for socialism.”²⁷ Although collaboration with the bourgeois democrats was necessary to achieve success in the revolutionary movement for democracy, the social democrats were not to merge with the bourgeois democrats because the latter were only interested in achieving democratic goals for themselves, whereas the former sought to establish democratic demands for the propertyless masses. What is more, this radical faction at the conference called for the establishment of a “purely Social-Democratic Group to attract more active and [class] conscious workers and intellectuals in Iran in order to lead the class struggle by means of agitation, propaganda, and the organization of working masses.”²⁸

On the contrary, the bourgeois-democratic faction argued that the capitalist stage of development in Iran was still in its infancy. Neither an industrial proletariat nor a strong bourgeoisie existed in the country, which meant that the essential features of a society that were needed in order to establish the foundation for social revolution (class conflict and class consciousness) were not present. Therefore, pushing for social democratic activity would have serious repercussions that would ultimately serve to benefit the reactionary forces: “Under such circumstances, and especially at present, Social-Democratic activity could lead to harmful results for the revolution and for the economic development of Iran by denying democracy its radical elements, thereby throwing it to the mercy of reaction at a time when it should be reinforcing its position.”²⁹ Instead, according to this view, the goal among democrats should be to fight for the

²⁷ “Protocol No. 1 of the Social-Democratic Conference, Sent to Georgi Plekhanov,” October 1908; published in Chaqueri, *Article and Documents*, 332.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

bourgeois revolution and establish democratic demands that would completely eliminate the remnants of despotism and feudalism, and pave the way for the future class struggle.

Out of the twenty-eight members present at the conference, only two voted for the moderate position.³⁰ Eventually, the ideological differences presented at the conference created a strong division between radicals and moderates that considerably weakened the social democratic movement after the civil war ended. Before the civil war commenced, however, the division did not cause problems, for all agreed, as one historian stated, “to unite all respective forces and to devote the necessary sacrifices for the restoration of the Persian Constitution.”³¹ Without the destruction of absolutism, argued both radical and moderate reformists, all discussions about bringing democracy to Iran, be it social or political, were a waste of time.

After successfully bombarding the Majles in Tehran, the next step for Mohammad Ali Qajar to eliminate his opposition was to suppress the revolutionary elements in Tabriz. In order to achieve this goal, the Shah released from prison a well known bandit by the name of Rahim Khan and instructed him to lead an army of men into Tabriz and join the *Islamiyah Anjuman*, which was an organization created during the first phase of the constitutional struggle by a group of conservative clerics in Tabriz to counterbalance the more radical *anjumans* in the city: “When the gravity of the situation in Tabriz was made clear to the Shah he bethought himself of Rahim Khan, and selected him as his instrument to restore tranquility in Tabriz. His orders were ‘to act in

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 334. According to Chaqueri, Vasso Khachaturian made a mistake in reporting the number of votes, for he initially reported twenty-eight members, but at the end the number of voters was thirty. See *Ibid.*, note 2.

³¹ Chaqueri, *Origins of Social Democracy in Modern Iran*, 160.

concert with the *Mujtahed* and punish Tabriz.”³² By the end of June, Rahim Khan gained enough support to march into Tabriz and gain control of the city. As the London *Times* reported, “[h]orsemen belonging to the well-known Rahim Khan have been arriving at Tabriz since yesterday evening. . . . The excitement among the inhabitants has increased. The anti-revolutionaries, feeling themselves on firm ground, have declined the proposal for an armistice made by the Russian Consul.”³³ Two weeks later, it seemed as though the royalist forces were going to be victorious without much effort: “The situation at Tabriz remains unsettled, but the Shah is believed to have the upper hand. . . . At midday Rahim Kham marched into the town with a thousand horsemen and went through the hostile Harban quarter without meeting resistance from the inhabitants, who gave up their arms, including a cannon.”³⁴

However, it soon became apparent that the revolutionaries in Tabriz were not going to capitulate easily. Despite the early victories of the royalist troops, the revolutionary forces in Tabriz grew stronger with the emergence of a heroic leader named Sattar Khan. His successful campaigns against the royalists directly after Rahim Khan’s arrival brought centralized unity to the resistance movement in Tabriz and brought the social democratic movement to the forefront of the civil war.

Sattar Khan was also known as a bandit before becoming a rank and file member of the *Mujahidin* social democratic fighters in the early stages of the constitutional movement. Born to a family of humble origins, he grew up in Tabriz and eventually became a horse dealer who worked in the crown prince’s stable, until his criminal activity

³² “Persia in Revolt,” *Times*, 11 August 1908, p. 6.

³³ “The Crisis in Persia: The Shah’s Dispute with the Majles,” *Times*, 2 July 1908, p. 7.

³⁴ “The Persian Troubles,” *Times*, 14 July 1908, p. 8.

led to multiple confrontations with the police.³⁵ Nevertheless, as a *Mujahid* fighter, alongside his close friend Baqir Khan, he earned the reputation of a courageous and fearless supporter of the constitution, so much so that his actions in July of 1908 instantly turned him into the best leader of the civil war:

[B]acked by the Secret Center and the Tabriz *Anjuman*, Sattar Khan confronted the *Islamiyah Anjuman*. In an act of great courage and defiance, he rode through Tabriz and removed the white flags of surrender raised on the houses [that were placed there by the civilians in response to Rahim Khan's demand that they do so or be branded as traitors to the royal army]. In the ensuing excitement hundreds joined his army of resistance and continued the defense of the city. The Russian consul general visited Sattar Khan and offered to reward him handsomely if he withdrew, but Sattar Khan would not accept.³⁶

Cooperating with revolutionaries from Transcaucasia, members of the Himmat party, rank and file members of the Organization of Social Democrats in Baku and Tiflis, members of the RSDWp from Russia and the neighboring countries, as well as social democrats from the Hnchak and Dashnak parties, Sattar Khan and his revolutionary supporters successfully drove the royalist forces out of Tabriz and established a Central Revolutionary Committee that acted as the provincial government during the ten month siege.³⁷ When asked by a correspondent of *Times* about the purpose of his resistance, he stated that it was to provide “the people [a] Constitutional government that the present Shah had [initially] confirmed [before his coup].”³⁸ However, one cannot help but notice the social democratic tendencies that were prevalent among the revolutionaries and the provincial government they established after the royalists were expelled from the city.

³⁵ Due to his humble origins and revolutionary style, the historian Cosroe Chaqueri compared Sattar Khan to the great Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata. See Chaqueri, *Origins of Social Democracy in Modern Iran*, 102.

³⁶ Malikzadeh, *Tarikh-i Inqilab* 5:18-19; quoted in *ibid.*, 214.

³⁷ See “The Persian Crisis: Tabriz in the Hands of the Revolutionaries,” *Times*, 20 July 1908, p. 7.

³⁸ For a copy of the interview, see “The Situation in Tabriz: A Visit to Sattar Khan,” *Times*, 17 July 1908, p. 7.

According to a British consular report, “Sattar Khan had appointed a Governor at Persian Julfa, who had displayed a red flag, and had been instantly joined by 100 or 150 revolutionaries from Russian territory.”³⁹ One participant of the struggle recalled in his diary that revolutionaries would give speeches about how the anti-constitutionalists were wealthy men who had no respect for the poor and wanted to “reverse constitutionalism so as not to lose their revenues.”⁴⁰ Moreover, when a British representative in Teheran asked the Shah about the resistance movement in Tabriz, His Majesty replied that “those who were in arms against him [in that city] were not fighting for the Constitution. They were most of them Caucasian revolutionaries.”⁴¹

Despite the strong resistance by the provincial government, by February the royalists had successfully surrounded the city and barricaded the people in by cutting off all supply roads, which caused a drastic decline in the food and water supply: “The sufferings of the town are increasing daily, and it is undoubted that a great tragedy is approaching. If Tabriz continues to hold out, thousands must die of starvation.”⁴² As people in the city started to starve, Sattar Khan’s support dwindled. By March, his revolutionary army had reached an all-time low of 500 members, many of whom were demoralized and tired of fighting.⁴³ The last thing that the Tabriz provincial government wanted was foreign intervention, but both the Russian and British governments expressed the need for some kind of action that would give the starving people some relief. Reporters from the London *Times* criticized the two powers for allowing the situation to

³⁹ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Sir A. Nicolson to Sir Edward Grey,” [cd. 4581], no. 319, p. 213.

⁴⁰ Cited in Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 220.

⁴¹ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “Sir G. Barclay to Edward Grey,” [cd. 4733], no. 9, p. 3.

⁴² “The Persian Disorder: Grave Situation at Tabriz,” *Times*, 6 April 1909, p. 5.

⁴³ See “The Persian Nationalist Situation at Tabriz,” *Times*, 27 March 1909, p. 9.

continue, claiming that “if Tabriz were within reach of Europe, philanthropic people would be busily preparing help against the inevitable *dénouement*. . . . [I]t seems incumbent of the Powers, in the name of humanity, to lose no opportunity of taking steps which might have the effect of averting a calamity at Tabriz.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Russia was increasingly becoming frustrated with the situation:

Last night M. Isvolsky spoke to me on the state of affairs in [Tabriz.] He said that since February no tolls had been taken on the Julfa-Tabriz road, which had cost about 10,000,000 roubles to make. Russian subjects had already sent in claims amounting to about 150,000ℓ. This state of things was greatly troubling the Minister of Finance, who was urging that Russian interest should receive some sort of protection.⁴⁵

By the end of April, the Russian government had sent over twenty-six hundred troops into Tabriz to occupy the city and end the siege by force.⁴⁶

Although the siege was brought to an end without the Tabriz revolutionaries achieving their desired goal, the struggle sparked a growing number of uprisings throughout Iran that eventually led to the restoration of the constitution. Soon, revolutionary governments had taken over Resht, Isfahan, and Gilan. As they increased the pressure on Tehran, the capital lost its royalist support. Finally, on July 18, 1909, the Shah was deposed and the constitution reestablished. One of the first actions taken by the newly established government was to set up a military tribunal to prosecute the conservative high-ranking cleric Fazlullah Nuri, who stood accused of murdering four constitutionalists in March of 1909. With the opening up of the Second Majles on November 15, 1909, just four months after the revolutionary forces conquered Teheran, it

⁴⁴ “Grave Situation at Tabriz,” *Times*, April 6, 1909, p. 5; “Persia: The Nationalists and the Shah,” *Times*, 2 April 1909, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Great Britain, *Correspondence*, “A. Nicolson to Edward Grey,” [cd. 4381], no. 326, p. 215.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 April 1909, p. 5.

seemed as though Iran had finally entered the democratic world and could soon focus on reform and modernization.

However, these expectations fell short in December of 1911 when Nasir al-Mulk, the regent in charge of the Persian government after the under-aged son of Mohammad Ali took the throne, staged a *coup d'etat* against the Majles and ended the constitutional form of government once again. The second period of constitutional rule was filled with factionalism and tribal revolt, which hindered the progress of reform and paved the way for foreign control of Iran by Great Britain and Russia during World War I. Moreover, the emergence of political parties made it extremely difficult for any faction to achieve a legitimate majority, which contributed to the lack of stability within each cabinet. As for the social democrats, who played the most important role in spearheading the movement to restore the constitution, once the Shah was deposed, the revolutionary leaders were removed from power and denied a place in the new political scene. Ironically, this was made possible by the social democrats themselves, for the Sattar Committee (created during the civil war by the social democrats to promote the revolutionary struggle) asked Sepahdar A'zam, an extremely wealthy landowner and previous supporter of the Shah, to lead the revolutionary forces from Resht.

Although the Sattar Committee's decision to bring the wealthy landowner into the struggle was based on the fact that, with Sepahdar's support, they would be able to defeat the royalists more quickly, the choice proved fatal for the social democratic movement, for Sepahdar and his Bakhtiari tribal allies were neither social democrats nor constitutionalists. In an interview published by the Tsarist newspaper, *Russkoe Slovo*, Sepahdar stated his position and the reasons he had to join forces against the Shah:

Remember my words well and transit them to the people through your newspaper. As Deputy-Minister of National Defense, I took part, with Ain al-Doleh (*the royalist governor of Azerbaijan who was deposed by the revolutionary provisional government in Tabriz*), in the march on Tabriz against the Nationalists. At last I had to renounce all that I had served when I noticed great violence and an unreasonable obstinacy. At the age of 63, I had to enter the ranks of those called revolutionaries. [However,] I am convinced that Iran needs absolutism. All my life I have served the Shah and his throne, and in my old age, I am going to fight the Shah in the name of justice. I will take part in the march on Teheran and am certain of total victory.⁴⁷

No doubt that Sepahdar understood the consequences of having the revolutionary social democrats take over the government and was prepared to do all in his power to make sure that did not happen. He himself had evaded paying taxes for quite some time and knew that a *Mujahidin*-based government would not allow him to continue to do so.

Morgan Shuster, the reformist American financial advisor for Iran during the second constitutional period, explained the situation in further detail. Based on the recommendation of the United States government, Shuster was appointed by the Majles in May of 1911 to help improve Iran's financial position. According to him, one of Persia's main problems was the fact that large land-owners such as Sepahdar did not pay taxes:

I found one item of 72,000 tumans of back taxes which the Sepahdar owed the Government. As a set-off he presented a claim for one million tumans for his patriotic services and expenses in equipping the "army of Resht," which formed part of the National force which took Teheran from Muhammad Ali in 1909. He said that he thought a grateful Government should exempt him and his descendants from all taxation for ten generations. As he was worth many millions and claimed title to immense estates in Northern Persia, and as he had at that time a large number of descendants who would probably not let the ancient line die out, it might well happen that the Sepahdar's descendants 250 years from now would own most of the taxable property in Persia.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Russkoe Slovo*, 21 April 1909; quoted in Chaqueri, *Social Democracy in Modern Iran*, 103-104 (my Italics).

⁴⁸ Morgan Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia* (New York: The Century Co., 1912), 300-301.

Thus the decision by the social democrats to give large landowners a position in the revolutionary movement proved to be a fatal mistake. By the time the Second Majles convened, the Organization of Social Democrats in Baku closed all its branches in Iran and refused to work with the liberals in the government. The organization did not approve of the formation of political parties and was outraged by the compromising nature of the Democrat party.

Although the Second Majles existed for over two years, significant reforms were never enacted. Interestingly, when the Democrat party had a majority in the National Assembly, it attempted to implement religious reforms that would separate church and state law, but the efforts proved futile. On November 5, 1911, Russia served the Iranian government with an ultimatum, demanding an apology for insulting the Russian consul and for appointing the American financial advisor (Shuster) without their approval. After a series of disagreements in the Majles about whether or not to respond to the ultimatum, the Tsarist government sent troops into Tabriz and bombarded the city. The Second Majles had become so weak that on December 24, the regent Nasir al-Mulk was able to march on Teheran and close it down. The remaining revolutionaries in Azerbaijan and Gilan were rounded up by the Russian government and massacred at Tabriz. Edward Browne's depiction of the event gives the reader an idea of the extent of the brutality carried out:

The Russians had begun the series of executions by which they removed most of the leaders of the Tabriz Nationalists; they had hung eight of them, including the Sikat-al-Islam, the chief ecclesiastic of Azerbaijan (see photograph). These executions continued, and at the same time Shuja al-Dowleh and his followers were perpetrating horrible atrocities on the bodies of unfortunate Nationalists who fell into their power. These atrocities were, of course, known to the

Russians. The body of one man (see photograph) was cut in half and the halves hung in the bazaar.⁴⁹

Thus, with the help of Russia, the conservative forces eliminated the revolutionary movement in Iran and brought the country back under the yoke of foreign domination.

The movement towards social democracy during the Constitutional Revolution in Iran brought about the successful establishment of the Second Majles and brought the ideas of social change to the forefront of Iranian politics. By dedicating themselves to the constitutional movement in Iran, the social democrats exposed the oppressive nature of Mohammad Ali's regime and attempted to transform the civil war in Tabriz into a class struggle between the upper class royalist supporters and the oppressed lower classes. Such ideas were influenced by the events in Russia during 1905, for many revolutionaries from Transcaucasia and Russian Azerbaijan made their way into Iran to continue the work they did in Russia. Soon, revolutionary organizations representing the Persian workers in the Baku oil fields emerged to combat the labor problems in the area. Before long, several revolutionary organizations were created to represent the immigrant workers abroad, who brought their complaints with them back home and helped propel the second constitutional movement forward.

However, there were two significant factors at play that contributed to the demise of the social democratic movement and the lack of representation the revolutionaries exhibited in the second constitutional government. The first can be seen by analyzing the composition of the Second Majles, which mainly consisted of middle-sized landlords,

⁴⁹ Edward G. Browne, *The Reign of Terror at Tabriz. England's Responsibility. With Photographs and a Brief Narrative of events of December, 1911, and January 1912* (Manchester: Taylor, Garnett, Evans Co. Press, 1912), 6.

land-owning merchants, and the clergy.⁵⁰ Granted, there were some social democratic members who joined the Democrat party, but the program of this so-called “left-wing” party in the National Assembly supported the ideas of the minority faction within the conference of the Tabriz Social Democrats that took place in 1908. Tigran Ter Hacobian, also known as Tigran Derviche, was the leading theoretician for the minority faction at the conference. He wrote to the Russian Marxist Georgi Plekhanov and stated that “the [minority wing considers the social democratic] approach to be utopian and, taking into account the politico-economic conditions of the country and the situation of the proletariat, supports the idea of a democratic organization – that is to say, democracy alone, that of the people against feudalism and despotism.”⁵¹ The Democrat party within the Second Majles supported Derviche’s view because he was “involved not only in the organizational work of the party but also in its ideological direction.”⁵² Thus the ideological differences that were exposed in 1908 reemerged after the establishment of the Second Majles to disrupt the social democratic movement in Iran and cause the Organization of Social Democrats in Baku to withdraw all support for the democrats.

Second, the vital mistake of handing over the leadership of the revolutionary movement to the landlords and tribal leaders de-radicalized the movement to depose the Shah and allowed the upper class to take control of the government. As a result, the revolutionary leaders were pushed out of the political scene and denied a place in the new order. Sattar Khan, who played such an important role in fighting for the cause of social

⁵⁰ For an analysis of the composition of the Second Majles, see Afary, *The Iranian constitutional Revolution*, 261-267.

⁵¹ “Tigran Derviche to G. V. Plekhanov,” December 1908; published in Chaqueri, *Armenians of Iran: Articles and Documents*, 340.

⁵² “Vram Pilisian to Taqizadah,” 19 August 1909; quoted in Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 268.

democracy, ended up providing support to conservative factions in order to seek revenge against the democrats who betrayed him. After his defeat, he took to drinking excessively and eventually became an insignificant figure in the political scene.⁵³ Instead, the government was placed in the hands of regional leaders who, in 1911 when Russia presented Iran with an ultimatum to dismiss the American financial advisor Morgan Shuster and the Majles refused to accept the provisions, went against the National Assembly and allowed Russia to intervene in Iranian affairs. As the American financial advisor said:

When they decided to take arms against the Majles, which had always distrusted them, the other armed force of the Constitutional Government – the gendarmes of Teheran – headed by Yeprem Khan, had apparently lost heart, and this brave Armenian fell in with the plans of the Cabinet. Between the two forces, they abolished the last vestige of constitutional rule in Persia, and left their country at the mercy of seven oriental statesmen, who had already sold out to the Russian Government. It was a sordid ending to a gallant struggle for liberty and enlightenment.⁵⁴

As a result, Persia was subjected to the type of foreign domination that existed under the rule of Naser al-Din Shah.

Nevertheless, although the social democratic movement in Iran diminished before the Great War, it reemerged when the Bolsheviks were taking control of Russia. The immigrant labor population in Baku continued to grow, and the social democratic developments that took place before World War I were once again gaining influence. At the same time, the nationalist fervor that emerged during the Constitutional Revolution started to gain zeal as more foreign troops entered Persian territory and used it as a battle ground during World War I. As the next chapter demonstrates, both the social

⁵³ For an account of Satter Khan's decline, see Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 284-302.

⁵⁴ Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia*, 200.

democratic movement and the nationalist resistance movement that emerged during the Great War paved the way for the first communist movement in Persian history.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROAD TO COMMUNISM: NATIONALISM AND SOVIET POLICY IN IRAN, 1917-1920

During the Great War, the situation in Persia was troublesome. After the social revolutionaries were repressed in 1911 by Tsarist intervention on the side of the Persian monarchy, the country went through a period of internal stagnation and foreign domination. However, the conditions of the war brought about a nationalist upsurge that led to the creation of a strong force of revolutionary fighters known as the Jangalis. The movement started in the dense forests of Gilan with the sole purpose of eliminating foreign control over Iran, but various political developments led the Jangalis in 1920 into a coalition government with the Soviet Union. Although the Bolsheviks recognized and helped establish the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, they never entirely committed to the revolutionary movement, which had a drastic impact on the political developments in the country.

Immediately after the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, they set out to establish diplomatic relations with the Persian government. However, it was not long before Moscow realized that the central government in Teheran was not willing to recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet government. As a result, the Bolsheviks took a more revolutionary approach towards Iran that involved supporting the nationalists in their campaign against the Persian government, which helped the nationalist forces gain enough strength to establish an independent republic in Northern Iran. Despite its

involvement in the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, the Soviet government never abandoned its aspiration to establish friendly relations with the central government in Teheran. After the independent republic in Northern Iran was established, the Persian government sent a message to Moscow, stating its desire to establish friendly relations, which induced the Soviet government – despite its claim to support the revolutionaries in Gilan – to meet with representatives of the Persian government to negotiate a treaty of friendship. By pursuing such a two-pronged policy towards Iran, the government in Moscow demonstrated that it was more concerned with establishing its security in the near East rather than promoting the cause of world revolution, which had a devastating effect of the first communist movement in Iran.

Although Iran had officially declared neutrality in 1914, the country was used as a battle ground by the belligerents in the Great War. Turkey entered the war in 1914 and immediately stationed troops in the northwest regions of Iran. This caused the British to extend their occupation in the South to Abadan and Bushir, while Russia managed to maintain domination over the Northern provinces. Before long, conflict raged throughout the land. In all, more than 100,000 Iranians died of starvation as their villages were destroyed in a war in which they were not even involved.¹ Moreover, evidence indicates that survivors were mistreated by foreign troops. The U.S. minister in Iran, John Caldwell, reported:

[E]xcitement and apprehension of serious disturbances throughout Persia continue with increased alarm. That already massacres and bloodshed have occurred and rumors of more uprisings are imminent. At Urumia our American Missionaries, numbering about a score, are prepared to leave on short notice or when the Russia forces withdraw and the threatening Kurds enter that place. At

¹ Cyrus Ghani, *Iran and the Rise of Reza Shah: From Qajar Collapse to Pahlavi Power* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1998), 17.

Resht, two hundred miles north of here, the Persian tribesmen have engaged the Russian Cossack in a skirmish wherein a number of both sides have been killed and wounded.² The Teheran newspaper, *Raad*, reported that “the inhabitants of Siahdehah wired that the Russians who retire from Hamadan have totally looted them, killed one girl and two men and shot and wounded another girl. They were even taking away the governmental grain, and the people scattered, escaping to Kazvin and other places.”³ As the British diplomat Harold Nicolson observed: “Persia had been exposed to violations and suffering not endured by any other neutral country.”⁴ These types of violations increased the hatred for foreign domination in Iran that had been brewing since the end of the nineteenth century, when Persians from various social classes joined together in protest during the Tobacco Rebellion. In September of 1915, Caldwell stated that the hatred for foreign occupation had increased so much that “the English and Russian legations may leave Teheran for Kasvin or some safer place Altogether, things are in a very unsettled state, and the outlook is far from peaceful or encouraging.”⁵

Such were the conditions when Mirza Kuchek Khan, a constitutionalist fighter from the province of Resht, began a nationalist movement dedicated to eradicating foreign domination of Iran’s political affairs. The growing inclination for Iranians to identify with a larger national community since the Constitutional Revolution helped him gain support for his cause. In 1914, Kuchek Khan headed for the dense forests of Gilan, where he established a guerilla force that would later be known as the Jangali movement

² “Troubles in Persia,” 13 September 1915, USNA 891.00/847, roll 4.

³ “Newspaper Translations,” 2 February 1918, USNA, file 891.00/962, roll 4.

⁴ Harold Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919-1925, A Study in Post-War Diplomacy* (London: Constable Press, 1937), 129

⁵ “Troubles in Persia,” 13 September 1915, USNA 891.00/847, roll 4.

(Jungle fighters).⁶ According to the Armenian revolutionary V. Vasakouni, the Jangalis started out with eight men who sought to “obstruct the rear of the Russian army operating on the Persian front.”⁷ Due to its meddling in Persian affairs throughout the previous decade, the Russian government had become the most despised enemy of the Persian people. As one British report explained, “the aggressive policy of Russia in the past, the unwanted intervention of her consul in Persia’s domestic affairs, and her plans of penetration into Persia could not but alienate all sympathy in Persia for her cause and . . . increase the widespread hatred of Russians amongst the masses.”⁸

Thus, when the Jangalis emerged and promised to fight against foreign exploitation, they had no trouble finding the support they needed to augment their military power. As Vasakouni said, “all these events increased and greatly spread the fame of the group operating in the forests of Gilan. . . . All Persian democracy marveled, and the Persian press wrote encomia in its honor, while the Persian youth became inspired.”⁹ General Raskolnikov, the commander of the Red Army after the Bolshevik Revolution, pointed out the Jangalis’ support by claiming that “the local populace supported Kuchek Khan and always notified him of the approach of British troops.”¹⁰

⁶ Although he was born in Resht, he was forced to reside in Tehran after 1912 due to his involvement in the struggle for a constitution. For an account of his life, see “Mirza Kutchuk, Dit Kutchuk Khan (Sa Vie et Son Oeuvre),” *Revue du monde musulman*, Tomes 40-41, Sept. Déc. 1920, pp. 106-111; published in Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Revolutionary Movement in Iran Versus Great Britain and Soviet Russia, Documents from 1914-1932* [RMI] (Florence: Mazdak edition, 1979), 842-847.

⁷ V. Vasakouni, “Kuchek Khan and His Work,” 1919; published in Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Armenians of Iran: The Paradoxical Role of a Minority in a Dominant Culture: Articles and Documents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 247.

⁸ British Consul Report, “Annual Report of Persia: General Summary of Events from 1914-1922,” 14 July 1923, F.O. 371, E1743/1745/34.

⁹ “On the Caspian and in Persia,” *Soviet Russia*, 23 October 1920.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; also provided in Chaqueri, *RMI*, 862-863.

By 1917, Kuchek Khan and his nationalist force had been involved in several military campaigns against the Tsar's army. For this reason, when the February Revolution occurred in Russia, many individuals in Iran were enthusiastic about the possibility of reaching an agreement with the new government. Some believed that, with their most oppressive enemy out of the picture, Iran would finally be in a position to establish progressive change without fearing Russian intervention. Expressing their hope for a brighter future between their country and Russia, a group of liberal ex-Majles (parliament) members sent a letter to the Kerensky government:

At the moment when the great Russia people, by the sacrifice of their children and the never-to-be forgotten audacity of their representatives, win a crushing victory in favor of the great cause, the ex-deputies of the Persian Majles present at Teheran, have the pleasure to express to the Great Assembly the admiration and the respect that they feel for the stoical resistance which is not found except among the defenders of the truth.

The light implanted by such energetic hands between East and West is the great light which will achieve the illumination of the world, and by dissipating the last darkness will permit peoples animated by the same principles to recognize one another in the midst of fraternal love. Long live Liberal Russia!¹¹

Former governmental representatives were not the only individuals who considered it a possibility for their country to gain more autonomy from the political changes in Russia. Kuchek Khan also sent a message to Moscow, in which he proclaimed his respect for the new government and promised to no longer attack Russian troops. In return, Kuchek Khan asked that Russia evacuate all their forces and cancel all the imperialist treaties imposed on Persia by the previous regime.¹²

¹¹ "To the Great Assembly of the Duma," 2 April 1917; translation of the telegram in *USNA* 891.00/912, roll 4.

¹² *AA, Akten Persien* C3408, Bd 1, no. 21/1, May 5-Nov. 3, 1917; quoted in Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 58.

However, despite such claims of support from the liberals in Iran, the Kerensky government was not willing to sacrifice its dominant position in Northern Iran. Although the president of the Russian Duma responded to the letter he received from the former Majles members by expressing his “sincere gratitude” and stating that he shared their “conviction that the great principles which have triumphed among us will not delay in making a pacific conquest of the world,” it was not long before the new government revealed its diplomatic position.¹³ Responding to a telegram he received from the Persian Prime Minister, which stated his hope that “the new regime [in Russia] will erase, as far as possible, the last thought of the dissensions created by the shortcomings of the fallen government,” the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Milioukoff, stated his government’s position:

Regarding the external policy [of the new Russian government,] the Cabinet in which I am charged with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will observe the engagements assumed by the late regime and will honor Russia’s words. We shall carefully cultivate the relations that unite us to other friendly and allied nations and we are sure that these relations will become more friendly under the new regime established in Russia, which has decided to guide itself by the democratic principle of respect for nations, great and small, being free to develop themselves, thereby contributing to better understanding among nations.¹⁴

In effect, the telegram expressed the new government’s eagerness to maintain a healthy relationship with the British. Vowing to “observe the engagements assumed by the late regime and honor Russia’s word,” the new regime upheld the provisions of the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907, which carved up Persia into spheres of influence between Great Britain and Russia.

¹³ “To the Ex-deputies of the Majles,” 30 April 1917; translation in *USNA* 891.00/912, roll 4.

¹⁴ “Telegram Received at the Russian Legation, Teheran,” 29 March 1917 translation in *Ibid.*, roll 4.

Despite these shortcomings, the February Revolution did eliminate the Jangalis most aggressive enemy, which increased their political and military position and allowed them to establish a legitimate political organization.¹⁵ In June of 1917, the newspaper, *Jangal*, began publication. One article, titled “What the Jangalis Want,” defined the Jangalis’ political program:

(1) Iran belongs to Iranians; (2) foreign domination must end; (3) reforms should be carried out without foreign interference; (4) the crown and throne of ancient Persia must belong to the freedom-protecting Ahmad Shah, and his dominion and authority match that of past great Persian emperors; (5) the cabinet (led by constitutional liberals) should not only quickly repair all damages caused by its ignoble predecessors, but also strive for the nation’s future welfare; (6) the Majles should be reconvened; (7) Islam should be protected against the British menace; and (8) traitors should be punished.¹⁶

Although the Jangalis advocated constitutionalism, they continued to support the Shah and his government, for their primary objective was to eliminate Tsarist interference in Persian affairs. By focusing primarily on eliminating foreign interference, they attracted support from all classes in society. The majority of support came from the Persian peasantry, but a number of landlords and notables contributed support as well.¹⁷ Moreover, the fact that Kuchek Khan was a staunch religious man and that he used the name *Ettehad-e Islam* (Islamic Union) to refer to his Jangali organization increased his support among the religious masses.

Once the Bolsheviks took over and announced their program to pull out of Iran, a new enemy emerged for the Jangalis. Filling the vacuum created by the Bolsheviks’

¹⁵ For a discussion on the Jangalis’ organizational structure, see Vasakouni, “Kuchek Khan and His Work,” (1919), in Chaqueri, *Armenians of Iran: Articles and Documents*, 268-273. Vasakouni states that “it is a well-known fact that the Ettehad-eIslam (the Jangalis political organization) turned into a state in Gilan thanks to revolutionary Russia” (*Ibid.*, 280).

¹⁶ “What the Jangalis Want,” *Jangal*, no. 13, 1917; quoted in Chaqueri, *Soviet Republic of Iran*, 63-64.

¹⁷ Evidence for this claim exists in various letters written by Kuchek Khan to landlords, compiled in Maclaren Letters, FO 248/1138, 1168, 1203, and cited *Ibid.*, 62-63.

withdrawal, the British increased their authority in Iran, placed a loyal cabinet in the central government, and gained control of Northern Persia. As the American consul Addison Hard stated in his report on the political affairs in Persia: “The British, who are the most recent comers onto Northern Persia, have been very successful in their intrigues for influence at Teheran, and undoubtedly have complete control at present over the Persian government both at Teheran and in the provinces, and over Persian political affairs in general.”¹⁸ The British were able to achieve such a victory in Persia because of “the excellent work of the British Legation at Teheran with its Consuls and Political Agents stationed at all important points in the country.” On August 3, 1918, the British influenced the Shah to dismiss the growing anti-British cabinet and appoint the pro-British politician Vossough al-Dowleh to the premiership. According to the American Consul, after the Vossough-cabinet took control, “the feeling in Teheran the latter part of August was that the Vossough al-Dowleh cabinet would probably be able to remain in power and prevent Persian governmental interference with the British plans for keeping Persia (excepting Azerbaijan province) and the Caspian sea free from the [Bolsheviks] and damaging enemy influence.”¹⁹

As a result of these changes, the Jangalis’ struggle shifted against the British and their supporters in the Persian government. By summer of 1918, the Turks had advanced into the oil region of Baku and threatened to occupy Azerbaijan, which would give them an advantage over the British in Transcaucasia. As Brigadier-General Frederick Moberly stated, “Should Baku fall to the enemy, only the British occupation of Tehran, or an

¹⁸ “Persian Political Affairs,” 2 September 1918, *USNA* 891.00/1050, roll 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

effective resumption of the war by Russia, could prevent Persia falling completely under the influence of the enemy.”²⁰ To prevent this, the British were prepared to send Major-General L.C. Dunsterville into Baku to provide support to the pro-British faction in Azerbaijan. However, the “Dunsterville Mission” would have to pass through Resht, which was controlled by the Jangalis. As Major Martin Donohoe explained in his memoir, “[n]egotiations with Kuchek Khan had ended abortively. The leader of the Jangalis was quite prepared to permit Russian troops to withdraw from Persia if they wished, and to pass through his ‘occupied territory’ to their port of embarkation in the Caspian. But British, ‘No!’ They had no business in Persia at all, he argued, and if they were desirous of going to Russia, they would have to find some other road.”²¹

As a result of the Jangalis’ refusal to work with the British, Donohoe explained, “the [White] Russians and British stormed the enemy trenches and speedily disposed of the Jangalis holding them.”²² However, fighting continued for another month, until, as Dunsterville himself claimed, “by the end of the month Resht was cleared of all signs of active Jangali opposition, and came under our effective administration. The road picquets were kept out for some time longer as a precautionary measure, but no further fighting took place, and Mirza Kuchek Khan, now reduced to a sensible frame of mind, began to sue for peace.”²³

²⁰ F. J. Moberly, *History of the Great War, Operations in Persia, 1914-1919* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1929), 302-303.

²¹ Martin Henry Donohoe, *With the Persian Expedition* (London: Edward Arnold, 1919), pp. 204-205.

²² *Ibid.*, 205-206.

²³ Lionel Dunsterville, *The Adventures of Dunsterforce* (London: Edward Arnold, 1920), 204. A great controversy erupted in the 1950s when Soviet historians reinterpreted the events leading to the downfall of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Gilan. M.A. Ivanova, representing the Stalinist school of thought stated that, “on 12th August 1918 [the Jangalis] accepted the conditions of the British, ceased military action and entered into an *alliance* with the British.” (M. Ivanova, “The National Liberation Movement in Gilan Province of Persia in 1920-21;” in *Central Asian Review* (CAR), vol.4, no. 3 (1956): 306. This

Believing that it was not advantageous to have a separatist movement still functioning in the northern province of Iran, the Teheran government collaborated with the British in an attempt to dissolve the Jangali movement. By the spring of 1919, the Jangalis were once again being subjected to military attacks: “As late as mid-May British airplanes attacked villages near Roubar, where Jangalis or their sympathizers, still estimated at between 300 to 500 men, might have been hiding.”²⁴ Although this last campaign had reduced Kuchek Khan and his remaining supporters to insignificance, the Jangalis managed to survive and build up enough support to continue to frustrate the pro-British central government. By the time the Jangali forces recuperated, the Bolsheviks, who had been occupied by civil war since they came to power, were gaining control of Russia and looking to change their approach in dealing with Iran. This would have a lasting effect on the Jangali movement and eventually enable the communist movement in Iran to emerge on the political scene.

When the Bolsheviks came to power, they considered it important to gain the support of the neighboring countries in the East. The capitalist advance into various Eastern countries had created great discontent among the toiling masses in those regions. According to Stalin, the strength of the imperialist countries involved in these regions was connected to “the backwardness of the masses [in the colonial countries of the East],

interpretation differs from the one provided by Irandust in the 1920s, which stressed that the treaty was not a symbol of friendly alliance between the two (see Irandust’s argument in *CAR, op. cit.*, 303-307). In all probability, the Jangalis did not see themselves, at the time, as collaborating with either the British or the Bolsheviks.

²⁴ Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 105; for a description of events leading up to this conflict, see *ibid.*, 93-105.

who provide wealth for their masters and thus forge chains for themselves.”²⁵ Accordingly, as one Bolshevik newspaper claimed, if the Soviets could promote enough agitation in the East, then “world capitalism [would be] fated to destruction.”²⁶ For this reason, Lenin believed that, as the historian George Lenczowski put it, “the revolution in the East was a concomitant to revolution in Russia and a prerequisite to the success of Communism all over the world.”²⁷

Initially, the Soviet government attempted to gain support from these important strategic lands by advocating the right to national self-determination. Lenin claimed in 1916 that socialists “must demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation – and this demand in its political ramification signifies nothing more or less than the recognition of the right to self-determination.”²⁸ To Lenin, self-determination eliminated imperialist domination and stimulated the economic and social development of a country, which started the process of separation of the proletariat from the bourgeoisie.²⁹ Not only would the national liberation movement in the East stimulate the movement towards socialism, it would also deal a heavy blow to the imperialist countries that relied on the raw materials being extracted from the region in order to fuel their capitalist engine. Moreover, the Bolshevik leader pointed out that advocating the principle of self-determination was all the more important because

²⁵ “Stalin on the Two Camps and the Doom of Imperialism,” *Izvestiia*, 22 February 1919; in Xenia Eudin and Robert North, *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927, A Documentary Survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), document 2, p. 46.

²⁶ “Soviet Persia,” *Tocsin*, 25 June 1920, in Cosroe Chaqueri, *Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran: Documents en Anglais, Français, et Allemand* (Florence: Edition Mazdak, 1979), p. 15.

²⁷ George Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran, 1918-1948* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1949), p. 6.

²⁸ Vladimir Lenin, *Selected Works*; quoted in Eudin and North, *A Documentary Survey*, 18.

²⁹ See Vladimir Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 20 (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1964), 395-406, 430-435.

“Tsarism and the Great Russian bourgeoisie with their oppression have left a heritage of great irritation and distrust towards most Great Russians.” He went on to say that, “only by action, and not by words, can we conquer this distrust.”³⁰

With that in mind, the Soviet government set out to demonstrate to the exploited peoples of the East that the path to self-determination and independence began with the newly established Soviet regime. On December 3, the Council of People’s Commissars published a document titled, “Appeal to the Muslims of Russia and the East”:

Comrades! Brothers!

Great events are taking place in Russia. The end of the sanguinary war, begun over the partitioning of foreign lands, is drawing near. Under the blows of the Russian Revolution, the old edifice of slavery and serfdom is crumbling. The world of arbitrary rule and oppression is approaching its last days. A new world is being born, a world of the toilers and the liberated. At the head of this revolution stands the workers’ and peasants’ government of Russia, the Council of People’s Commissars. . . .

The empire of capitalist plunder and violence is crumbling. The ground under the feet of the imperialist plunderers is on fire.

In face of these great events, we turn to you, the toiling and underprivileged Muslims of Russia and the East. . . .

Muslims of the East, Persians, Turks, Arabs, and Hindus! All you in whose lives and property, in whose freedom and native land the rapacious European plunderers have for centuries traded! All you whose countries the rovers who began the war now desire to partition!

. . . . The Russian Republic and its government, the Council of People’s Commissars, are against the seizure of the Muslims.³¹

Such promises of support for the liberation of the Muslim people of the East were reaffirmed by the creation of a Commissariat for Muslim Affairs in January of 1918. In December of the same year, the Central Bureau of the Muslim Organizations of the Russian Communist party, which was established in November for the purpose of

³⁰ Lenin, *Sochineniia*, XXI, 316-317; quoted in Eudin and North, *A Documentary Survey*, 19.

³¹ Jane Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy*, vol. 1 (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 15-17.

distributing propaganda to all the Muslim peoples in the East, published a document that expressed its determination to “draw all oppressed peoples into the world laboring family.” To achieve this, the Central Bureau called it “the duty of all communists to come to the aid of their younger brothers [in the East].”³²

Still, all the propaganda in the world would be ineffective unless the Bolsheviks could demonstrate to the Muslim speaking peoples of the East that they would not attack the Islamic faith the same way they had attacked the Russian Orthodox Church. If they were to gain the support of the profoundly religious masses in the East, Stalin said, “it is obvious that the direct method of combating religious prejudices in this country must be replaced by indirect and more cautious methods.”³³ As a result, the Soviet government, according to historian Ivar Spector, “made a number of symbolic gestures towards the Muslims, indicative of its desire to prove its goodwill towards Islam. For instance, it presented a copy of the ‘Holy Koran of Osman,’ formally in the State Public Library, to a Muslim congress meeting in Petrograd.”³⁴

In evaluating the strategic value of the various countries in the East, the Soviets paid particular attention to Iran. Not only did Russia share a common border with the country, but imperialist involvement in Persia over the past 25 years made the Bolshevik principle of national self-determination sound intriguing. By bringing Persia over to their

³² “The Call to Spread Revolution in Asia,” *Zhish Natsionalnoitei*, No. 5, 8 December 1918, p. 8; published in Eudin and North, *A Documentary Survey*, document 26, p. 162.

³³ “The Policy of the Soviet Government on the National Question in Russia,” *Pravda*, No. 226, 10 October 1920; in Joseph Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question, Selected Writings and Speeches* (New York: International Publishers, 1942), 85.

³⁴ Ivar Spector, *The Soviet Union and the Muslim World, 1917-1958* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959), 37.

side, the Bolsheviks would be dealing an enormous blow to British imperial expansion.

As one Bolshevik leader explained:

The Persian revolution may become the key to the revolution of the whole Orient, just as Egypt and the Suez Canal are the key to English domination in the Orient. Persia is the 'Suez Canal' of the revolution. By shifting the political center of gravity of the revolution to Persia, the entire strategic value of the Suez Canal is lost. . . . The political conquest of Persia, thanks to its peculiar geopolitical situation and significance for the liberation movement in the East, is what we must accomplish first of all. This precious key to all other revolutions in the Orient must be in our hands, come what may. Persia must be ours! Persia must belong to the revolution!³⁵

Standing by the principle of self-determination, the Soviet government renounced all Tsarist treaties imposed on Persia since the nineteenth century. On January 4, 1918, the Bolsheviks sent a note to the Persian government, promising to “work out a general plan for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Persia in the shortest possible time,” and to “wipe out as quickly as possible the effects of the acts of violence perpetrated by Tsarism and bourgeois Russian Governments against the Persian people.”³⁶ By early spring, there were no more Russian troops stationed in Persian territory. Finally, the two countries were in a position to reach an understanding.

How was it, then, that only two years after the evacuation and nullification of all Tsarist treaties, Soviet troops were once again stationed in Iranian territory? After the Bolshevik Revolution, national uprisings emerged throughout the Caucasus, resulting in the establishment of anti-Bolshevik republics on Russia's southern border. Particularly threatening was the uprising in Azerbaijan in 1918. On July 26, just two months after Stepan Shaumian had established a pro-Soviet government in Azerbaijan, the Socialist Revolutionary party staged a successful *coup d'etat*: “[A]n old enemy of the

³⁵ Konstantin Troyanovsky, *Vostok I Revolyutsiya* (Moscow, 1918); quoted in *Ibid.*, 84-85.

³⁶ “Note From Trotsky to the Persian Government on the Withdrawal of Troops from Persia,” 4 January 1918; published in Degras, *Soviet Documents*, 28-29.

Communists, [the Socialist Revolutionary party] overthrew the existing regime [in Azerbaijan], and put under arrest the members of the Bolshevik Committee, including two chief leaders, Shaumian and Petrov.”³⁷ The newly established government enjoyed the support of the British, who had been, since the Bolsheviks’ evacuation, eagerly waiting in Iran for an opportunity to establish a pro-British government in Baku before it fell to the Turks. As Percy Sykes, a British Brigadier-General stationed in Persia at the time, explained:

The Bolshevik government at Baku had been overthrown [and replaced] by a new body styled the Central-Caspian Dictatorship. . . . [This] new government asked for help, and Dunsterville, who had meanwhile gained control of the Enzali-Kazan port, immediately responded by the dispatch of a small detachment, which he gradually reinforced as troops became available. . . . The Turks . . . were investing Baku at short range, and were able to bombard the town or harbor at will; but fortunately they possessed no heavy guns. The one idea of the garrison was that the British should take over the fighting.³⁸

The British government provided support for the Caucasian republics to protect its Eastern Empire from the Bolshevik enemy:

After the Russian Revolution, there was the threat of a Bolshevik invasion in the North [of Persia]. . . . If it be asked why we should undertake the task at all, and why Persia should not be left to herself and allowed to rot into picturesque decay, the answer is that her geographical position, the magnitude of our interests in the country, and the future safety of our Eastern Empire render it impossible for us now – just as it would have been impossible for us at any time during the past fifty years – to disinterest ourselves from what happens in Persia. Moreover, now that we are about to assume the mandate for Mesopotamia, which will make us coterminous with the western frontiers of Persia, we cannot permit the existence, between the frontiers of our Indian Empire in Baluchistan and those of our new Protectorate, of a hotbed of misrule, enemy intrigue, financial

³⁷ Lenczowski, *Russia and the West in Iran*, 20.

³⁸ Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, vol. 2, 3d ed. (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1930); first published in 1920.

chaos, and political disorder. Further, if Persia were to be left alone, there is every reason to fear that she would be overrun by Bolshevik influences from the North.³⁹

Since the British considered Bolshevik influence in the East threatening, they provided support to the counterrevolutionary forces in Russia. In a dispatch sent to Admiral Aleksandr Koltchak, one of the commanders of the White Russian forces fighting against the Bolsheviks, the British government reiterated its policy towards Russia:

[We] wish to declare formally that the object of [our] policy is to restore peace within Russia by enabling the Russian people to resume control of their own affairs through the instrumentality of a freely elected Constituent Assembly. . . . [We] are convinced by the experiences of the last twelve months that it is not possible to attain these ends by dealing with the Soviet government of Moscow. [We] are therefore disposed to assist the government of Admiral Koltchak and his Associates with munitions, supplies and food, to establish themselves as the government of all of Russia.⁴⁰

As the Bolsheviks gained the upper hand in the civil war, they pushed the counterrevolutionary forces out of Azerbaijan and into Northern Persia, where they were in a position to receive more British support. Thus the Bolsheviks' inability to fulfill the promises they made to the people of Iran stemmed from the fact that they were surrounded by hostile regimes; hence establishing security for their own regime took precedence over the need to establish support from the Eastern countries.⁴¹ As a result, in the spring of 1920, Russian troops were once again crossing over to Persian territory.

³⁹ Earl Curzon to British Foreign Office, "Anglo-Persian Relations After the Signature of the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919," 9 August 1919; published in Rohan Butler and E.L. Woodward (ed.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, vol. 4 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1952), ser. 1, no. 710, pp. 1120-1121.

⁴⁰ "Despatch to Admiral Koltchak," 26 May 1919; published in *Ibid.*, vol. 3, ser. 1, no. 233, p. 331.

⁴¹ Some historians have argued that, in the first two years preceding the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks were not concerned with Asia. As Harish Kapur stated, "In fact, apart from a few declarations through which the Bolshevik leadership renounced many concessions that Tsarist Russia had acquired through the centuries, and some appeals to nations to revolt against European imperialists, there was hardly any policy to speak of so far as Asia was concerned" (Harish Kapur, *Soviet Russia and Asia* (New York: The Humanities Press, 1967), 37). However, such an interpretation minimizes the importance of Lenin's and Stalin's early theoretical writings concerning the Eastern countries, and the appeals made by the Soviet government to appeal to the peoples of the East.

At the same time in which the above-mentioned events were taking place, a number of issues developed between Moscow and the Persian government that changed the way the Bolsheviks dealt with Iran. When the Bolsheviks publicly denounced the Tsarist policies in Iran and vowed to uphold Persia's independence, they expected the Persian government to express its gratitude by agreeing to recognize the Soviet regime. However, despite all Bolshevik efforts to achieve this goal, the central government in Tehran refused to recognize the Soviet government.

Shortly after denouncing all Tsarist claims in the country, the Bolshevik government sent Feodor Nikolaevich Bravin, a Soviet diplomatic representative, to Tehran to establish contact with the central government. As one Persian newspaper stated: "Bravin, the Russia Diplomatic Agent of the Bolsheviks to the Court of Persia, arrived on Saturday last at Teheran and has taken rooms at the Grand Hotel."⁴² Although his arrival in Tehran was met with enthusiasm by various radicals and members of the Democrat party, the central government refused to recognize his authority. Nevertheless, Bravin continued his designated mission to obtain support from the Persian government by writing letters that demonstrated Russia's commitment to Persia and its independence:

The old government under the Tsars of Russia was always in opposition to the Persian government, even, in many cases, protecting Persian subjects who had done wrong. Now the Republic of Russia honors the independence of Persia and, therefore, the Persian Foreign Office is informed that hereafter no capitalist, prince, etc. is under the protection of the Republic of Russia and if any such have certificates or passports they are all null and void. As the old government of the Tsars was always opposed to the laws of Persia, and acted only as it saw fit in regard to them, it is necessary now to inform the Persian government that the Republic of Russia will not help

⁴² *Raad*, 28 January 1918; translated in *USNA*, 891.00/962, roll 4.

Russian capitalists against the Persian government and considers all purchases, contracts for rent, etc., written before as null and void.⁴³ Showing the Soviet government's commitment to diplomacy with Iran, he also made a reference to the Jangalis, in which he recognized them as a "national Persian force [fighting for] the independence of their country," but reaffirmed his government's support for the central government in Teheran by stating that, "[i]n case any Russian individual or band take part in helping those who oppose Persia, they are not officials, but are rebels."⁴⁴

Although, as the newspaper *Raad* reported, the radical democrats, who met with Bravin in Teheran and "congratulated him on his arrival," approved of his mission, the attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the central government failed.⁴⁵ The British, who had been pressuring the Persian government to not recognize Soviet legitimacy, knew about Bravin's efforts and were able to frustrate his mission by intercepting his messages and preventing him from contacting his superiors in Moscow. According to a citation provided by the historian Cosroe Chaqueri, "[i]n a June 9, 1918, telegram Bravin noted that he was unable to communicate with his government 'either by post or telegraph.'"⁴⁶ Before long, the Soviet government aborted the mission and ordered Bravin to return to Moscow.

A few months later the Soviet government sent another delegate, I. I. Kolomiitsev, to Teheran. After he failed to come to any type of agreement with the Persian government, Kolomiitsev reportedly told the Persian foreign minister: "Although

⁴³ *Iran*, 16 June 1918; translation in *USNA*, file 891.00/1051, roll 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "Newspaper Translations," *Raad*, 28 January 1918; translated in *USNA*, 891.00/962, roll 4.

⁴⁶ "Bravin Telegram no. 1," 9 June 1918, FO 248/1213; cited in Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 147.

your negative answer, Sir Minister, which is dictated by the will of the British ambassador here, dispirits me, nevertheless I find much consolation in the fact that the Persian people, as represented by a number of your public men, recognize me, the proof of which I receive daily.”⁴⁷ Unfortunately, the support he claimed to have from the Persian population was not sufficient enough to save his life, for on August 24, 1919, after being forced out of Teheran by the Persian Cossack brigade, he was “captured by anti-Bolshevik forces on the island of Ashur-Ade in the Caspian Sea, and shot by them.”⁴⁸ Shortly after, despite widespread opposition in Iran, the Persian government signed the Anglo-Persian Agreement with the British. In the Agreement, the British government reserved the right to “supply, at the cost of the Persian government, such expert advisers as may be considered necessary for the various branches of the Persian Administration.”⁴⁹ In effect, the agreement secured British control over the country and demonstrated to the Bolsheviks that, if they wanted to decrease British authority in Iran, they would have to take a different approach.

In response to the failed attempts at establishing diplomatic relations with the central government, the Bolsheviks adopted a more aggressive policy towards Persia that focused more on promoting revolutionary activity. After Persian Prime Minister Vosouq al-Dowlah announced the Anglo-Persian Agreement, G. V. Checherin, the Foreign Commissar, published an appeal “To the Workers and Peasants of Persia,” in which he criticized the Persian government and denounced British domination of the country: “At

⁴⁷ S. Iransky, “Stranitsa iz istorii krasnoi diplomatii,” *Novyi Vostok*, No. 8-9 (1925): 154; quoted in Eudin and North, *A Documentary Survey*, 95.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴⁹ “Earl Curzon to British Foreign Office,” 9 August 1919; published in Butler and Woodward (ed.), *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. 4, ser. 1, p. 1121.

this moment when the triumphant English robber is trying to force total slavery upon the Persian people, the Soviet workers' and peasants' Government of the Russian Republic solemnly declares that it does not recognize the Anglo-Persian treaty which gives effect to this enslavement." He continued: "[t]he hour of your liberation is near. . . . The Russian working people stretch out to you, oppressed masses of Persia, their brotherly hand; the hour is near when we will be in a position to complete together with you our task of struggle against all robbers and oppressors, great and small, the origin of your untold sufferings."⁵⁰

By the spring of 1920, the Soviet government was in a position to take action on Persian soil. The Bolsheviks had advanced into the Caucasus and, on April 28, 1920, a force of pro-Bolshevik Muslim communists staged a *coup d'etat* against the government of Azerbaijan, replacing it with the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan. Shortly after, the Red Army landed in Baku and advanced to the Iranian port of Enzali, where General Raskolnikov sought to destroy General Denikin's White Army forces, which had fled to the port seeking British protection. As the British foreign officer Percy Sykes explained, "Fifteen ships constituting Denikin's Caspian fleet fled from Baku to Enzali, and as the result of some negotiations with the Persian authorities, in which the British military representative took part, it was decided that the fleet should be disarmed and interned." Determined to capture the counterrevolutionaries and put an end to the civil war, the Bolsheviks followed Denikin's army into Persian territory and soon controlled the port of Enzali: "Upon the arrival of their squadron of thirteen ships off Enzali, the

⁵⁰ "Appeal From Checherin to the Workers and Peasants of Persia," 30 August 1919; published in Degras, *Soviet Documents*, 161-164.

port was bombarded. The British detachment of 500 men, which represented the last link of the very long weak chain stretching across Northwest Persia to Mesopotamia to the Caspian Sea, was withdrawn to Resht, and afterwards to Kazvin.”⁵¹

In the months that followed, the Soviet regime was able to consolidate power by emerging victorious over the counterrevolutionaries and their foreign supporters. With the enemies of the revolution defeated, the Bolsheviks were in a position to wage a strong propaganda war against the British and once again focus on appealing to the toiling masses of the Muslim world. What is more, the Red Army’s presence in the Persian province of Gilan created an opportunity to establish contact with Kuchek Khan, the leader of the Jangali rebels, who had been fighting a nationalist movement since the beginning of the Great War. Already in 1918, before the fall of the pro-Bolshevik government in Baku under Stepan Shaomian, a brief attempt had been made to establish relations with the Jangalis, but was thwarted when, on a mission to meet with Kuchek Khan, the emissary was murdered by enemies of Bolshevism.⁵² Once the Bolsheviks adopted a more aggressive policy towards Iran, however, they started to seriously focus on using the Jangali movement to promote their revolutionary agenda. As one article from *Zhisn Natsional’nostei* stated:

The significance of Kuchek Khan’s activities lies not in his armed strength and his fight against the British, but rather in the point of a possible contact with him for the purpose of successful revolutionary propaganda in Persia. Kuchek Khan is important as a socialist agitator not so much because he is a leader of a guerilla war, but because he is a bearer of social slogans, which he advanced even before the coming of the British to Gilan.

⁵¹ Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 526.

⁵² See Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 154.

Claiming that his work was “closely connected with communism,” the article went on to say that Kuchek Khan’s movement “represents a seed which, once it is carefully and skillfully cultivated, will produce a good harvest of revolutionary preparedness among the Persian masses.”⁵³ Granted, the Jangalis had received a great deal of support from the Persian peasantry, but they never attempted to implement any radical communist agrarian reforms. One of the radical leaders of the movement, Ehsanollah Khan, wrote in his memoirs that one of the ways in which the Jangalis financed their movement was by extorting ransom from the Gilan landowners, but his account does not provide any evidence that Kuckek Khan was inclined towards communism, nor does it take into account the fact that the Jangalis received support from a number of landlords.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, articles praising the Jangalis for the socialistic nature of their movement continued to be printed. One of them explained that, even though the “Jangalis are far from comprehending European communism, the incarnation in the reality of their slogans is very similar to socialism.”⁵⁵ Elaborating on this point, one Azeri Bolshevik stated that “this group of courageous revolutionaries is destined to play an important role in the revolutionary movement in the East against the bourgeoisie. Kuckek Khan and his forest brothers are worthy of the support and attention of the world revolutionary movement.”⁵⁶

By spring of 1920, the propaganda paid off, for on May 20, Bolshevik officials met with the Jangali nationalists in Iran, where they agreed to establish the Soviet

⁵³ “The Nature of the Propaganda to be Carried on in Persia,” *Zhizn Natsional’nostei*, no. 19 (27) and no. 20 (28), 25 May 1919; published in Eudin and North, *A Documentary Survey*, document 34, p. 177.

⁵⁴ For a translation of Ehsanollah’s memoirs, see Chaqueri, *Revolutionary Movement in Iran: Documents*, 643-726.

⁵⁵ “The Nature of the Propaganda to be Carried on in Persia,” *Zhizn Natsionalnostei*, no. 20, June 1919; published in *ibid*, 831.

⁵⁶ “The Iranian Forest Fighters,” *Zhizn Natsional’nostei*, No. 30, 10 August 1919; published in *Ibid.*, 837.

Socialist Republic of Iran. It is important to note that the Soviets achieved success in establishing relations with the Gilan revolutionaries primarily because the Persian nationalists were searching for a way to loosen the grip the British had over their country, and the Bolsheviks had given every indication that they were willing to support this cause. As the Bolshevik commissar of Tashkent said in one appeal: “You who are in a valley of humiliation, prepare for a great war so that a single front may be made . . . [enabling us] to defeat the [British] enemy! Crush those who oppress you! Long live the revolution in Persia.”⁵⁷ The Bolshevik newspaper *Tocsin* proclaimed that Kuchek Khan was a “famous champion of Persian independence,” assuring the people that his movement posed a “threat to English imperialism in Persia.”⁵⁸ Such statements created the foundation needed for Soviet support among the nationalists, who were in desperate need of an ally. Kuchek Khan and his supporters had by this time been badly hurt by the skirmishes with the British, the central government in Tehran, and the remaining Tsarist troops who had supported the British and their attempts to occupy Baku. As the U.S. minister at Teheran noted in April of 1920:

It is believed that the growth of Bolshevism in Persia is like the former alleged pro-German sympathies of the Persian, not love for the Bolsheviks or their principles, but rather the fact that the Bolsheviks are vehemently opposed to the British – whom a great number of patriotic Persians firmly believe to be their greatest enemy; . . . although it is hardly possible that the Bolshevism could ever secure a firm hold in Persia, there is, nevertheless, great danger of its spread to Persia on account of the occupation of this county by the most steadfast enemy of the Bolsheviks.⁵⁹

Taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them after they consolidated their power in Russia, the Bolsheviks established the support-base they had been looking for in

⁵⁷ Bolshevik Commissar of Tashkent, “To the Democrats of Persia,” 20 August, 1919, British Foreign Office, F.O. 248/1236; quoted in Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 174.

⁵⁸ *Tocsin*, 21 April 1920; English translation in F.O. C 1168/510/84.

⁵⁹ “Quarterly Report No. 6,” 10 April 1920, *USNA* 891.00/1157, roll 5.

Iran since the beginning of the revolution by courting the Jangalis while they were most vulnerable and in desperate need of support. As Kuchek Khan said in a speech to the citizens of Resht on June 5: “A brilliant beacon has been kindled in Russia, but we were so blinded by its light, that we even turned our backs to it, and it is only now that we understand the greatness of its brilliant light.”⁶⁰ That is, at a time when the Jangalis were struggling against the British and had the Bolsheviks knocking on their door in the North.

There is no question that Kuchek Khan had doubts about entering into an alliance with the Bolsheviks. Although he publicly showed enthusiasm for the coalition government by making fiery speeches and sending messages to Lenin and Trotsky that praised their work and expressed support for the “union of the toilers of the world, the Third International,” he never intended on establishing a Soviet-style government in Gilan.⁶¹ Quoting from the memoirs of a Jangali member, the historian Cosroe Chaqueri wrote: “Apparently out of concern for the damage the people might suffer should Gilan become a theatre of military conflict, he considered collaborating with the Soviets with ‘the hope of preventing their oppression.’”⁶² In fact, according to the newspaper, *Borda*, Kuchek Khan reportedly told an employee of the Georgian commercial firm Khoshtaria that he never intended to follow the Bolsheviks’ program: “I am strongly aware of the Bolsheviks’ program and their activities, but I have no intention of following them completely. My goal is to depose the Teheran government and hand over power to a democratic government in Persia. I do not wish to repeat here what the Bolsheviks have

⁶⁰ British India Office, “Situation in Khorossan and Northeast Persia,” 11 August 1920, F.O. 371, C 3703/510/34.

⁶¹ “Telegram to Trotsky,” *Soviet Russia*, 4 September 1920.

⁶² Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 198.

done in Russia.”⁶³ It appears that Kuchek Khan accepted the Bolsheviks as an ally to protect his region from further damage and as a step in achieving his ultimate goal of democratic change in Persia.

Although the Bolsheviks’ new, more aggressive approach in dealing with Iran led to the establishment of a Soviet republic in Iran, the Soviet government was not entirely ready to abandon the idea of peaceful negotiations with the central government in Teheran. Shortly after the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran was established, *Pravda* reported that an exchange of notes took place between the Persian government and the Soviet government, “with the object of opening diplomatic and commercial relations between Persian and Soviet Russia,” in which the Persian government promised “to send out two delegations, one to Baku, the other to Moscow.”⁶⁴ As the newspaper reported, Chicherin responded by stating that “the Soviet government greets Persia’s decision to send a diplomatic mission to Moscow with pleasure, and declares itself ready immediately to reestablish postal and telegraphic relations with Teheran, as well as to continue in its pursuit of a policy of conciliation and peace towards all the races of Central Asia.” Moreover, in a message sent to the Persian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chicherin declared that, “on the basis of exact data in my possession, there is now no longer any military or naval force of the Russian Republic in the territory or in the water of Persia.”⁶⁵

⁶³ “Borda,” 28 July 1920, *Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (MAEF); published in Chaqueri, *RMI*, 907.

⁶⁴ “Persia and Soviet Russia,” *Soviet Russia*, 31 July 1920; also published in *Ibid.*, 853.

⁶⁵ “Message to Prince Mirza-Firouz, Persian Minister for Foreign Affairs,” *Soviet Russia*, 14 August 1920; also published in *Ibid.*, 854.

Obviously attempting to conceal his government's involvement in the establishment of the Soviet republic in Gilan, Chicherin went on to say that the forces in Northern Persia "have no relation whatever with our government. . . . The attitude of the Russian government toward the interior struggles proceeding in Persia is one of non-intervention, in spite of the similarity in ideas between the government established at Resht and the Russian government."⁶⁶ Such statements did not, however, reflect the real perspective of the Soviet government in regards to the Soviet republic they helped establish in Northern Iran. For that, one only has to refer to the words of Russia's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs at the time:

Persia is on fire. A revolutionary Provisional Government has been formed in Resht. The entry of our troops into Enzali seems to have given wings to the Persian revolutionists . . . We succeeded in establishing connections with Kuchek . . . , [which] may lead to momentous results. The revolution will undoubtedly pass from Western Persia into Sistan over the railway line that is now being built, and thence it will inevitably spread to Afghanistan and Baluchistan. And when Afghanistan is aflame, the fire will spread to Northern India. Kuchik's insurrection thus acquires the importance of a world event.⁶⁷

Although the Jangali revolutionary movement, which began during the Great War to eliminate foreign domination in Persia, gained popularity throughout Iran, it was not until Mirza Kuchek Khan decided to ally with the Bolsheviks that the movement succeeded in establishing an independent republic. He was aware of the fact that his forces could not hold off against the British and Persian government much longer, and the Soviet government had expressed its promise to uphold Persian independence against the imperialist British, so he agreed to establish the Soviet Socialist Republic in Iran. For the Soviets, promoting a revolutionary movement in Iran was not even an option until

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ "The Revolution in Persia," *Soviet Russia*, 11 September 1920; also published in *Ibid.*, 857.

General Denikin's counterrevolutionary forces had been defeated. After failing to establish diplomatic relations with the Persian government, the Soviet regime focused on finding an outlet for which they could export their revolutionary message into Iran. However, despite their involvement in the establishment of the Soviet republic in Northern Iran, the Bolsheviks simultaneously pursued a friendly relationship with the Persian government.

This double-sided foreign policy that the Bolsheviks applied towards Iran may be explained by the fact that the Soviet government was less concerned with promoting world revolution and more concerned with establishing its own security. By trying to convince the Persian government that they were not actively supporting Kuchek Khan's separatist movement and that they wanted to establish a friendly relationship, the Bolsheviks were attempting to secure a relationship with the central government in case the revolutionary republic failed to gain the support it needed to serve Soviet interest, which was to solidify a position in Iran that would eliminate British domination of the region. As will be demonstrated in the following chapter, this double-sided approach worked out well for the Bolsheviks, but had a damaging effect on the fate of the revolutionary republic and the Persian communist movement, which developed out of Baku around 1916 and allied with the Jangalis after the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran was established in 1920.

CHAPTER 5

RUSSIA AND THE FIRST COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN IRAN¹



Figure 2: Map of Northern Iran during the 1920s illustrated by the author

Although the first official communist party in Iran was not established until 1920, many social democrats from the Persian Social Democratic party who were affiliated with the Muslim Himmat party established an organization in 1916 to represent the Persian working class in Baku. This organization, called Adalat (justice), became increasingly active after the Bolshevik Revolution and played an important role in bringing about the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran. However, after

¹ A version of this paper was presented by the author at the Western Association for Slavic Studies (WASS) section of the 48th annual conference of the Western Social Science Association (WSSA) on April 22, 2006, in Phoenix Arizona.

the republic was established and the organization changed its name to the Communist party of Iran, theoretical conflicts emerged between the communists and their nationalist allies, causing a serious split within the revolutionary government. These conflicts, coupled with the fact that the Soviet Union was, in the fall of 1920, seeking a new approach to Iran and desperate to resume trade with England in order to stabilize its war-torn economy, led to the demise of the first communist movement in Iran.

After the Soviet republic was formed and the alliance between Persian communists and nationalists secured, the Persian communists divided along ideological lines, which led to a serious debate within the party: would the revolutionaries adopt a strict communist program that promoted a Bolshevik-style revolution in Iran or pursue a less radical program that stressed the need to cooperate with the bourgeoisie in order to prepare the country better for the socialist stage of development? With the more radical, leftist faction gaining the majority early on, the nationalist Jangalis – who did not desire a communist take-over in Iran – broke ties with the communist leadership of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran and withdrew to the forests of Resht. After the moderate communists gained control of the Persian Communist party, an attempt was made at establishing another united front with the nationalists, but the Soviet government had already decided that it was not willing to jeopardize the possibility of establishing diplomatic relations with the Persian government and trade negotiations with the British by promoting the communist movement in Iran, so the republic failed. For theoretical justification of their change in policy, the Bolshevik leaders claimed that conditions in Persia were not ripe for socialism and that bourgeois democracy needed more time to develop. As a result, the Soviet government declared its support for the Persian

government, which all but sealed the fate of the first communist movement in Iran when Reza Shah came to power.

As previously discussed, by the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, the ideas of Russian social democracy had been introduced into Iranian society. As early as 1903, members of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' party (RSDWp) established an organization called Himmat (endeavor), which was geared towards promoting political consciousness among the Persian migrant workers employed in the oil fields of Baku. After the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Himmat party gained a lot of influence throughout Caucasia and even contributed to the social democratic movement that had emerged within the Constitutional Revolution in Iran by providing the revolutionaries with, as one historian noted, "contraband arms and ammunition and revolutionary literature."²

Despite the fact that forty-five percent of the lowest paying jobs in this region were occupied by Muslims, the RSDWp had a more difficult time reaching these workers than it did the Russian and Armenian populations. The Muslim workers were not as receptive to social democratic propaganda primarily because their roots were still firmly embedded in their countryside. Most of the workers were seasonal employees who were not interested in changing their cultural and religious customs, so the revolutionaries from the RSDWp who organized the Himmat party had to take a more subtle approach when they attempted to appeal to the Muslim proletariat. Instead of targeting the system of capitalism, the Himmatists called for, as one historian stated, "the spread of education,

²Tadeusz Swietochowski, *Russian Azerbaijan, 1905-1920, the Shaping of National Identity in a Muslim Community* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 66.

for instruction in the native language,” and used traditional Islamic proverbs such as “the joint efforts of men will move mountains,” as their slogans.³

Due to the Stolypin repression after the Russian Revolution of 1905, the Himmat party declined drastically. Still, the harsh repression that the Himmatists experienced did not stop them from publishing a party program in 1909. Although the program stated that the Himmat party was “founded to preserve the interest and improve the conditions of the poor, the workers, and the commerce employees,” the document never mentioned the RSDWp and did not contain any Marxist slogans.⁴ It may not be possible for historians to know the exact relationship between the Himmat party and the Bolsheviks, but there is no question that the organization did exhibit some form of autonomy in the years before the October Revolution.

That at least some of the leading figures of the Himmat party did not completely identify with the RSDWp is evident by the fact that, in 1912, some of the members broke away and formed the nationalist Musavat party (equality). Mohammad-Amin Rasoulzadeh, for example, was one Persian revolutionary figure who decided to break with his Himmatist past to join the nationalist movement. In response to the Stolypin reaction of 1907-1909, Rasoulzadeh (and others) fled to Persia, where he took part in the struggle against the Shah and for a constitutional form of government. However, his involvement only led to exile in Turkey, where he was, as one biographical report pointed

³ Tadeusz Swietochowski, “The Himmat Party: Socialism and the National Question in Russian Azerbaijan, 1904-1920,” in *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* XIX, no.1-2 (Jan. –Jun. 1978): 119-120.

⁴ “Programme et Statut de L’organisation Musulmane Social-Democrate Himmat,” 22 December 1909; in Cosroe Chaqueri, *La Social-democratie en Iran: articles et documents* [SDI] (Florence: Mazdak, 1979), 125.

out, “influenced by the rising tide of Turkish nationalism.”⁵ Returning to Azerbaijan in 1912, he became a leader of the Musavat party, which advocated Islamic solidarity and the establishment of an independent Azerbaijani nation-state. According to historians, such an evolution in ideological belief “was not uncommon among [Himmatists] who had stayed in Azerbaijan. Many of them shared in general disillusionment with the Russian Revolution [of 1905], and at the same time were affected by the world-wide rise of national consciousness among the Islamic peoples.”⁶

Although the Musavat party was forced to conduct its activity clandestinely, it gained much more support than did the Himmat party, as seen by the fact that, after the Bolshevik Revolution, the Musavatists were able to overthrow the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan and establish a tripartite federation with Armenia and Georgia. The Himmat party, which was reestablished after the February Revolution with a stronger tendency towards Marxism, could not attract the following it needed to take control. This was likely due to the fact that “it found a formidable contender for the allegiance of the masses in the Musavat whose socially progressive slogans combined with nationalist appeal attracted a large part of the Baku proletariat, while in the country-side its merger with the Ganja-based Turkic Federalist party won it the backing of the landowning elements.”⁷ This point exposes two major problems that would later plague the Persian communist movement as well: inability to attract a large amount of support from the masses and constant disagreement with the nationalist forces.

⁵ Cosroe Chaqueri, *Origins of Social Democracy in Iran* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001). Biographical information on Rasoulzadeh came be obtained in the appendix, 209.

⁶ Swietochoski, “The Himmat Party,” 123.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

About the same time the Himmat party was being revived, a handful of Persian immigrants in Baku who were not as concerned with maintaining a separate identity from the RSDWp established an organization called Adalat. Throughout the years, the number of Persian workers migrating to Baku for work steadily increased. One conservative estimate stated that, by the end of the Great War, there were “about 200,000 Iranians, mostly migrant seasonal workers, within Russia.” According to the 1920-21 census, “41,020 Iranians, mostly employed in the oilfields of Baku, lived in Azerbaijan.”⁸ As the historian Cosroe Chaqueri pointed out, “[i]n addition to sufferings inflicted by the war, these Iranian workers and immigrants had been hurt by the defeat of the Constitutional Revolution, both at the hands of Russian Tsarism and of the movement’s Iranian leaders.”⁹ Seeking new solutions to old problems, then, these Persian immigrants became the ideal targets from which the Adalatists would gain recruits for their cause.

Although sources on the early activity of the Adalat party are limited, the information available leads to the conclusion that it was a proletarian party that agreed to support the Bolsheviks, both ideologically and militarily.¹⁰ Undoubtedly the turbulent times in Baku following the Bolshevik Revolution contributed to the party’s lack of activity in its early years. Granted, the Adalat party “readied the impressive strength of 4,000” members and published its newspaper *Baydaghe Adalat* (Banner of Justice) under the pro-Bolshevik regime of Stephan Shaumian that was established directly after the

⁸ S.L. Agayev and V.N. Plastun, “The Communist and Nationalist Liberation Movement in Iran in the 1920s,” in R.A. Ulyanovsky (ed.), *The Comintern and the East: A Critique of the Critique* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), 283.

⁹ Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920-1921* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 153-154.

¹⁰ See Avetis Sultanzadeh, “The Revolutionary Movement in Iran,” *Zhizn Natsional’nostei*, no. 30, 1920; translation in Cosroe Chaqueri, *Le Mouvement Communiste en Iran* [MCI] (Florence: Mazdak Press, 1979), 243. Another source translated from Russian in the same work claims that many members of the Adalat organization were sent to Moscow to receive military training (see *Ibid.*, 264).

October Revolution, but the Turkish invasion and occupation of Baku before the end of the war caused a decline in party activity.¹¹ Nevertheless, after the brief time in which Azerbaijan was declared a republic before it again fell to the Soviets, the party was able to regain strength and begin a new publication under the name *Horiyat* (freedom).

By 1920, the Adalat party succeeded in establishing branches throughout Northern Iran and Azerbaijan, such as in Tabriz, Marand, Khoi, Ardebil, Khalkhal, Zanjan, Resht, Qazvin, and Teheran.¹² According to a British report in May of 1920, the Adalat party had been, for the past several months, successfully “indulging in much blowing of trumpets. . . . The Bolshevik newspaper *Toscin* of 31st March announced that this party has been engaged in promoting political education courses at Tashkent to which members of the party at Ashkabad are proceeding. Hundreds of Persian workmen are said to be joining the party.”¹³ A Bolshevik newspaper reported on June 13 that the organization had grown to include “17 centers, with a total of 30,000 members.”¹⁴

Once the party gained sufficient strength, it focused on distributing propaganda intended to increase support among the population for the fast-arriving Soviet forces in pursuit of General Anton Denikin’s counterrevolutionary forces. One publication distributed by members of the Adalat party declared:

Oh Russian workmen! Persian oppressed classes are looking to you for help [Know you Persians that] the Russia of today is not the same as the Great Russia which had joined the British government in 1906 to devour Persia. . . . No, Soviet Russia extends the hand of friendship and

¹¹ Sepehr Zabih, *The Communist Movement in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 12.

¹² T.A. Ibrahimov, *Iran Kommunist Partiasynyn Iaranmasy*, pp. 162-163; cited in Chaqueri, *Soviet Republic of Iran*, 155.

¹³ British Foreign Office, “Intelligence Summary No. 18 for the Week Ending the 1st May 1920,” F.O. C 2473/510/34.

¹⁴ “Resht in the Hands of Kuchek Khan,” Rosta, 13 June 1920; in “Situation in Khorasan and Northern Persia,” F.O. C 3703/510/34.

brotherliness to you. The Red Army is the present bag-bearer of the British in Asia. Open your eyes before it is too late [and] unite with us to regenerate Persia. . . . Long live the revolution!¹⁵

Claiming that “the Imperial government of Persia has, by its thieving methods and policies, reduced the whole population of Persia to the greatest straights,” another publication firmly proclaimed to its readers that the only way for the Persian people to liberate themselves was through the Adalat organization:

The Adalat Committee of Persia has raised the banner of help and opposition and is going to act against all such thieves, and free Persia from their tyrannies and oppressions. The Adalat Committee alone can emancipate Persia. The Adalat Committee alone can snatch the rights of the people out of the other’s hand and give them back to their rightful owners. . . . The event in Russia in the month of October is a lesson and an example for us. The Russian peasants are the true friends of ours. They too were like us. With the help of the Russian friends we will clear Persia from all darkness. Oh mates! Oh Persian brethren and “ryots” and peasants of Persia! Come under the revolutionary banner and strive to free the oppressed from the oppressor. . . . Death to the robbers! Death to the sellers of Persian rights! Long live Persian liberty! Long live Persian Adalat!¹⁶

Such appeals would not have had the desired effect without mentioning Islam. In fact, although the term *adalat* translates into English as “justice,” the word actually holds a much stronger connotation and refers to one of the cardinal points in Islam.

The Adalat party was later accused of being a godless organization, which Islamic leaders in Iran condemned, but in the years before the Soviet republic of Iran was established, one finds references to the Islamic faith in much of the party propaganda. In one edition of the newspaper, *Baydaghe Adalat*, the Adalatists claimed that Persia, “with its great and glorious past, is now quivering in the British talons, and seems to be doomed to an early death and effacement. The real reason is that we, the Muslims, have ignored the real spirit of Islam. . . . It is our sacred duty now to strive to rescue our motherland

¹⁵ “Appeal to the Persian Workmen From the Persian Adalat Committee,” July 1920, F.O. C 1168/510/34.

¹⁶ “Propaganda,” 11 August 1920, F.O. C 3703/510/34.

from foreign contamination, and the [religion] of Islam from the dreary vortex of ignorance and apathy.”¹⁷ Other articles appealing to the Islamic faith have been cited by the historian Cosroe Chaqueri:

The clearest proof is a series of articles in the daily *Iran* arguing that Bolshevism, whose teachings resembled that of Islam, was to accomplish the second, modern political stage of the work started by the Prophet Mohammad in the domain of religion; the Bolsheviks were the ‘spiritual friends’ of the Persians. *Iran* also cited ‘polygamy and the right to divorce’ as examples in Islam that anticipated Bolshevik social practices! Moreover, *Seda-yi Tehran* compared Lenin to the Prophet Mohammad.¹⁸

All of this contributed to a drastic increase in Soviet support among the population of Northern Iran when the Red Army marched into Iranian territory.

According to General Fyodor Raskolnikov, commander of the Soviet Army in pursuit of the counter-revolutionaries, when the Red Army landed in Enzeli, “all the streets and squares were packed with people. The whole city was covered with Red Flags. . . . [F]rom the very first moment of our entry [into Persia, we were welcomed] . . . as liberators from British oppression. The whole populace cursed the British as exploiters.”¹⁹ Even if Raskolnikov exaggerated, the fact that the invading Soviets were able to strike a deal with the Jangalis, who enjoyed a great deal of support among the Persian population at the time, and create a Soviet republic in May of 1920, suggests that the Adalat party had been successful in establishing support for the Soviets. As one U.S. official painstakingly reported as the Bolsheviks were approaching Iran: “Bolshevistic tendencies are constantly increasing in Persia and whereas a few months ago it seemed

¹⁷ “Banner of Justice,” 22 May 1920; in *Khorasan Intelligence Summary No. 27*, 7 September 1920, F.O. C 5728/510/34.

¹⁸ Articles in *Iran* quoted in “le bolchevisme progresse chez les Persans,” *Correspondance d’Orient*, 30 May 1920, no. 238, p. 438; cited in Chaqueri, *Soviet Republic of Iran*, 176.

¹⁹ “On the Caspian and in Persia,” *Soviet Russia*, 23 October 1920.

that the Persians were firmly and unalterably opposed to the Bolsheviki, many adherents are now found for that cause here and one often hears that the Persians will welcome the Bolsheviki with open arms if they do succeed in pressing through the Caucasus into Persia, as is now threatened.”²⁰

The establishment of a Soviet republic in Iran gave the Adalat party the opportunity to join the revolutionary struggle in Iran by allying with the Jangalis and assuming partial control over the new revolutionary government. A month after the alliance, the party held a congress in which the members agreed to change the name of the organization to the Iranian Communist party (ICp). The program that was adopted at this congress not only created a great deal of conflict among the communists themselves, but it so aggravated the nationalists that they withdrew from the government and went back to the forests.

The problems that developed as a result of this conflict provided the Soviet government with a reason to change its policy towards the revolutionary movement in Iran. Besides providing the revolutionary government with ammunition and troops, the Soviets, according to one American missionary in Resht, “introduced propaganda methods, opened many schools, established a peasants club and seemed to desire to win the people as a whole to their way of thinking.”²¹ However, after conflict emerged among the leadership of the revolutionary movement in Gilan, the Bolsheviks decided that it was not in their best interest to continue providing support to the revolutionary regime.

²⁰ “Quarterly Report No. 6,” 10 April 1920; in *United States National Archives* (USNA), 891.00/1157, [microfilm] roll 5.

²¹ “J. Davidson Frame to U.S. Chargé d’Affaires,” 16 October 1921, USNA 891.00/1704, roll 5.

Only a few weeks after the creation of the new government in Gilan, in an effort to declare its support for the Soviet Union, the Revolutionary War Council of the republic sent the following message to Trotsky:

The Revolutionary War Council of the Persian Red Army, organized upon the decision of the Council of People's Commissars of Persia, sends its sincere greetings to the Red Army and Red Navy. After passing through great hardships, and undergoing all kinds of privations, we succeeded in crushing our internal counterrevolution, which was merely a hireling of international capitalism. By the will of the toiling people there was organized in Persia Soviet power which began creating a Persian Red Army, with the purpose of destroying the enslavers of the Persian people

Long live the fraternal union between the Russian Red Army and the young Persian Army!
Long live the union of the toilers of the world, the Third International.²²

The message was signed by Kuchek Khan, Mir Muzaffar-zadeh, and Ehsanullah Khan, Jangali leaders who had been working closely with the Persian communists.²³ Such a document, along with the fiery speeches made in support for the Soviet government, suggests that Kuchek Khan was enthusiastic about working with the communists during the early months of the revolutionary regime. He must have been convinced that the Adalatists were willing to allow the national liberation movement to take its course. However, after the Enzali congress on June 20, 1920, in which the ICp adopted a radical program that advocated abandoning the national liberation movement for a Bolshevik-style revolution in Iran, his enthusiasm diminished.

²² "Exchange of Messages Between the Persian Revolutionary Insurgents and Trotsky," *Izvestiia*, No. 129, 16 June 1920; in Xenia Eudin and Robert North, *Soviet Russia and the East, 1920-1927: A Documentary Survey* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), document 36, p. 181.

²³ If one looks at the composition of the Revolutionary Council of the new republic, one finds that the leadership was composed of both Jangali and communist leaders. See "Members of the Revolutionary Council of The Republic of Iran," 2 July 1920; published in Cosroe Chaqueri, *The Revolutionary Movement in Iran versus Great Britain and Soviet Russia, Documents in English, French, and German* [RMI] (Florence: Mazdak Press, 1979), 896.

Kuchek Khan clearly was not an ardent communist. His alliance with the Soviet government and the Persian communists had more to do with preserving his nationalist movement than establishing a communist regime. As A. Vozhnesensky, director of the Eastern Department of the Soviet Commissariat for Foreign Affairs pointed out, after the Soviets declared their support for Persia's independence, "Kuchek Khan inaugurated a definite orientation toward Soviet Russia." However, he was nothing more than "a nationalist [with] a burning hatred for the enslavers of Persia, the English, and the Teheran government," whose program called for "the nationalization of the banks and custom houses, and also the introduction of an income tax."²⁴ Moreover, the fact that Kuchek Khan did not want a communist program is revealed by the agreement between the Jangalis and the Bolsheviks:

1. Communist principles regarding property rights would not be applied, and communist propaganda would be proscribed in Gilan;
2. A provisional revolutionary republican regime would be established;
3. The people would determine the nature of the regime through a constituent assembly after the seizure of Teheran;
4. The Soviets would not interfere in the affairs of the revolutionary government, which would alone be in charge;
5. No Soviet troops should enter Iran beyond the existing 2,000 without authorization by the revolutionary regime;
6. Expenses of the troops stationed in Iran would be covered by the revolutionary regime;
7. Any arms and munitions requested by the revolutionary regime would be delivered [by the Soviet government] against payment;
8. Iranian merchandise confiscated at Baku would be handed over to the revolutionary regime;
9. All Russian commercial enterprises in Iran would be handed over to the republican regime.²⁵

After the Enzali congress, in complete violation of the first clause of the above agreement, the Persian communists adopted a resolution to carry out a propaganda

²⁴ "The Revolution in Persia," *Soviet Russia*, 11 September 1920.

²⁵ The agreement is reproduced in Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 192.

campaign calling for socialist revolution in Iran: “to fight world capitalism jointly with Soviet Russia . . . and to keep our organization independent, and enlarge it . . . so at the time of the class struggle for obtaining political power and land, we could lead the proletariat and the peasants.”²⁶ Accordingly, the time for allying with the national-democratic and bourgeois-democratic forces was over. Such a resolution created conflict with the nationalists: “[t]his intransigence against cooperating with the ‘national bourgeoisie’ obviously had a negative affect on the united front with Kuchek The PCp was impatient to achieve victory in the class war; defeating the British and establishing national independence was not enough.”²⁷

The adoption of a “war communism” program at the Enzali Congress not only alienated the nationalists, but it also created a split within the ICp. Avetis Sultanzadeh represented the radical faction of the party.²⁸ This Persian-born Armenian revolutionary intellectual and theoretician who had been working for the Soviet government since the October Revolution presented his thesis at the Second Congress of the Communist International in July of 1920. According to his argument, not only did the imperialist nations’ involvement in the economic and political spheres of the Eastern countries since the 1870s hindered the progress of industrialization in those countries, but it also “converted them into markets for their manufactured products and into inexhaustible sources of supply of raw material for the industrial centers of Europe.” This problem

²⁶ Jane Degras, ed., *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 106.

²⁷ M. Reza Ghods, *Iran in the Twentieth Century: A Political History* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1989), 67.

²⁸ For biographical information on Sultanzadeh, see Cosroe Chaqueri, *Avetis Sultanzade, the Forgotten Revolutionary Theoretician: Life and Works* (Florence: Mazdak Press, 1985).

contributed to the lack of organized revolutionary parties, but there was substantial revolutionary potential because of the nature of the ruling class in these countries:

An extreme antagonism of interest prevails among the ruling classes. The big landowners are interested in continuing the colonial policy of the great powers, whereas the urban bourgeoisie opposes foreign interference with all its might. The clergy protests against the import of goods from the infidel lands of the *ghayer* [foreigner], while the merchants and traders fiercely oppose this stand. There can be no unanimity among the ruling classes in countries where for some the possibility of exploiting the toilers depends on the markets of the metropolis, while others cherish the illusion of independence.

Although such a situation is ideal for a revolutionary movement of a national character, Sultanzadeh stressed that it “will inevitably become social, owing to the weakness of the bourgeoisie.”²⁹ It would only be necessary, then, for the Communist International to support the national-democratic revolutionary movements in the East for a short period of time, and only in those countries where “this movement is still embryonic.” In countries like Persia, he argued, it was time to take the revolution to the next step:

If we were to proceed in accordance with the thesis in countries where we already have ten or more years of experience behind us or where bourgeois-democracy is a prop and a foundation of the state, as in Persia, that would mean driving the masses into the arms of the counterrevolution. We must create and support a purely communist movement counter-posed to the bourgeois-democratic movement. Any other assessment of the facts could lead to regrettable consequences.³⁰

The leader of a moderate faction within the party was Haydar Khan Amu Ughli, the veteran Iranian Social Democrat who had been involved in both phases of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. According to one British report, Haydar Khan joined the Adalat party and “reached Askhabad on the 10th of June . . . [and] has come to

²⁹ “Theses by Avetis Sultanzadeh,” published in John Riddell (ed.), *The Communist International in Lenin’s Time: Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples, Unite: Proceedings and Documents of the Second Congress, 1920*, vol. 2 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991), 856-857.

³⁰ “National and Colonial Questions,” published in *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 239.

Transcaspia to head a large section of the Adalat.”³¹ However, for reasons unknown, he did not attend the Enzali Congress. Nevertheless, his moderate program was published in *Zhizn Natsional* on June 15, 1920, just days before the congress was convened. According to his view, and those of his supporters who attended the congress, it was the duty of all communists to collaborate with the nationalist forces and the bourgeois-democrats in a joint effort to fight the British: “The Persian revolution cannot call for the liberation of the laborious masses without first fighting foreign exploitation. . . . The nationalist revolution must have time to transform itself into a social revolution.”³²

Whether the Soviet government ever publicly came out in support of one faction or the other is not known. Although Sultanzadeh claimed that Lenin supported his faction, no concrete evidence exists confirming his claim.³³ However, if one reads the proceedings of the Second Congress of the Communist International, in which Sultanzadeh presented his thesis *On the National and Colonial Question*, one finds that the final draft adopted by the congress included a lot of his argument. The thesis that Lenin initially drafted for discussion at the congress stressed the need for communists in colonial countries to cooperate with the bourgeois-democratic liberation movements in these countries:

The more backward the country, the stronger is the hold of small-scale agricultural production, patriarchalism and isolation, which inevitably lend particular strength and tenacity to the deepest of petty-bourgeois prejudices, i.e., to national egoism and national narrow-mindedness. These prejudices are bound to die out very slowly, for they can disappear only after imperialism and capitalism have disappeared in the advanced countries, and after the entire foundation of the

³¹ “Resht in the Hands of Kuchek Khan,” *Rosta*, 13 June 1920; in *Khorasan Intelligence Summary*, F.O. C 3728/510/34

³² “The Social Bases of the Persian Revolution,” *Zhizn Natsional’ nosti*, No. 18, 15 June 1920; published in Chaqueri, *La Social democratie en Iran*, 76.

³³ Avetis Sultanzadeh, *Persia* (Moscow, 1925), 85-87.

backward countries' economic life has radically changed. It is therefore the duty of the class-conscious communist proletariat of all countries to regard with particular caution and attention the survivals of national sentiments in the countries and among nationalities which have been oppressed the longest; it is equally necessary to make certain concessions with a view to more rapidly overcoming this distrust and these prejudices. Complete victory over capitalism cannot be won unless the proletariat and, following it, the mass of working people in all countries and nations throughout the world voluntarily strive for alliance and unity.³⁴

Whereas this preliminary thesis stressed the need to establish cooperative relations with the national and bourgeois-democratic movements in the backward countries of the East before advancing the socialist revolution, the revised version of the thesis that was adopted after the debate at the congress' National and Colonial Commission had some extensive modifications, the most important of which concerned promoting the proletarian revolution in the backward countries: "[A]re we to consider as correct the assertion that the capitalist stage of economic development is inevitable for backward nations now on the road to emancipation and among whom a certain advance towards progress is to be seen since the war? We replied in the negative." The report goes on to say that, if the communist organizations in these areas "conducts systematic propaganda [among the peasant masses in these countries] and the Soviet government comes to their aid with all the means at their disposal," then it would be "mistaken to assume that the backward peoples must inevitably go through the capitalist stage of development."³⁵

Such changes from the original version seem to confirm Sultanzadeh's statement that the Soviet government supported the Persian communists after they adopted the radical program at the Enzali Congress. However, in the months that followed, the

³⁴ "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions," 5 June 1920; published in V.I Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 31 (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1969), 150-151.

³⁵ "Report of the Commission on the National and the Colonial Questions," 26 July 1920; published in *Ibid.*, 244.

situation in Gilan took a turn for the worse, which had a drastic effect on the future program of the party and on the Soviet government's policy in Iran. On July 28, Kuchek Khan and his supporters withdrew from the revolutionary government, leaving the communists in complete control of the region. Shortly after, a new revolutionary cabinet was formed: "Kuchek Khan has quarreled with his Russian friends and some of his own supporters, and has retired to his Jangal home west of Resht. Fewer than 300 Jangalis remain in the field with the Russian and Azerbaijan Bolsheviks."³⁶ Headed by Ehsanollah Khan, the leftist Jangali who had joined the communists just before proclamation of the republic, the new revolutionary committee stated that, "in view of the refusal of the [Revolutionary] Cabinet [of Mirza Kuckek Khan], formed after the conquest of Enzali, to advance the revolution, on the 31st of July, 1920, at 2 in the morning, freedom-loving revolutionaries, taking into account the necessity of the extension of revolution, took over the Government from the said Cabinet and left it in the hands of the members of a provisional Committee."³⁷

According to Soviet sources, the failure of the revolutionary movement in Gilan can be traced to the point when the leftist faction of the ICp took over the revolutionary government after Kuchek Khan and his nationalist allies withdrew in late July. Ever since 1927, the year in which V. Osetrov (Iran dust) published his article, "Aspects of the Gilan Revolution," Soviet historians have blamed the failure of the Gilan republic on Sultanzadeh's radical faction for adopting a Bolshevik-style communization program in

³⁶ "Setback to Persian Reds," *Times*, 10 August 1920, p. 9.

³⁷ "Important Changes," *Public Declaration*; published in Chaqueri, *RMI*, 899.

their attempt to hasten the revolutionary movement in Iran.³⁸ Although such an interpretation helps illustrate the important internal factors that contributed to the demise of the republic, it fails to take into account the Soviet government's withdrawal from the province and its change in policy towards Iran. While there were a number of problems that contributed to the fact that the communist revolutionaries could not obtain the loyalty of the masses, it was not until the Bolsheviks decided to support the Persian government that the movement was doomed to fail.

To begin with, not even two weeks after the new Revolutionary Committee assumed power in Gilan, a tragic incident occurred that drastically affected the communists' reputation. On August 5, 1920, a devastating fire broke out in Resht, which, according to one British report, resulted in the destruction of "400-700 shops, two mosques, a church and several caravanserais and private houses." Although no evidence identified who started the fire, the British report stated that it was widely accepted in Teheran that "the Russians deliberately fired the Bazaar."³⁹ Even the London *Times* reported that "the Bolsheviks, after quarrelling with Kuchek Khan, have looted and burnt down a great part of Resht."⁴⁰ Since the communists were in alliance with the Soviet government, the circulation of such rumors increased peoples' doubts about the intentions of the revolutionary government. By September, claimed another British report, there was "a strong anti-Bolshevik revulsion of feeling . . . caused mainly by reports of Bolshevik excesses at Resht and similar tales brought by refugees from Transcaspia."⁴¹

³⁸ For a partial translation and extensive discussion of this article, see *Central Asian Review* (CAR) 4, no. 3 (1956): 303-307.

³⁹ "Gilan and Bolsheviks," F.O. 371/4930; published in Chaqueri, *RMI*, 893.

⁴⁰ "Reds Burn Resht," *Times*, 12 August 1920, p. 10.

⁴¹ "Teheran Monthly Summary," September 1920, F.O. 371/4910.

Such tales were described by the British as follows: “the communists chastised [the people] with scorpions. Mirza Amini, the treasurer [of the revolutionary government], would dig graves and bury people up to their chins to force them to divulge the whereabouts of their treasure. [Also,] Several women were done to death by this monster.”⁴²

The communists’ inability to shed their irreligious reputation also contributed to the party’s declining reputation. Despite the fact that the Revolutionary Committee published leaflets claiming that Persian communists were not opposed to religious doctrine, the communists could not get rid of their godless image.⁴³ They blamed the British, claimed one article in the party’s organ, *Kommunist*, for fabricating “the rumor that ‘communist doctrine is opposed to religion’ in order to stir the people against the ICp,” but it did little to stop the anticommunist sentiment increasing among the population.⁴⁴ By the end of July, according to a newspaper article from the French archives, events in Persia “had taken an unfavorable turn for the Bolsheviks. The success of the anticommunist propaganda [being distributed by the] Muslim priests among the population [has] become threatening.”⁴⁵

One of the main arguments that the leftists used to criticize Kuchek Khan’s government was the fact that it had no intention of implementing land reform. So, when the communists came to power, they confiscated land from the landowners with the intent to distribute it among the peasants. However, by adopting this policy, the ICP leaders

⁴² “Gilan and Bolsheviks,” F.O. 371/4930; also published in *RMI*, 893.

⁴³ One document even goes as far as saying that “Moses, Mohammad, and Jesus were all communists.” See “Khorasan and Northeast Persia,” 17 July 1920, F.O. C7594/510/34.

⁴⁴ *Kommunist*, 22 July 1920; as quoted in Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 253.

⁴⁵ “Novaya Grouzia,” 29 July 1920, *French Archive MAEF*; in *RMI*, 907.

proved how little they understood the patrimonial relationship between landlord and peasant. As the nationalist politician Karim Sanjabi wrote in the 1930s: “The landowner in Persia is not considered by his peasants as a businessman linked to them by contractual ties, but on the contrary as a chief, a master, a lord. . . . Also, by means of the legitimate right of ownership of the land, he exercises a right of sovereignty and organization over the village. . . . The landowner is the intermediary between the peasants and the public authority, an intermediary who totally supplants the latter.”⁴⁶ The patrimonial relationship did not lead to peasant hostility toward the landlords, but gave them instead a sense of loyalty that resulted in the peasants accepting their status quo. Therefore, when the Revolutionary Committee attempted to enforce the land reforms, “the peasants refused to accept land which the communists proposed to confiscate from the landowners.”⁴⁷

In the midst of such problems, the Revolutionary Committee was also conducting military operations against the Persian Cossack Brigade and planning to march on Teheran. By August 17, reported the London *Times*, the Shah’s troops had “come into contact with the Reds at Isma’ilabad, between Menzil and Kasvin.” After six hours of fighting, the Persian Cossacks successfully “captured the Reds’ stronghold.”⁴⁸ One week later, the Cossacks moved into Resht and took five hundred prisoners, “all belonging to the Eleventh Russian Army organized in Azerbaijan.”⁴⁹ Although the Persian revolutionaries were able to regain control of Resht by September 1, the military

⁴⁶ Quoted in Ghods, *Iran*, 4-5. Also, for a detailed analysis of the relationship between the landlord and peasant in Iran, see Ann Lampton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 295-296.

⁴⁷ R. Ulyanovsky, *Revolutionary Process in the East: Past and Present*, 229-230.

⁴⁸ “Reds’ Losses in Persia,” *Times*, 17 August 1920, p. 9.

⁴⁹ “Persian Cossacks’ Victory,” *Times*, 26 August 1920, p. 9. Also see “Bolshevik Attacks on Persia,” 20 November 1920, F.O. C/12195/56/34.

operations that continued for another month exposed the fact that the Russian Red Army was providing support to the revolutionaries, which could have jeopardized the negotiations that the Soviet government had been seeking with the Teheran government.⁵⁰

Such was the political situation when the Second International published *To the Enslaved Popular Masses of Persia, Armenia, and Turkey*, which called upon the workers and peasant masses of these countries to come together on September 1 in Baku to “discuss how to free yourselves from the chains of servitude, so as to unite in fraternal alliance, so as to live a life based on equality, freedom and brotherhood.”⁵¹ Although most of the ideas presented at the congress were theoretically in line with the Comintern’s previously established thesis *On the National and Colonial Question*, the speech by Haydar Khan was more about expressing grievances against the British than promoting the cause of revolution: “Gathered here are representatives of these and other peoples who are hostile to British and every other kind of imperialism. I am sure that these peoples will reach agreement here and will organize a rebuff to the British and other imperialists and liberate the East from the yoke of the capitalists.”⁵²

One month after the Persian delegates who had attended the Baku Congress returned to Iran, they called a meeting of the ICp Central Committee in which the party adopted Haydar Khan’s moderate program and elected a Second Central Committee. It

⁵⁰ The British were providing military and financial support to the Teheran government, and the Bolsheviks did not want the British to maintain a favorable position in Iran. See J. M. Balfour, *Recent Happenings in Persia* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 196-197. Balfour was the financial advisor to the Persian government at the time.

⁵¹ *Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku, September 1920: Stenographic Report*, trans. and ed. Brian Pearce (New York: Labor Publications, 1977), 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 56.

seems as though the complaints he made at the Baku Congress were enough to convince Sultanzadeh that his program had been too extreme, for the radical theoretician admitted at the meeting that the “bourgeoisie and landlords had deserted Kuchek Khan because of ill-timed communist propaganda and socialist measures.”⁵³ Now he embraced the necessity of collaborating with the nationalist forces:

Taking into consideration the almost absence of the proletarian element with a collective world consciousness and the incredible ignorance and humility of peasant masses pitilessly exploited by landlords, masses, who, in many an area still find themselves in feudal bondage, the Communist Movement, growing in its struggle against the reactionary bloc, must, in its fight, base itself in the East mainly on the petty bourgeois strata. . . . [The petty bourgeoisie] is still discontented with its lot; and for this reason, it is the most revolutionary [class] in the backward countries. The Communist parties of the East must, at the outset, march hand in hand with these elements till complete union with them is realized.⁵⁴

By the spring of 1921, the ICp had reunited with Kuchek Khan and published a new program that vowed to introduce socialism in Iran only after “the bourgeoisie has been democratized, and for this the party will struggle.”⁵⁵ However, according to the document, the struggle would be extremely difficult and require the complete support of Soviet Russia: “[We will achieve our goals] with the help of those poor working men, the Bolsheviks of Russia, who have hoisted Red Standard of Revolutionary Socialism and have proclaimed the message, ‘Let the proletariat of all the world unite!’”⁵⁶

V. Osetrov (Iran dust) and other Soviet historians who have written about the fall of the Gilan republic stressed that the period in which the Second Central Committee

⁵³ Quoted in S. Agayev and V. Plastun, “The Communist and National Liberation Movement in Iran in the 1920s,” translated in R. Ulyanovsky (ed.), *The Comintern and the East: A Critique of the Critique* (Moscow: Progressive Publishers, 1981), 290.

⁵⁴ “The Development of the Communist Movement and the Tactics of the Imperialist Bourgeoisie in the East,” *Zhizn Natsional’noste*, 24 December 1920; published in Chaqueri, *Sultanzadeh: Life and Works*, 17.

⁵⁵ “The Present Object of the Communist Party of Bolshevik Persia,” *Appendix II*, F.O. E4713/6/34, received by the foreign office on March 22, 1922.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

established another alliance with the Jangalis was hardly different from the previous period, in that the new central committee could not effectively deal with the problems that plagued the previous central committee. Although they admit to the fact that, as the Soviet historians S. Agayev and V. Platsun wrote, the Second Central Committee of ICp made some significant achievements in their effort to “set about correcting the mistakes made by the ‘left’-wing Communists,” the fact remained that “the [new] anti-imperialist front in Gilan . . . could not have been a stable one because the party, afflicted by a grave internal crisis, failed to overcome the burden of left-sectarian mistakes altogether.” They continued:

Contrary to the theses of the new ICp Central Committee, the Communist party rushed into setting up Soviets of working peoples. Representatives of the ‘left’ wing of the ICp continued, even at the Third Congress of the Comintern (July 22-July 12, 1921), to oppose cooperation with the national bourgeoisie and liberal landowners. This left-sectarian position found itself reflected both in the ‘Outline Report’ submitted by the ICp delegates . . . to the Executive Committee of the Communist International, as well as in their oral statements at the Congress.⁵⁷

Osetrov’s interpretation of the fall of the Gilan republic after the establishment of the second alliance blames the Persian communists who, he claims, still “wanted to gain control of Kuchek’s Jangali area,” which weakened the effectiveness of the party.⁵⁸

Such an interpretation was designed to reinforce the Soviets new approach towards Iran. At the time it was published, Moscow had just signed the Russo-Persian Non-Aggression Act, which reiterated the Soviets commitment to Iran and was “designed to bolster relations between the two states.”⁵⁹ Not wanting to jeopardize their relationship with the Persian government by supporting another feeble attempt by the Persian

⁵⁷ Agayev and Platsun, “Communist and National Liberation Movement in Iran,” 289-291.

⁵⁸ *CAR*, 311.

⁵⁹ “Chronology of 1927,” *League of Nations Photo Archives*; accessed at <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/1927.htm>, 3 May 2006.

communists to establish the revolution in Iran, the Soviets needed a historical interpretation that supported their position. As a result, Osetrov claimed that “the attempt at liberation by the peasants through an agrarian movement in Gilan had to transform itself into a struggle against the commercial bourgeoisie, [who] owned sixty-percent of the land.”⁶⁰ In effect, bourgeois-democracy needed more time to develop in Iran, which is why the Persian communists failed to generate enough support for their revolutionary cause in Gilan. Nowhere in Osetrov’s argument is there any mentioning of the Soviet government’s change in policy towards promoting the revolutionary movement in Iran as a contributing factor to the demise of the movement. Although, as he correctly points out, problems between certain leftists, moderates, and nationalists persisted and continued to affect the development of the revolutionary experiment in Gilan, the fact that the Soviet government changed its policy in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with the Persian government cannot go unrecognized as an essential factor not only in the destruction of the Gilan republic, but in the demise of the first communist movement, for it allowed Reza Khan to march into Gilan without facing Soviet resistance.

In July of 1920, an article appeared in *Soviet Russia*, the periodical published in New York to represent the voice of the Soviet government, claiming that “an exchange of notes took place between the Persian Government and the Soviet Government at Moscow with the object of opening diplomatic and commercial relations between Persia and Soviet Russia.” On July 4, Moscow received a message from the Persian government stating that, with the “object of inaugurating friendly relations with the Soviet

⁶⁰ V. Osetrov, “Aspects of the Gilan Revolution;” published in Chaqueri, *RMI*, 809.

Government, the Persian government promises to send out two delegations, one to Baku, the other to Moscow.”⁶¹ Georgi Chicherin, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, received the message and responded by saying that “the attitude of the Russian Government toward the interior struggles proceeding in Persia is one of non-intervention, in spite of the similarity in ideas between the government established in Resht and the Russian government.” After falsely stating that “there is now no longer any military or naval force of the Russian Republic in the territory or in the waters of Persia,” he stated that the Soviet government wished “to see the best of relations established between Russia and Persia.”⁶²

On October 31, the prime minister in Teheran sent Moshaver al-Mamalek, a veteran government employee who had just been appointed ambassador to Constantinople, to Moscow to begin negotiations. When he arrived, he set out to negotiate the withdrawal of the Red Army, which had supposedly entered Persian territory in April only to annihilate the remaining forces of Gen. Denikin’s counterrevolutionary forces. However, according to the Soviet government’s view, evacuating these troops from Gilan was not a possibility, for it would allow the British to move in, which would put them in a position to strike against Soviet Azerbaijan. Moshaver al-Mamalek, who had been reporting the proceedings of the negotiations to the British foreign office, responded that, if the Soviet government could “give an absolute guarantee that all Bolshevik troops will be at once withdrawn from Resht and Enzali,

⁶¹ “Persia and Soviet Russia,” *Soviet Russia*, 31 July 1920.

⁶² “Message to Prince Mirza-Firouz, Persian Minister for Foreign Affairs,” *Soviet Russia*, 14 August 1920.

[then the] Persian government will induce His Majesty's government not to advance beyond Manjil."⁶³

Since the Soviets claimed that they were only in Persian territory for security purposes, they were compelled to accept the proposal, as long as the British were willing to evacuate as well. As negotiations continued, the Soviets also agreed to implement the promises they made to the Persian government directly after the Bolshevik Revolution, which declared void all of the concessions and treaties obtained by Imperial Russia from Persia. Interestingly, Moscow also demanded that the Persian communists not be persecuted for their involvement in the revolutionary movement. When this claim was presented to the prime minister, he reported that "he would accede to the request that the Persian communists not be persecuted for their past offenses but that they could not be allowed to oppose the government with impunity in the future."⁶⁴

In effect, the type of agreement that the Soviet government was seeking strikingly resembled the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which proposed to carve Iran up into spheres of influence between the respective foreign powers. As long as the Persian government was willing to recognize the Bolsheviks and not permit another foreign power into this buffer zone, the Soviets would no longer support the revolutionary movement in Gilan. Already in November, Lenin had issued a document to the Politburo, stating the intentions of the Soviet government towards Persia: "A policy of utmost conciliation [is] to be adopted towards . . . Persia, i.e., one directed most of all towards avoiding war. We must not set ourselves the task of conducting any campaign

⁶³ "Relations Between Soviet Government of Russia and Persian Government," 1 December 1920, F.O. C/12684/56/34.

⁶⁴ "Agreement Between the Persian Government and the Soviet Government of Russia," 8 December 1920, F.O. C/12950/56/34.

against . . . Persia. The main task is to be that of guarding Azerbaijan and securing possession of the whole Caspian.”⁶⁵ Moreover, in January of 1921, Lenin directed the Russian Communist party (Bolsheviks) to approve “the political line of the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs in lending Soviet assistance to stop the armed struggle in Gilan as it was no longer a democratic movement.”⁶⁶

On February 26, 1921, just five days after the military commander Reza Khan and the politician Sayed Zia Tabatabai staged a coup d’etat against the Prime Minister Sepahdar Azam’s cabinet in Teheran, the Irano-Soviet Friendship Treaty was signed. Professing a desire to see Persia’s independence and prosperity assured, the Soviet government agreed to abandon all Tsarist claims to Persia, as long as the following provision was established:

In case on the part of third countries there should be attempts by means of armed intervention to realize a rapacious policy on the territory of Persia or to turn the territory of Persia into a base for military action against the R.S.F.S.R, and if thereby danger should threaten the frontiers of the R.S.F.S.R, or those of Powers allied to it, and if the Persian Government after warning on the part of the Government of the R.S.F.S.R shall prove to be itself not strong enough to prevent this danger, the Government of the R.S.F.S.R shall have the right to take its troops into Persian territory in order to take necessary military measures in the interest of self-defense.⁶⁷

Although disagreement about the latter demand prevented the Majles from approving the agreement, it was finally ratified on December 15, after the Soviets agreed to drop the demands for amnesty to ICp members and the establishment of workers’ organizations. By this time, Haydar Khan had been killed in a dispute with Kuchek Khan (September), the Soviets had evacuated all troops from Persian territory (October), and Reza Shah had

⁶⁵ “Draft Decision of the Politbureau of the C.C., R.C.P. (B),” 27 November 1920; published in Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 42, p. 228.

⁶⁶ Agayev and Platsun, “Communist and Nationalist Movement in Iran,” 315.

⁶⁷ “Russian Treaties in the Middle East,” *Soviet Russia*, 30 April 1921.

captured Resht (October). Anticipating these problems, a delegation of five ICp members attended the Third Congress of the Comintern to plead for support from the world proletariat. As one historian said about the appeal to the congress, which was held from June 22 to July 12, 1921: “Acknowledging Persia’s new national awakening, [the ICp delegates] cautioned that communists could not capture power by themselves. They needed the close cooperation of the world proletariat.”⁶⁸ Unfortunately for them, the appeal was pointless, for, as the U.S. minister noted, “it was apparent [by now] that Moscow was no longer considering it advantageous actively to support Persian insurrectionary forces in the North.”⁶⁹

In an effort to provide a theoretical justification for Moscow’s change in policy, Chicherin stated:

To reinforce the East in its struggle against imperialist enemies, not only morally, but also materially, it was indispensable for us to take into consideration the fact that economic development of the Oriental countries alone and the appearance in these countries of a strong national bourgeoisie would create the conditions under which foreign imperialist should withdraw. A strong bourgeoisie [would lead to] the removal of the remnants of feudalism and absolutism, the creation of a compact organism of a national state, capable of putting up a resistance to all attempts against it from abroad, and finally, the development of productive forces which, by way of class struggle, must bring about the communist regime. . . . Proceeding from this fact, our [Soviet] policy, once committed to a positive path, has assumed the task of facilitating the process of the development and of self-consciousness of the bourgeoisie in the Eastern countries as the force capable of creating a strong barrier against the desires of British imperialists and other capitalists.⁷⁰

However, when viewed in light of the economic problems facing the Bolshevik regime and the negotiations that were being conducted with the British to remedy these

⁶⁸ Quoted in Sepehr Zabih, “The Dynamics of the Communist Movement in Iran,” *Ph.D. dissertation*, University of Berkeley, California, June 1963, p. 64.

⁶⁹ “Quarterly Report No. 13,” 12 October 1921 p. 23, USNA 891.00/1216, roll 5.

⁷⁰ Chicherin, “My I Vostok,” *Kommunisticheskaia Revoliutsia*, no. 13 (52) (1923): 25-28; partially translated in Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 293-294.

problems, the ultimate reason behind the Soviets' change in policy towards Iran was actually due to a desperate need to establish trade relations with capitalist countries. By autumn of 1920, in order to stabilize Russia's economic position, as the historian Edward Carr pointed out, "there was a further strengthening of those forces in Soviet policy which made for a temporary accommodation with the capitalist world."⁷¹ Due to the backwardness of Russia's economy and the state of war that occupied the country for the first four years after the revolution, the Soviet system would not be able to sustain itself without establishing a policy of accommodation with the capitalist world. As Lenin explained:

So long as we remain, from the economic and military standpoint, weaker than the capitalist world, we must stick to the rule: we must be clever enough to utilize the contradictions and oppositions among the imperialists. . . . Politically we must utilize the conflicts among our adversaries which are explained by the most profound economic causes. . . . We must be clever enough, by relying on the peculiarities of the capitalist world and exploiting the greed of the capitalist for raw materials, to extract from it such advantages as will strengthen our economic position – however strange this may appear among the capitalists.⁷²

On March 16, 1921, after months of negotiations, the Soviet government gave in to all of Great Britain's demands and signed the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement. Although they agreed that neither country would impose any form of blockade against the other and that trade would resume immediately, the Soviet government had to promise not to promote its revolutionary cause in the East and to refrain from promoting any type of propaganda against the British government.⁷³

⁷¹ Edward Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution, 1917-1923*, vol. 3 (London, 1983), 272.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 276-277; also quoted in Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 287.

⁷³ For a copy of the trade agreement, see Richard Ullman, *The Anglo-Soviet Accord* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 474-478. The text from this section of Ullman's book is also available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1918p/sovtrade.html>.

Not until the treaties with the Persian and British government were signed did the revolutionary movement in Gilan start to seriously break down. The Soviets' decision to support the Teheran government gave Reza Khan an uncontested opportunity to strike against the Gilan republic. After repeated attempts to negotiate with Kuchek Khan the surrender of his forces – which the Soviet envoy in Teheran, Theodore Rothstein, played a part in – Reza Khan marched the newly consolidated Iranian Army into Resht and captured the city in October 1921, killing Kuchek Khan and forcing Ehsanollah Khan and the other left-wing leaders into Soviet territory.⁷⁴ By November 1, the revolutionary movement in Gilan was completely destroyed, and Northern Iran was under the control of the central government in Teheran.

When the Soviet government changed its policy in favor of establishing diplomatic relations with the Persian government over promoting the revolutionary movement in Gilan, the revolutionaries who had been dedicating their lives to the struggle against the Shah's government lost any chance they had to successfully establish change in Iran. The Persian communists, since their emergence on the political scene in 1916, had contributed enormously to bringing about popular support in the North for the invading Soviet forces in the spring of 1920, only to be abandoned a year later so that the Bolsheviks could establish contact with the capitalist world. As a result, the Teheran government was able to unleash a military campaign on the revolutionaries and destroy the republic.

⁷⁴ For Rothstein's involvement in the negotiation process with Kuchek Khan during the summer and fall of 1921, see Chaqueri, *Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran*, 354-366.

Although the revolutionary government faced internal problems (ideological differences) and the external problems (gaining support from the peasant masses), the fact that the Soviet government no longer identified with the revolutionary struggle in Iran was the most significant factor contributing to its demise. After the fall of the republic, the Communist party in Iran became organizationally weak and was forced to conduct its work clandestinely. Reza Khan, who had been consolidating his power since the 1921 coup d'etat, established a new dynasty in Iran in 1924. Because Moscow and the Comintern declared support for the newly established monarchy, the Communist party in Iran was denied, as the historian Miron Rezun stated, "any active voice in the political and economic life of the Iranian nation."⁷⁵ As a result, the communist movement was pushed to the side, with the party leader, Sultanzadeh, working in Moscow as the Chief of the Near Eastern Section of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. It was not until the Second World War, in which Reza Shah was forced to abdicate, that the Communist party would again be able to have an active voice on Iranian soil.

⁷⁵ Miron Rezun, *The Soviet Union and Iran: Soviet Policy in Iran From the Beginning of the Pahlavi Dynasty Until the Soviet Invasion in 1941* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 265.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

It would be easy to conclude that Great Britain, Tsarist Russia, and the Soviet Union were to blame for the failure of the revolutionary movements in Iran before the rise of the Pahlavi dynasty. After all, the Constitutional Revolution, social democratic movement, and the first communist movement each suffered heavy losses at the expense of these foreign countries. Neither of the three hesitated to intervene or withdrawal support for a particular cause in Iran when an opportunity to further their own interests presented itself. In cases such as the Constitutional Revolution and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, actions taken by the respective foreign powers played a prominent part in destroying the revolutionary movements.

This explanation illuminates one key problem the progressive forces faced in Iran during the first quarter of the twentieth century, but it does not take into account the damaging effects that Iran's traditional political culture had on the revolutionary movements. Although some few Iranians had begun to identify with a larger national community, remnants of the traditional social structure continued to have an adverse effect on the new political system. The age-old custom of loyalty to one's family, tribe, or local community (which still persists to some degree in Iran today) contributed to the inability of the Iranian left to attract a majority of the masses and also to the factionalism that existed within the political parties that emerged during the Constitutional Revolution. Not only did a plethora of political parties emerge with different goals, but irreconcilable

differences existed between individuals within the same party. The Democrats were divided on the issue of land reform during the Constitutional Revolution, the social democrats could not agree on the type of revolutionary activity to be conducted after the civil war, and the nationalists parted ways with the communists after the left-wing faction of the party took over the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran because they did not want a Bolshevik-style revolution in Iran. These differences weakened the revolutionary movements and helped the reactionary forces regain control of Iran with foreign support.

As a result, Reza Shah came to power in 1924 and dismantled the revolutionary movements. Although the Majles continued to exist as a political institution, Reza Shah maintained complete control over it throughout his reign by using his highly centralized authority to determine the outcome of each election. The revolutionary movement in Gilan, however, was completely destroyed. Finding refuge in Moscow, Persian communists were instructed by the Communist International to support the new “bourgeois-democratic” regime in Iran. In 1927, after the Second Congress of the Iranian Communist party, the Persian communists publicly denounced Reza Shah’s military dictatorship and vowed to fight for the establishment of a republic in Iran. In response, the Persian government banned all trade unions and arrested one hundred and fifty labor organizers and communist leaders between 1927 and 1932. Those leaders who remained in the Soviet Union, such as Avetis Sultanzadeh, “disappeared” during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

Other surviving party activists found refuge in Germany, where they published the party organ *Paykar* (Battle) and became well-versed in European socialism. Although many leading activists returned to Iran during the 1930s, they were unable to

conduct political activity until the fall of Reza Shah's military dictatorship before the Second World War. As a result of their training abroad, the revolutionaries returned to Iran with stronger ties to the Soviet Union, which had a lasting effect on the party's relationship with the nationalists.

Thus the problems in Iran that plagued the revolutionary movements of the early twentieth century continued to have an adverse effect in the post war era. Factionalism, lack of popular support, and the external involvement of foreign countries in Iran's internal affairs all contributed to destroying the dreams of those Iranians who felt enthusiastic about the type of change constitutionalism and social democracy would bring to their country.

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