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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A critical analyzes of social and communist movement in Iran 1900-41

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Abstract

This article deals with the origin and development of the party system's beginnings, with especial emphasize on social and communist movements related to the period 1900-41.

The party system within Iran had its origins in a series of prototype parties-the dawra¹ [see below], Band², Parti Bazi³-which subsequently developed into the more structured anjuman, during the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911.

Foreign intervention, i.e Britain and Soviet Union, and Iranian tyrannical rule which oppressed its people. These aims banded groups together and thus furthered the development of the Party system within the country: the first organized Party, the Communist Party of Persia, was formed in 1920.

The political upheavals associated with the rise to power and establishment of Riza Shah. In 1921, following his coup d'etat which put him in power, Riza Khan encouraged the party system to develop. Upon his accession to the throne, however, Riza Shah began to see the parties as a serious and dangerous threat to his power, and began a campaign of suppression against them and trade-unions. All parties were banned or crushed, and Riza Shah passed a bill prohibiting any Communist membership; as a result, most parties either vanished or went underground for the whole period 1925-41.

I have tried to discuss the critical analyze the social and communist movement in Iran where feudal system was predominated. Traditionalist and religious people and monarchy where in power.

1. Dawras in the of Form of Faramushkhanas (Freemason groups) frequently engaged in informal or clandestine activities that resulted in direct political influence.
2. Band- a collaboration of like-minded thinkers in a mutually supportive, though informally organized political group, usually.
3. Parti Bazi- a term that refers to individual petitioning of bureaucracy, military or security organizations, in order to achieve a stated aim

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Introduction

Within the Iranian political system during the period 1941-47 there existed a number of left-wing parties exhibited a varied range of Socialist leanings. The Tudeh Party as the largest, most influential and long-lived indeed of all the political parties, was the sole true and full-fledged Communist grouping. Its proclaimed ideology was Marxist-Leninist, not Socialist, and statements of this fact by the hostile central government were not refuted by the Tudeh Party.

This situation has led the majority of observers of this period of Iranian history, both ignorant and informed, to assume the total dependence of the Tudeh Party upon the Soviet Union. The organization of the USSR on Marxist-Leninist lines and its proximity to, and interest in, Iran prompted the natural, but mistaken, idea that the Tudeh Party was nothing but a Soviet creation or a Soviet puppet¹. [Sayr-I Kumunist Dar Iran, (1959)]

This presupposition can clearly be refuted with the recognition that Communism was not simply an ideology wholly imported from the Soviet Union but had long-standing precedents in Iran going back as far as the political aspects of the teachings of Mani² [K. Kishavarz, (1975)] from 242 onwards and the ideology of Mazdak³ [F. M. Javanshir, (1980)] a century later.

The history of Iran has been punctuated by egalitarian peasant uprisings, and while it would be difficult to show that the Tudeh Party was a natural outgrowth of such movements, it is clear that it would have made no progress in Iran if it had not found many who were predisposed to give a favourable reception to its ideas. Its beginnings can perhaps be traced back to 1880, when an article on scientific socialism reprinted from a Turkish paper was published in Iran⁴ [Iran, (1259), (1359), newspaper], together with an editorial comment, while a year later Farhang in Isfahan published a series of articles by the Iranian political philosopher, Jamal al-Din Asadabadi (Afghani) considered the pioneer in the spreading of reforming ideas in Iran⁵ [G. R. Sabri-Tabrizi, (1958)].

At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, much socialist influence was being gained from the Russian based Social Democratic movement throughout Iranian socialist circles. The Tudeh was at its inception party to this reception, not as is commonly assumed as a dependent grouping, but rather as an independent localized Communist party within Iran. The more secure footing of the Social Democratic movement in Russia made it the natural mutual ally of the tentative Iranian parties. Thus we shall begin our discussion of the origin of the Tudeh Party with an analysis of its initial connection with the Social Democratic party, and follow it afterwards with that of the Hizb-i aAdalat and the Persian Communist Party (PCP).

Social Democratic Party (Ijtimaiyyun-i Ammiun)

The most important character concerned with the SDP was Haydar Khan.⁶ [G. R. Sabri-Tabrizi, (1958)] He was born of a radical family and was influenced early on by Narimanov, founder of the Social Democrats in Baku. Haydar Khan was given the task of setting up an electrical plant in Mashhad. While in Mashhad, he was advised by Russian social democrats to establish a political grouping. However⁷ [Muntakhabat-i Khatirat-i Haydar Khan, (1949)] he failed to achieve this because of the ignorance of socialist ideas amongst the population. As the factory venture proved unsuccessful he moved to Tehran,

where his ideas did attract a certain following, even amongst the clergy.

At this time, the Social Democratic party in Baku⁸ [Ettehadieh, M. (1979)] spread its influence throughout the Caucasus; after the Persian Revolution, it also seized the opportunity to spread into Iran initially through the exchange of ideas with Persian revolutionaries. The ultimate transfer of the party into Iran was the task entrusted to Haydar Khan.

Advice was given by the Baku organization to the Markaz-i Ghaybi (Secret Centre), a 12 man group of middle-class radicals in Tabriz, who knew the Caucasus, and assistance was also given to the Kumita-yi Sitara (Star Committee) of three Armenians, and four other constitutionalists in Rasht and to Bahar and his intellectual group in Mashhad. The leader of the Kumita-yi Barq (Committee of Light) was Yefrem Khan, of the Armenian Dashnak party. By the end of the Constitutional revolution in 1909, out of the secular parties, the Social Democrats were second in strength only to the Constitutionalists. According to Tarbiyat “...during the first period of the Constitution, the only organized party was that of the Social Democrats.”⁹ [E. G. Browne, (1914)]

The Social Democratic Party had branches in the four Northern cities and several ‘front’ organization, including the Anjuman-i-Azarbayjan, in Tehran; the Mujahed (fighter) in Tabriz, and the Mujahidin (fighters) in Mashhad. With a strong party newspaper in Tabriz, the party gained a major success in persuading 300 Armenia, Georgian and Russian volunteers to guard Tabriz and collected a force of Caucasian revolutionaries. Yefrem Khan, with the combined force of social democrats and Dashnaks, liberated Rasht and with help from the Bakhtiyyar tribes, captured Tehran. The membership, however was rather illusory since the party was small, weak and ignorant of socialism: it rather advocated, in fact, constitutionalism, secularism and parliamentary reform.¹⁰ [For details of the party programme, (Aut.1962)] On the other hand, the programme of the Baku Social Democratic Party, which was translated into Persian by Tabrizi radicals, was more socialist-calling for land-ownership by farm-workers and universal religious freedom.¹¹ [Ibrahimian, (1969)]

The Mujahidin merely stated that their programme was in accordance with the principles of Islam, and in 1907 the programme of the Mashhad group focused upon centralization, rather like that of the Bolshevik Party in Russia.

The radical element sought not a Marxist ideology: instead they looked for Caucasian support for the constitution. Haydar Khan rescued the party, when its ‘raison d’etre’ seemed lost with the defeat of the Royalists in 1909. He was supported by the radical

Prince Iskandari, an ex- constitutionalist, and Taqizada from Tabriz, both of whom were wary of the label 'socialist' because of popular misconceptions of the term.¹² [Dunya2, (summer 1966)]

Within parliament the party had 27 deputies.¹³ [M. Malikzada, (1954)] Outside parliament, Haydar Khan was the organisation's leader. Haydar Khan probably avoided the Majlis because of his ignorance of Persian and therefore the non-parliamentary group was more daring in outlook.¹⁴ [Ibrahimian, (1962)] They attracted the opposition of the Ulama by their radical newspaper 'Iran-i Naw' (new Iran) and by their violent tactics (for instance, the murder of Ayat Allah Bihbahani in 1910, which sparked off a spate of assassination).

After the Anglo-Russian invasion of 1911 the party was weakened and its newspaper banned. Several socialists were executed and many more fled. The Iranian movement split into two streams following upon the Russian Revolution: parliamentary Reform and International Radicalism. The Reformists were strongest in Parliament, the Radicals in the Caucasian oil-fields. Haydar Khan meanwhile, was killed in the struggle of the Gilan movement, which was partly communist. After the first Russian Revolution, Iranian radicals in Baku formed the separate Adalat (Justice) Party, which ultimately became the Persian Communist Party.

Justice Party (hizb-i-Adaat)

The origins of the early Adalat Party¹⁵ [Cf. Azhir, (July 19, 1943)] are to be found in the social conditions obtaining in Iran in this period. The peasants of the countryside were oppressed by tyrannical landowners and lived in abject hunger and poverty. In reaction against the harsh measure employed by the landowners, together with the chance of employment, these peasants migrated across the near-by border into Russia, a large number being attracted to Baku where oil refinery offered job opportunities. They were willing to stay, despite Iranian consular pressure and the cold reception they found, accepting low wages and poor conditions, because these were, however unsatisfactory, still more promising than the situation that faced them in Iran.¹⁶ [Azhir, (July 20-25, 1943)]

Several factors were responsible for the pull towards communism which attracted the Iranian workers in Baku. Their strong sense of exploitation by the local landowners contrasted sharply with the principle of equality operating within the socialist party. The socialist party in Baku exerted a large amount of influence itself – under the leadership of Norimanov and the sentiments expressed by the Russian

Revolution, which favoured the workers' cause¹⁷ [Azhir, (Aug. 19, 1943)] also attracted them.

The Baku party encouraged such feelings, including the revolutionary flames aroused in the workers by the 1905 Constitutional Revolution in Iran. Such patriotic and revolutionary ideals compensated for the lack of education among the Iranian workers and thus inspired – as well as armed with weapons supplied in Russia- they returned to Iran to join the already existing anti-government constitutional groups. They were unable, however, to unite with the Mujahidin for the latter were supported by the landowners, a compromise which was unacceptable to the workers, fighting as they were, on class lines. As a result of this internal conflict, the zeal of the returning workers was dissipated: some were killed, others abandoned their revolutionary ideals. The later Adalat party's membership formed around the dedicated core who retained their fervour and enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause. It should be noted that Iran was not ready at this point to accept communist principles, and the party blossomed when this receptivity had increased and strengthened within Iranian society.¹⁸ [Azhir, (July 26-30, 1943)]

The first official meeting of the Adalat Party were held in the Baku oil refinery following the collapse of the Tzarist regime. During these meeting, the president – A. Ghaffarzada- was elected, and the constituent committee were formed. In this initial period, the Iranian workers were the most active members; they were anxious to prepare the ground for an industrially efficient Iran, with a strong worker element, but even more, were eager to grasp those principles of communism with which to return to Iran and create within the country a democratic form of government.¹⁹ [Azhir, (Oct. 21, 1943)] This movement was due to unfavourable social and political conditions within Iran.

The Adalat was a true workers' party: its programme and manifesto were adopted from the Social Democratic Party of the Soviet Union, as were as methods employed by the latter party. A Council of Iranian workers was soon formed within the social Democratic Party, its members numbers numbering 50,000 by 1917.²⁰ [Azhir, (Aug. 22, 1943)] It established contacts with sympathetic groups within Iran itself, spreading propaganda throughout the country, so that within a short period secret branches of the party had sprung up, extending the party's influence from the Soviet Union, over Iran, and linking up with groups such as the Social Democratic party. Union between these two parties, however, was not achieved, due to the divergent aims and ideas of both groups: Adalat accused the Social Democrats of furthering the interests of the bourgeoisie to which many of them belonged, and the Social Democrats

responded by charging the workers with interfering in the internal affairs of Russian in supporting the Bolshevik Revolution.²¹ [Azhir, (Aug. 26, 1943)]

The leading figure and most prominent member of Adalat was Ghaffarzada, elected as president. Ghaffarzada was asked in 1920 by the Soviet authorities²² [Azhir, (Nov. 7, 1943)] to return to Iran to coordinate the work of the Gilan movement. His death at the hands of opponents of the Adalat, before he was able to begin his activity, had a dramatic effect on both the Gilan movement and the Adalat Party itself. It was responsible, together with the formation of the Musavat Party in Baku, under the leadership of Rasulzade, for the weakening of the Adalat party; Ghaffarzada was replaced by Pishavari.

The establishment of the Adalat Party in Gilan, which was supported by the Communist movement, was part of the way communism was introduced into Iran. Its presence exhibited, however, both positive and negative features. Although it emphasized class equality and land redistribution, its actual grasp of communist ideology was weak, it opposed other ideologies,²³ [see references] and the party was fragmented into communist and non-communist elements, who quarreled between themselves.²⁴ [Azhir, (Feb. 13, 1943)] During this period, the party changed its name to the Persian Communist Party (PCP) and pledged support to the Soviet Union.²⁵ [The First Congress was held in Anzali, (June 1920)] After the collapse of the uneasy alliance between communists and non-communists in the Gilan movement in July 1920, a National Committee for the liberation of Persia was set up, but its policies were deemed too radical for the present state of the Iranian peasantry, and it was also seen at the 1920 Congress in Baku, organized by the Comintern, that the Iranian delegates were primarily anti-British nationalists, rather than committed communists. This led to a new thesis in October 1920, at the election of a new Central Committee (of the PCP), modifying the earlier anti-religious stance and the call for action against Britain and the Central Government was effected by May 1921 and a first attempt was made to extend the party's influence beyond Gilan. On August 4, 1921, Gilan was once again proclaimed a Soviet Republic, but the unity was fragile and the entire movement soon collapsed.

The methods of the PCP now shifted towards the creation of trade union and peasant organizations and gradual infiltration through education and propaganda. The most fertile groups for the latter activity was found to be among Iranian upper and middle class students studying in Germany, who were exposed to European democracy. These students became the core of anti Riza Shah

sentiments and formed the backbone of the communist opposition.²⁶ [M. Rezun, (1981)] Germany became the centre of these activities, since the PCP's movements were restricted in Iran by the policies and legislation of Shah's government. In early 1929, the students started publication of their monthly journal *Sitara-yi Surkh* (Red Star).²⁷ [M. Rezun, (1981)] Later in 1931 another newspaper, *Paykar* (Battle)²⁸ [M. Rezun, (1981)] was issued fortnightly, edited by M. Alavi. The Iranian, student, with the support of the local German Communist Party, spread these publications throughout Europe, even managing to smuggle copies into Iran.²⁹ [M. Rezun, (1981)] This fast growing student movement was felt as a dangerous threat by Riza Shah. He therefore requested the German government to ban all such publications and prohibit further propaganda. At the same time, he introduced a law forbidding similar propagandizing activity within Iran. The Germans acquiesced to this somewhat reluctantly, wanting to maintain their economic ties and good relations with Iran. *Paykar* was banned, and its editor, Alavi, expelled. Despite this, a new publication was started, under the name *Nahzat* (Movement), which shared the same fate as *Paykar*.³⁰ [M. Rezun, (1981)] In 1931, these students having attracted mass support among fellow Iranians studying in Germany, decided upon return to Iran encouraged and led by Arani.³¹ [see references] There, as a consequence, the propaganda law was passed by the Majlis in the same year and they were forced to work underground. Secret discussion groups organized by Arani were formed from lower middle class elements, such as students, teachers, lawyers, judges and trade union leaders attracted through the communist publication *Dunya*, which was strongly anti-fascist,³² [Dunya 3, (1936)] and sports and cultural clubs were used as cover for these meetings. They were uncovered, however, in 1937, apparently through widespread infiltration by the Iranian secret police and 53 of the most prominent members were arrested under the 1931 law. Put on trial in 1938, all denied being communists, but 45 were convicted and given prison sentences. Arani received 10 years, but in his defense, he vigorously upheld his dialectical materialism and attacked the 1931 law as unconstitutional and a violation of justice. He also claimed that both socialism and communism, as intrinsic elements of western civilisation, could not be barred by Iran, which was attempting to westernize itself.³³ [T. Arani, (1943)]

Arani died in prison 16 months later. His colleagues claimed that he had deliberately been refused medical treatment, while the authorities insisted that he had died from incurable typhus. However, in 1943 Azhir stated that, although Arani had died from typhus, the

authorities had purposely placed him in the cell of a former typhoid prisoner. The other 53 members convicted made contacts among other political prisoners within the prison, and were definitely hardened by their prison experience. Upon their release in 1941, they then formed the nucleus of the new Tudeh (Masses) Party, whose leader were Arani's colleagues from Europe.

Conclusion

One of the most important features of the period under study is that Iranian policy was determined, and produced, by an interaction between the country's internal troubles and her external relations. By the beginning of the twentieth century a popular awareness was beginning to grow that the ruling classes were 'selling' Iran to foreign powers, particularly to Russia and to Britain through oil concessions. The ruling Qajar dynasty became increasingly weak and oppressive, and was almost totally obedient to the great powers. But the oppression under which peasants meantime trickle of migrants seeking work in Russia.

But awareness also grew of the need for constitutional reform, and, as the necessary pressure on the government could not be brought by arties as we understand them, which had not yet developed, the struggle was finally won by anjumans which developed from dawras [Dawras in the of Form of Faramushkhanas (Freemason groups) frequently engaged in informal or clandestine activities that resulted in direct political influence.] and were supported by the Ulama, although a major part of the process took place in Azarbayjan. Part of the motive inspiring this movement was a desire to bring Iran into line with contemporary Western Europe.

After the first World War, these anjumans began to grow into such parties as the Hizb-i Dimokrat and the Hizb-i Adaat, which rapidly developed popular political mobilization, but did not provide good conditions for forward-looking leadership unlike that of Riza Shah.

Department of Reza Shah was the introduction of 'fractions', discussion groups which were very like parties in all but name, for example, conservative, liberal and radical; these fraksiyuns supported different foreign powers. These groups, however, did not represent significant political growth throughout Iran or the blossoming of many new parties, which followed on the political hiatus which existed from 1925 until 1941. Of the many new groups formed during this new period of relative freedom of association, the most important was the Tudeh Party, which had its roots in the Hizb-i Adalat of 1916, but whose real founder was Taqi Arani, after whose death in one of Riza Shah's prisons, the arty formed

in September 1941, assuming as their new leader Sulayman Muhsin Iskandari in February 1942.

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20. Azhir, (Aug. 22, 1943), 56.
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