



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

State, society and labour in Iran, 1906-1941 : a social history of Iranian industrialization and labour with reference to the textile industry
Afacan, S.

Citation

Afacan, S. (2015, June 23). *State, society and labour in Iran, 1906-1941 : a social history of Iranian industrialization and labour with reference to the textile industry*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/33227>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/33227>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/33227> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Afacan, Serhan

Title: State, society and labour in Iran, 1906-1941 : a social history of Iranian industrialization and labour with reference to the textile industry

Issue Date: 2015-06-23

Chapter Three: Iran from the Constitutional Revolution to the End of Reza Shah's Reign: 1905-1941

Introduction

Demanding a constitution with established rights and duties was a common reaction at the turn of the twentieth century in despotic regimes in various parts of the world, and in the Middle East in particular. The constitutional revolutions in neighbouring Russia (1905) and the Ottoman Empire (1908) were the two examples which were most relevant to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909.¹ The Iranian Constitutional Revolution should be analysed within this context. Notwithstanding the apparent commonalities with other similar revolutions, however, Iran had distinct characteristics which originated from its social structure and historical development and which in turn determined the course of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution as well as subsequent developments. This chapter investigates this revolution by emphasizing the roles played by various social groups and by analysing the consequences of this revolution for working people in Iran, and the changing class positions during this period. I then proceed to discuss the Pahlavi modernization initiatives in the same framework. For a complete discussion of the revolution and the decades following it, the roles and the perceptions of such classes as trade guilds, intellectuals, the labouring poor, merchants, and the clergy will also be addressed. Overall, the chapter aims at exploring the grassroots dimensions of these developments during this period of nearly four decades.

From Mobilization to Revolution: The Making of the Constitutional Revolution

The first part of the above title is borrowed from Charles Tilly's book which deals with social movements and revolutions.² Apart from the title, his conceiving of revolution in terms of collective action provides a useful framework for investigation of the making of the Iranian

¹ The effects of these two revolutions deeply influenced the Iranian constitutionalists. An eye-witness reported that "the Russian Revolution [had] had a most astounding effect" among the protesters gathered in the garden of the British Legation in 1906. E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution, 1905-1909* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1966), 120. On the other hand, largely owing to the existence of many bilingual constitutionalists, the developments in the Ottoman Empire were closely watched and admired. Both the literature produced in such Ottoman cities, like Istanbul and Cairo, and abroad, mainly Paris which was at that time an important centre for Young Turks, were followed with great interest by Iranian constitutionalists. For an ample discussion of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution in comparison with the Ottoman case see: Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 335-426.

² Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978).

Constitutional Revolution. Tilly suggests five major components which he regards as necessary for the analysis of a collective action: interest, organization, mobilization, opportunity and finally collective action.³ While interest is simply put as “the gains and the losses resulting from a group’s interaction with other groups”, by organization Tilly refers “to that aspect of a group’s structure which most directly affects its capacity to act on its interests”.⁴ Mobilization starts once a group reaches an interest-based coalition and the various elements which constitute it bring together their resources, such as manpower, goods, weapons etc. Nonetheless, these can only produce the expected outcome if the third component, i.e. opportunity is present. According to Tilly, opportunity “concerns the relationship between a group and the world around it”.⁵ Once the above components are materialized they produce a collective action which “consists of people’s acting together in pursuit of common interests”.⁶ The process of the making of a collective action is obviously not as neat and schematic as the above illustration might suggest. Quite to the contrary, not only are the steps not strictly sequential, but also, there are ideological, personal and other factors involved. Nonetheless, the model is useful for a structural analysis of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

The outbreak of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution cannot be explained only by the despotic rule of the Qajar monarchs, even given the deep dissatisfaction it created especially among the urban and educated classes. The existing scholarship on early twentieth century Iranian history aptly emphasizes the significance of the political and ideological processes on the path to the Revolution. Notwithstanding their significance, however, the larger population was rather concerned with economic developments and their deteriorating living conditions for which ‘the foreigners’ and the ever-increasing European economic penetration were blamed. Moreover, guild members, merchants and labourers, and other social groups, were frustrated by the unpopular economic policies of various Qajar governments in the face of distressing economic conditions. Against the background of arbitrary concessions granted to foreigners and the excessive ready-made European imports, the new tariff treaty signed with

³ Ibid., 7

⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵ Ibid., 7. Tilly’s cautionary remarks about ‘opportunity’ is particularly important for the analysis of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. After emphasizing the difficulty of studying the opportunity since ‘it is hard to reconstruct the opportunities realistically available to the group at that time’ he states that ‘knowledge of later outcomes make it too easy to second-guess a group’s action, or inaction’. Ibid., 7. Indeed the involvement of diverse classes which ultimately had varying goals from the Constitutional Revolution makes the analysis of interests and opportunity rather complex. As will be seen in the following pages they were both subjects to changes during the period.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

Russia in 1903 furthered the unrest. The treaty brought new tariff rates on certain articles. Accordingly, Russian sugar would pay 2 percent ad valorem determined by weight, while petroleum and matches would pay 4 percent each.⁷ As Entner suggests, the treaty had a positive impact on Iran's unfavourable trade balance due to the new tariffs on exports of raw materials and foods. However it damaged non-Russian enterprise even though "this was not necessarily its sole purpose".⁸ Textiles were among the crafts most severely hurt by the new regulations.

Russia was soon to be followed by other countries, primarily Britain, which also revised its customs treaty with Iran. The treaty had various negative consequences but two proved to be particularly significant. First of all, Iran was no longer able to unilaterally revise its customs tariffs, so that it practically lost control over much of its foreign trade. Secondly, Iranian industries were further damaged, for Russia was interested in importing raw materials from Iran and exporting industrial products.⁹ There were reports regarding the protests organized by artisans and guilds members in order to "force the government to encourage home industries, and to protect them against growing competition from Russian industrial products".¹⁰ Mullahs reportedly agitated against the employment of non-Muslim foreigners for collecting land-taxes from Muslims.¹¹ Protests took place in several cities such as Tehran and Yazd. Agha Seyyed Ali Yazdi, a leading cleric from Tabriz, was arrested and banished for preaching against the treaty and inciting people to resistance.¹²

Along with the treaty the Prime Minister Amin al-Soltan Atabak and Joseph Naus, the Belgian Director of the Customs was harshly attacked 'for selling' the country to Russians, and their dismissal was requested by the protesters. Amin al-Soltan resigned and was replaced by Ain al-Dowleh. The opposition insisted on the dismissal of Naus too. However, not only

⁷ Marvin L. Entner, *Russo-Persian Commercial Relations, 1828-1914* (Florida: Douglas Printing, 1965), 54.

⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹ Hojjat Fallah Tootcar, "Social and Political Activities of Guilds and Artisans from the Iranian Constitutional Revolution to the Rise of Reza Shah, 1906-1925." PhD diss., (in Persian) (Tehran: Tarbiyat Modarres University, 2003), 36.

¹⁰ Gad. G. Bilbar, "The Big Merchants (*tujjar*) and the Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1906," *Asian and African Studies* 11, no. 2(3) (1976): 275-303. Here p. 301 quoted by Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy and the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 35.

¹¹ Fereyduun Adamiyat, *Idiuluzhi-ye Nehzat-i Mashrutiyyat-e Iran*, (Tehran: Payam Press, 1977), 117.

¹² Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 106. Also again in Tabriz Hajj Mirza Hasan Tabrizi, another mojtahed, claimed to have received letters from the great mullahs of the Atabat (i.e Karbala and Najaf). The letters which, as it turned out, were not genuine, authorized a movement against the new customs dues and trade regulations. Thus he urged the Governor of Tabriz to dismiss the Belgian custom-house officials as well as to abolish the new tariffs. Although the letters produced some effect for a brief period and even M. Priem, the Belgian Chief of Customs, fled the city, the fact was discovered and resulted in the banishment of Hajj Mirza Hasan and his followers from the city while the new tariff remained in force. Ibid., 107.

that he was not dismissed but quite to the contrary his influence increased even further during Ain al-Dowleh's premiership. Naus had practically assumed the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs as he also became High Treasurer, Head of the Passport Department, and Member of the Supreme Council of State.¹³ Apart from these developments increasing critiques of Iran's backwardness and corrupt officials were written and circulated, which contributed to popular agitation. Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (an Iranian-Azari intellectual living in Russian Caucasia), Mirza Agha Khan Kermani, Zayn al-Abedin Maragha'i, Jamal al-Esfahani and Malek al-Motakallemin were among the most prominent figures of this growing literature. Akhundzadeh's *Kamal al-Dowleh va Jalal al-Dowleh* (Kamal al-Dowleh and Jalal al-Dowleh); Maraghai's *Siyahatnameh-e Ebrahim Beg* (The Travel book of Ibrahim Beg); and *Ruya-yi Sadeqeh* (True Dream) co-authored by Jamal al-Esfahani and Malek al-Motakallemin were among the prominent examples of such literature.¹⁴

Thus, the elimination of the arbitrary rule constituted the common interest which brought diverse groups together. The close relations between the bazaaris and the clergy provided the organizational groundwork of the opposition. A number of developments which took place in 1905 created a suitable atmosphere and the pushing factors for mobilization. The first one was the Japanese victory in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905. The victory of an Asian constitutional power, Japan, against a European absolute monarchy, Tsarist Russia, had significant consequences in Iran. For many reformists Japan was believed to have all the graces of progress by at the same time preserving their genuine national identity and traditions. By their victory they allegedly showed that a European Great Power could be defeated by an Asian power. On the other hand Japan being the only Asian constitutional power while Russia was the only major European non-constitutional power further reinforced the message as to the advantages of a constitutional regime.¹⁵ Apart from its political significance, the war further deteriorated Iran's economy and increased inflation in the country.¹⁶ Protests broke out again. On the night of 9 Muharram 1323 (16 March 1905) Seyyed Abdollah Behbehani, a prominent mojtahed of the period, gave a harsh sermon against Naus and Ain al-Dowleh. By showing a picture of Naus and his colleagues in a mullah's attire taken at a costume party two years earlier he called him 'corrupt'

¹³ Ibid., 112.

¹⁴ Nikki Keddie, "Iran under the Late Qajars 1848-1922", in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 7, *From Nader Shah to the Islamic Republic*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 174-212. Here P. 201-202.

¹⁵ Keddie, "Iran under the Late Qajars", 202.

¹⁶ Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 51.

(*haramzadeh*) and ‘cursed’ (*mal’un*) and demanded his dismissal.¹⁷ He then added that despite the insistent demand for issuing a fatwa for the killing of Naus he did not consider it necessary since, he argued, by his disrespect to the Prophet and mullahs he already deserved to be killed by any Muslim.¹⁸ The protesters insisted on the dismissal of Naus and took sanctuary (*bast*) in Abd al-Azim Shrine near Tehran. Reportedly the number of *bastis* reached five hundred.¹⁹ Upon the arbitration of Mohammad Ali Shah, the heir apparent, who promised the *bastis* that once the Shah arrived back from his European tour he would try for the dismissal of Naus, they left the Shrine and ended the sanctuary.

Nonetheless, arbitrary rule continued in both the capital and the provinces. In such regions as Fars, Mashhad and Qazvin, among other, news of oppressive rule added to the existing dissatisfaction.²⁰ Yet, the move to trigger the discontent in Tehran came from the Governor Ahmad Khan ‘Ala al-Dowleh. Due to the rising sugar prices caused by the Russo-Japanese War the Governor asked in 1905 two prominent sugar merchants, Seyyed Hashemi Qandi and Hajj Seyyed Isma‘il Khan, to reduce their prices. In response, Seyyed Hashemi told the Governor that the rising prices came as a result of the reduced sugar imports caused by the Russo-Japanese war and the revolution in Russia. ‘Ala al-Dowleh insisted, but Seyyed Hashemi did not retreat. The governor consequently ordered these two respected merchants bastinadoed.²¹ As a matter of fact such arbitrary disciplinary actions were not exceptional in contemporary Iran. Yet, for bazaaris and the clerics associated with them this penalty was the straw that broke the camel’s back, and they reacted decisively. Backed by the two prominent mullahs, Seyyed Mohammad Tabataba’i and Seyyed Abdullah Behbehani, the protesters took sanctuary in the Shah Mosque in the city of Tehran, but the *bastis* were dispersed by ‘Ain al-Dowleh. At the suggestion of Seyyed Mohammad Tatatabai a number of mullahs, including Behbehani and the influential cleric Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, decided to retire to the shrine of Shah ‘Abd al-‘Azim in the south of Tehran where two thousand theology students joined them.²² This is known in Iranian history as *Hejrat-e Soghra*, i.e. the Minor Exodus. When increasing numbers of bazaaris supported the *bastis* and began to join the sanctuary, the Prime Minister ‘Ain al-Dowleh threatened any shopkeeper who shut his shop and joined the

¹⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁸ Adamiyat, *Idi`uluzhi*, 153.

¹⁹ Fallah-Tootcar, “Social and Political Activities of Guilds”, 36.

²⁰ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 112.

²¹ Fallah-Tootcar, “Social and Political Activities of Guilds”, 38. Fallah-Tootcar adds that according to some eyewitnesses Hajj Ahmad Qayseriyeh, Agha Seyyed Hosayn Lajavardi and several other individuals were also punished.

²² Keddie, “Iran under the Late Qajars, 202.

sanctuary with a legal sanction permitting people to plunder his workplace. A few shops were indeed plundered, but the *bastis* refused to obey. Their major demands were the dismissal of Naus along with the governor of Tehran and the establishment of an *adalatkhaneh* or a House of Justice.

The Shah dismissed the governor and agreed to the *adalatkhaneh* upon which action the sanctuary-seekers returned to Tehran. However, the Shah did not keep his promise. Towards the end of April the mullahs sent a letter to the Shah requesting that he enact his promised reforms. Yet, the petition produced no effect. Besides, people were no longer allowed to go out into the street after three hours following sunset.²³ Also, several prominent opposition leaders were arrested or exiled. For example, Seyyed Jamal al-Din Va'ez was expelled to Mashhad, while Majd al-Eslam Kermani was arrested. When Sheikh Mohammad Soltan al-Va'ezin was imprisoned in the Soldiers' Quarters, the building was attacked by theology students by the order of Seyyed Abdollah Behbehani. In the incident a young seyed (presumed descendent of the Prophet) student was shot to death. During his funeral another fifteen, including another seyed, were killed too.²⁴

This consequently gave way to the *bast* in the Masjed-e Jame', the main mosque in the city centre, from where the *bastis* moved to Qum, a town near Tehran. This was the start of what is known in Iranian history as Great Exodus or *Hejrat-e Kobra*. Fearing another government intervention the protesters decided to take sanctuary in a safer place. There was among the protesters a deliberate conviction about the British sympathy for a constitutional movement in Iran while Russia was largely believed to be hostile to it. This point was reported in later years by C. Spring-Rice, the British minister at Tehran during 1906 and 1908.²⁵ This was expressed by the following lines written on the top of cobblers' tent: "In the Embassy of His Britannic Majesty / Iranian people came together weeping and asking for justice".²⁶ Consequently after some correspondence with Evelyn Grant Duff, Secretary of the British Legation and the acting charge d'affairs, the protesters obtained permission to move to the legation compounds in Tehran. This should be regarded, to follow Tilly's model, as part of

²³ Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 115.

²⁴ An incident that occurred only about a month before this event suffices to explain the influence of the killing of a seyed. In June 1906 a young seyed is reported to have thrown a stone at the Dutch Minister in Tehran while he was driving. The Minister was seriously wounded and he nearly lost his eye. When he made a formal complaint to the Prime Minister, Moshir al-Dowleh, the latter apologized for boy's action but stated that in the present state of the town the Government dared not to cause a seyed to be beaten. The boy was imprisoned not more than a few days and was then released. FO 371/111 "Situation in Persia, July 1906".

²⁵ FO 881/8870 "General Report for Persia for the Year 1906".

²⁶ Fallah-Tootcar, "Social and Political Activities of Guilds", 48.

the opportunity for restive unrest. On the one hand there was the rivalry between Britain and Russia for the control of the region while on the other, the personal enmity among prominent figures such as ‘Ain al-Dowleh and Amin al-Soltan provided an advantageous atmosphere for the opposition. Based on his correspondences with the eyewitnesses E G. Browne provides a lively description of *bastis* and their organization in their stay in the legation garden. *Bastis* were organized along guild-lines with each guild having its tent. The number of tents was reportedly more than five hundred.²⁷ There are varying estimates as to the number of *bastis* but evidently they were more than a thousand.²⁸ The basic needs of the *bastis* were provided for by wealthy merchants. Faridun Adamiyat names intellectuals, mullahs and merchants as the three principal elements of the constitutional movement.²⁹ According to him students of modern and classical schools, guilds members and ordinary people later on took part in the agitations. However although the movement was first launched by the merchants and the mullahs, guild members played more than marginal roles in the process and in its outcome.

At first there was much confusion about the protesters’ basic demands. Adamiyat argues that the mullahs were primarily concerned with the dismissal of the Prime Minister, ‘Ain al-Dowleh, while theology students asked for the “establishment of a House of Justice which would implement the Muhammadan laws”.³⁰ Security and confidence about the future were among their basic objectives.³¹ Such demands were in time translated into a call for a National Assembly. The legation premises turned into a school where many issues but especially politics were discussed. The poems written on the top of almost each tent provides valuable insight about the popular perception of the protests and its expected outcomes. There were in their slogans an emphasis on promoting Islam and compliance with its principles along with a request for a House of Justice. The sock weavers, for example, foretold the good news that “out of His justice the Shah of shahs will soon erect a House of Justice”.³² Yet the *bastis* appear to have paid special attention to not to outrage the Shah and make a clear distinction

²⁷ Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 56.

²⁸ The number varies between 12,000 and 16,000. According to Browne a number between 12,000 and 14,000 is nearer the truth: *The Persian Revolution*, 199. Sohrabi, however, gives estimates their number at between 14,000 and 16,000. Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism*, 344. In his reports about the developments Cecil Spring-Rice also estimates the numbers of *bastis* to be at 14,000 by 2nd September 1906. See: FO 881/8870 “General Report for Persia for the Year 1906”..

²⁹ Adamiyat, *Idi`uluzhi*, 147.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 168. Based on his conversation with Seyyed Hasan Takizadeh, a prominent Azari intellectual and politician, Browne writes that when the Shah promised to dismiss the Prime Minister some of the *bastis* wished to end the sanctuary. However, a commission formed to formulate rather fundamental demands. They convinced the *bastis* to stay and the calls for a House of Justice in time developed into the demand for a National Assembly or Majles-i Melli. Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 122.

³² Fallah-Tootcar, “Social and Political,” 49.

between him and the oppression they complained about. This is put by tailors as follows: “In order to obtain justice Iranians put their tents in the Embassy. To praise the just Shah people hastened to come together. We are not querulous towards our Sultan, may the glorious God bring him help and victory”.³³ In the face of these determined protests, Mozaffar al-Din Shah finally proclaimed the constitutional system a short time before his death in 1906. The Iranian Constitutional Revolution has been the subject of various studies which emphasized various aspects. Instead of providing a standard account of the revolution and its aftermath, this chapter will concentrate on its neglected dimensions by emphasizing the perceptions and attitudes of the wider population throughout the process. Petitions, along with printed media, memoirs etc., provide us with invaluable insights into subalterns' reflections on the constitutional system, its performance and later developments. Therefore, the coming section deals with the history of petitioning in Iran and concentrates on how petitions functioned as an uninterrupted channel of interaction of state and society in Iran.

“Do You Want me to Go and Present this to the Majles?”: Petitioning in Iran

Petitioning, both written and verbal, has a long history in Iran and it has been considered throughout centuries an indispensable part of a just monarchy, as it was in other parts of the world. In pre-Islamic Iran the king would personally appear before the public, mostly in bazaar squares, at periodic intervals to attend to people's grievances and demands. Islam further reinforced this practice and petitions continued to be one of the most effective channels between the rulers and the ruled. Yet it was during the 19th century, particularly during Naser al-Din Shah's reign (r. 184-1896), that several measures were taken for the institutionalization of petitioning. In 1860 the Shah declared by a decree that he saved Mondays exclusively for giving audience to the aggrieved and to those with demands. It was further added in the decree that the Shah would not meet any of his ministers on those days to attend exclusively to the issues of his subjects.³⁴ Apparently this practice did not last very long. Thus in 1874 another decree announced the establishment of the Box of Justice in Tehran in which supplicants would drop their petitions and the practice was, one year later, enlarged to cover the provinces too.³⁵ These boxes were protected by special guards to secure

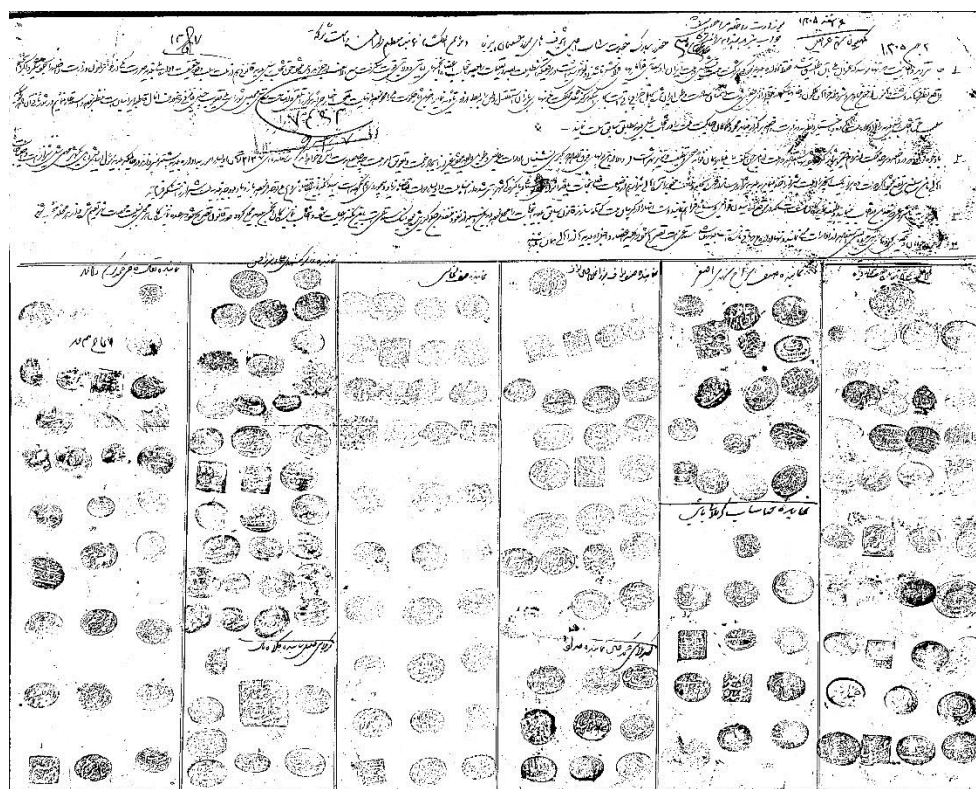
³³ Ibid., 53.

³⁴ Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism*, 297.

³⁵ Ibid., 297. Schneider gives 1864 as the date of the establishment of these boxes both in Tehran and in the provinces. Schneider, *The Petitioning System in Iran: State, Society and Power Relations in the Late 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2006), 35.

the necessary comfort and trust for the supplicants and they were to be emptied twice a week by a trustee of the Shah who would deliver him the petitions in a sealed bag. The guard would even suffer the death penalty should he deny access to petitioners.³⁶ So too any petitioner submitting false petitions would suffer the death penalty.³⁷ In 1882 the more institutional and structured Council for the Investigation of Grievances (*majles-e tahqiq-e mazalem*) was founded for the administration of justice.³⁸ The petitions from this council provide invaluable information about late 19th century Iran particularly regarding the social issues aspects of the period. Yet they are mostly summaries of the original letters which apparently have not survived to this day. This is the main difference between them and the ones sent to the Majles following the Constitutional Revolution.

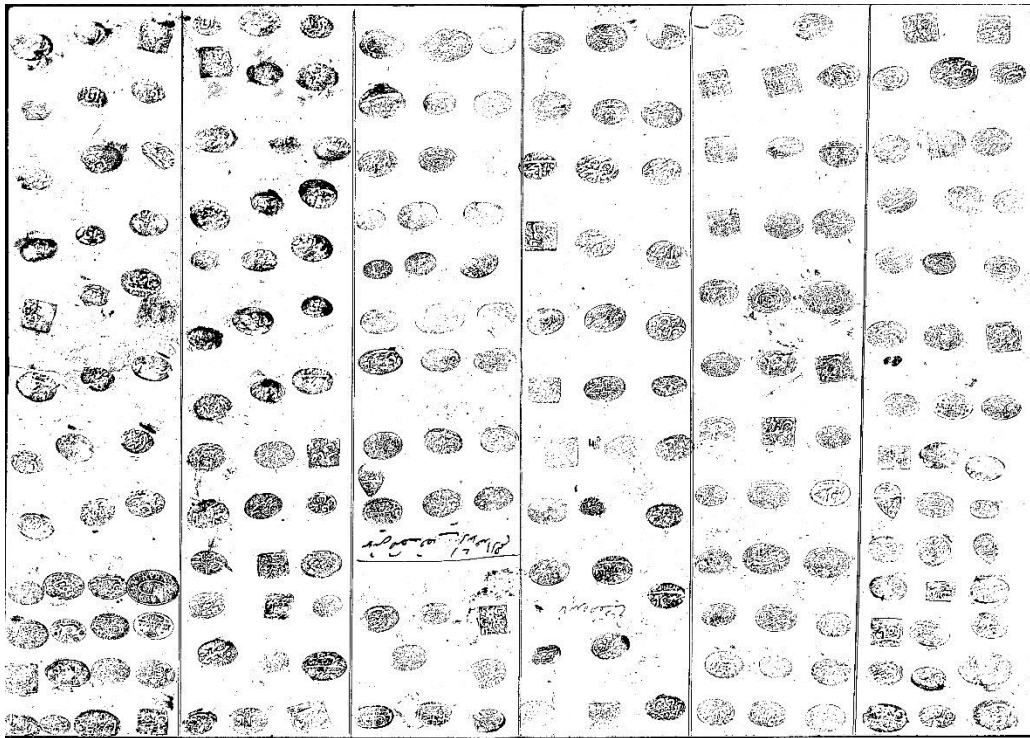
Figure 1: A collective petition from Shiraz dated 27 February 1927 requesting an increase in the municipal budget.



³⁶ There are constant violations of this rule. For example, Lord Curzon reports that the governors in the provinces “ordered a watch to be kept on those boxes; the bastinado was freely administered to any indiscrete person dropping in a petition.” Schneider, *The Petitioning System*, 35.

³⁷ Ibid., 36.

³⁸ Ettehadiéh Nezam-Mafi, “The Council for the Investigation of Grievances: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century Iranian Social History”, *International Society for Iranian Studies* 22, no. 1 (1989): 51-61”. Here p. 52.



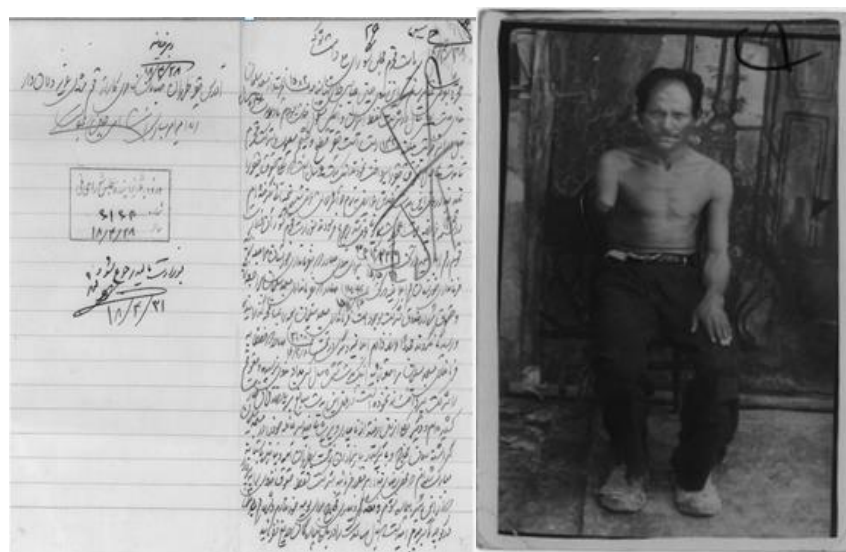
Source: LMDCIP. d6/k31/j17/ p97, 'To the Ministry of Interior'.

When petitioning was established as a legal right in the Constitution of 1906 the Majles found an enthusiastic public who eagerly presented their cases to the extent that “even the grocer and greengrocer thought himself a Commander, and everybody has problems with everybody and wants to scare him by saying: ‘do you want me to go and present this to the Majles?’”.³⁹ It is not always clear who actually wrote a petition. Those who did not show up personally sent their petitions directly to the Majles even though the issues concerned specific ministries or directories. To this effect several announcements were made urging the petitioners to address their grievances and demands to the relevant state department but apparently to no avail. The amount of petitions soon reached such numbers that the Commission of Petitions was founded exclusively to administer supplications and to forward them to the relevant ministries and other state departments. Sent by men and women, rich and poor, workers and employers, peasants and urban dwellers, petitions can be individual or collective with more than one, in some cases tens or even more than a hundred names, signatures or stamps on them. (see Figure-1) They typically started their petitions by showing their respect to the authority in question, often the Majles, where they emphasized their obedient and deferential attitude. They then introduced themselves, a part which at times gives detailed information as to the

³⁹ Mansureh Ettehadiyeh-Nezamma’i, *Majles va Entekhabat* (Tehran: Nashr-i Tarikh-i Iran, 1996), 23.

environments and social as well as political settings in which they lived, and then, stated their cases. This is finally followed by the statement of the request of a favour or the redressing of an injustice. In order to prove the accuracy of their claims and increase their chance of attendance to their cases petitioners sometimes included a supporting document called Letter of Testimony (*esteshhad-nameh*). As this could be a letter from a prominent person, a leading merchant, governor, a cleric etc., attaching a photo of, for example, a disabled person was also an option though not a frequently used one. (See figure 2). These petitions provide insight not only into the experiences of ordinary people but also their perceptions regarding the political processes and the issues discussed at the Majles.

Figure 2: The Petition and the *esteshhad-nameh* (a photograph) of Hosayn ‘Abbas, a former worker at AIOC (APOC), in which he asked for financial help for not being able to work after he lost his right arm in a work-related accident, 20 July 1939.



Source: Documents of the Eleventh Parliament, 20 July 1939, National Library and Archive of Iran.

Parliamentary Politics: The First Majles, 1906-1908

It is safe to argue that the opening of the Majles fundamentally altered the political realm in Iran. Politics had in this era become a popular topic and the court politics of the absolute monarchy was replaced by parliamentary politics. The reforms which have been launched in Iran during the nineteenth century determined the course of the Constitutional Revolution as

well. Unlike the neighbouring Ottoman Empire or its quasi-independent province, Egypt, the reforms undertaken in Iran throughout the nineteenth century failed to sufficiently strengthen the central government and to produce well-established institutions. Apart from the Cossack Brigades which had troops only enough to protect the capital, the country had no notable armed forces, with the exception of armed tribal groups. Not only were the tribes practically autonomous in their tribal and regional affairs but also other social groups like the clerics enjoyed extraordinary financial and political powers. Therefore, on the eve of the Constitutional Revolution, “Iran could be characterized as having a weak state that coexisted with a strong society where the clerics, merchants, statesmen and other social groups were serious challengers to the state’s authority”.⁴⁰ Thus, while the relatively well-organized and trained Ottoman armed forces played a decisive role in the inception and the consolidation of the Ottoman Constitutional Revolution of 1908, the revolution in Iran was a result of urban social protests. As Nader Sohrabi rightly argues, “the ambiguities in the reformist political discourse of the early twentieth century provided a chance for broad mobilization”.⁴¹ This ambiguity along with inadequate institutional support for the revolution came to play a decisive role in its fate. The First Majles opened in October 1906 and lasted until 1908. This Majles deserves a separate mention not only because it was the first in Iranian history but also it was the one with the highest representative capacity of the Constitutional Era.

The electoral law produced for the first elections in 1906 specified six classes (*tabaqeh pl. tabaqat*) of the electorate which consisted of the princes and the Qajar tribe; mullahs and theology students; the nobility; merchants; landholders and smallholders; and guild members.⁴² Each *tabaqeh* was to send the Majles certain numbers of deputies to serve for two years. Also, the electorate was supposed to possess the following qualifications: to be Persian subjects; to be at least twenty five years old; to be known in their locality; to possess at least a thousand tumans (about £200); merchants and guild members were to have a definite office and to belong to a recognized guild.⁴³ Women, criminals, foreign subjects, and those ‘who are notorious for evil doctrine, or who live in open sin’ were among those who were debarred from electoral rights.⁴⁴ Some of the prerequisites for candidacy were as follows: the candidates should be able to speak, read and write Persian; they should be aged between thirty and seventy years old; they should not be employed in government service; and they should

⁴⁰ Sohrabi, Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism*, 288.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 288-9.

⁴² Browne, *The Persian Revolution*, 355.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 355-6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

be renowned persons. Overall while Tehran obtained 60 seats; the provinces together received only 96. Also among the 160 deputies 26 percent were guild elders while 20 percent were clergymen as opposed to 15 percent who were merchants. The First Majles has been subject of various studies. The intellectual debates during this period; several organizations, called *anjomans*, established in various cities in order to monitor elections but which continued their existence even afterwards; and external factors determining the future of constitutional experiment in Iran have been dealt with in several works. In what follows, the presence of guilds in this parliament and their activities will be analysed.

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution did not originate as a result of a class-oriented struggle. Quite to the contrary, the otherwise-conflicting groups such as the clerics, merchants, aristocracy, guild members, intellectuals etc., made an ambiguous and ‘populist alliance’ for overthrowing the absolute monarchy.⁴⁵ This alliance was emphasized by some contemporary observers as well as later historians.⁴⁶ The fact that guild members sided with big merchants calls for explanation, since they hardly shared common interests. Guilds’ participation in the constitutional agitation clearly reflected its economic aspects. The negative impact of foreign economic presence drew guild members to anti-imperialist and even anti-foreign lines.⁴⁷ The ambiguous discursive engagement of constitutionalists’ and guilds’ ties with mullahs and merchants led them into revolutionary cadres. Therefore the class-based structure of the First Majles was more apparent than real even within the confines of the Persian word for class (*tabaqeh*). The nobility was largely represented by state officials or politicians; among the

⁴⁵ The phrase “populist alliance” is taken from: John Foran, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Iran’s Populist Alliance: A Class Analysis of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911,” *Theory and Society* 20, no. 6 (Dec., 1991): 795-823. Here, p. 795. The Constitutional Revolution and the coalition which brought it about has preoccupied scholars. While some focused on the leading role of certain classes, mostly of the mullahs and modern intelligentsia, others tried to reveal the ideological bases of the struggle. None, however, underestimated its multi-class character. This latter point, I think, is best formulated by John Foran who argued that the movement leading to the Constitutional Revolution was “fought by a pre-capitalist class in decline (the artisans), and two small capitalist classes in formation (the intelligentsia and the working class), and led by two classes/groups that were divided (ulama and merchants). Foran, “Strengths,” 803. (Italics in original). Despite its explanatory power, however, the formulation fails to sufficiently emphasize the internal divisions within each class. Also, although class-based interests, hence conflicts, did exist in Iran quite early on, it is not always clear what is meant to constitute a class in the literature dealing with early twentieth century Iran. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, the struggle against absolute monarchy and the ever-increasing foreign economic domination overshadowed real class positions in Iran, roughly, until 1930s. It seems more promising, therefore, to investigate the Constitutional Revolution as a breaking point for the making of new classes out of traditional structures. This last point will be analysed in chapter four.

⁴⁶ Browne’s correspondent in Tehran, allegedly Walter Smart who was the vice-consul at Tehran between 1906 and 1908 (see J. Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, P. 56) shared with him ‘the remarkable phenomenon’ of ecclesiastical participation in the Constitutional Revolution which, he commented ‘[was] unexampled in the world’s history’. Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 123. Adamiyat also attempts to explain this diversity and its reflection in the First Majlis. See: Adamiyat, *Idi’uluzhi*, 359-69.

⁴⁷ Fallah-Tootcar, “Social and Political,” 28.

representative of landholders and smallholders there were those who fell outside this category; the representative of bath-attendants and ice-sellers was a school teacher, just as some guilds were represented by the clergy.⁴⁸ That ‘the electors [were] not absolutely compelled to elect (a deputy) out of their own class or guild’ allowed for this flexible representation.⁴⁹ The comments of Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, a leading constitutionalist and a deputy to the Majles, on the First Majles should be read against this background. He argues that “political parties did not exist in the First Majles but there were Radicals and Moderates with the former having ideas similar to socialism”.⁵⁰ Thus Adamiyat observes that “within each social group different and at times conflicting political ideas existed”.⁵¹

The First Majlis was a Constituent Assembly and the constitution drafted by it remained in effect throughout the Pahlavi period. The Majles had the final say on all laws, decrees and any economic decisions from treaties to monopolies.⁵² An Upper House (*Majles-e A‘yan*) was also proposed consisting of sixty senators, thirty of whom would be nominated by the Shah. The functions of this house, however, were to be determined by the National Assembly. The Shah was virtually reduced to a figurehead. Even his right to determine half of the proposed sixty senators did not mean much since no senate was convened during the Qajar period.⁵³ Mohammad Ali Shah, who ascended the throne upon his father’s death, quickly made it clear that he would not easily submit to the new situation. He successfully manipulated frictions in the capital as well as in the provinces to undo many of the constitutional achievements. The Supplementary Fundamental Laws produced in 1907 provided him the proper opportunity for his anti-constitutional manoeuvres. This also marked the beginning of the disintegration of the ambivalent alliance among constitutionalist forces.

The proposed oath made by the deputies suggested that every deputy would swear on the Quran that they would “with the utmost truth, uprightness, diligence and endeavour” discharge the duties conferred on them.⁵⁴ The position of the Sharia, or Islamic law, was not clear especially as far as the legislative process was concerned. The Supplementary Fundamental Laws brought some clarification on this point. Accordingly, five members of the clergy, to be elected by the Majles from a list of twenty, would scrutinize all legislative

⁴⁸ Adamiyat, *Idiuluzhi*, 359-60.

⁴⁹ Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 357.

⁵⁰ Adamiyat, *Idiuluzhi*, 361.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 361.

⁵² Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 89.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵⁴ Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 364.

attempts no prevent any law which contradicted the Sharia.⁵⁵ Alienated by the constitutional forces, Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri became the outspoken leader of *mashru'eh* (rule according to Sharia) as opposed to *mashruteh* (rule according to the constitution). As the Shah, meanwhile, refused to ratify the Supplementary Laws he also denounced such leading constitutionalists as Malek al-Motekallem, Jamal al-din Esfahani, Mirza Jahangir Khan of *Sur-e Esrafil* and Mohammad Reza Shirazi of *Mosavat* as 'heretical Babis' and 'republican subversives'.⁵⁶ The assassination of Amin al-Soltan, however, shook the Shah who ratified the laws and expressed his reluctant respect for the constitution. Once the opportunity arose, however, he was to launch his final attack on the Majles.

Another notable aspect of the First Majles was the high degree of representation of the trade guilds. Thirty two deputies, both from Tehran and provinces, represented the trade guilds in this majles.⁵⁷ (Appendix 1). Defined as "group[s] of townspeople engaged in the same trade or craft, who elect their own chief and who pay guild taxes; this group having economic, social, fiscal and political functions"⁵⁸ guilds (*senf- pl. asnaf*) have historically been an integral part of the Iranian society. Although their economic importance showed more or less a steady decline during the nineteenth century, they largely maintained their political and social position.⁵⁹ By the electoral law of 1906, they attained a prominent position in central politics between 1906 and 1908 for the first and the last time. According to Adamiyat such representatives of the trade guilds as Mashhadi Mohammad Baqer Baqqal and Mirza Ebrahim Khayyatbashi were known "for their sound understanding and progressiveness".⁶⁰ Taqizadeh, too, credits Baqqal, Hosayn Tehrani Saqatforush, Mohammad Taqi Bonakdar, Mohammad Khunsari Ketabforush and Hosayn Borujerdi "as the most consistent supporters of the majles".⁶¹ Yet not everyone agreed on this point. The historian Kasravi, for example, criticizes the presence in the Majles of such guild representatives as Hajj Ali Akbar Parviz and Baqqal.⁶² Indeed it is safe to suggest that like many of the deputies in the First Majles,

⁵⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 90.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁷ Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-i Mashruteh-e Iran* (Tabriz: Akhtar, 2006), 190.

⁵⁸ Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh*, 111.

⁵⁹ The decline in the economic position of guilds continued during the early twentieth century too. Nonetheless, as will be discussed in the 3rd chapter, this decline in economic activities organized around guilds does not necessarily entail an overall decline in crafts or 'traditional' industries. Quite to the contrary, it originated from the fact that the putting-out system organized largely in rural settings and large scale 'modern' manufactures were responsible for the declining economic significance of guilds.

⁶⁰ Adamiyat, *Idi'uluzhi*, 369.

⁶¹ Afary, *Iranian*, 72.

⁶² Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Mashruteh*, 191. Also one of the contemporaries, Moghis al-Saltaneh, makes similar negative observations on two other guild representatives, namely Mirza Mahmud Ketabforush and Me'marbashi.

guild representatives too lacked any notable political experience and were hardly informed on theoretical issues such as constitutionalism and parliamentary rule. However, their background and their ties with their electoral districts can shed important light on the social dimensions of politics in this period. Also, in terms of their demands and activities, guild members were the closest to the working class and most attentive to labour issues.

Backed by the Central Committee of Guilds, the guilds played a major role during this period. The Central Committee was a typical one in its advertised aim of reinforcing the constitutional form of government. Yet, in addition to this, it regulated guilds' affairs, attended to the needs and the demands of craftsmen, and organized charity activities.⁶³ *Anjoman-e Asnaf* was the official organ of the Committee of which no issues are available. After a while the name of the newspaper was changed to *Bamdad* but from that too only three issues are available.⁶⁴ From an analysis of the available issues it appears that *Bamdad* was rather preoccupied with the prevalent concerns of the period such as the consolidation of the constitutional system, comments about the parliamentary discussions, education of girls, reforming the bureaucracy etc. For example, the editorial of the ninth issue titled "A Petition to His Excellency may His Reign be Infinite" and authored by Yahya al-Hosayni (Dowlatabadi), the alleged compiler of the Committee's code,⁶⁵ the typical distinction between the Just King and his corrupt entourage is highlighted. The Shah is requested not to give credit to those "ignorant and ill-intentioned" persons who tried to provoke the Shah against His people. He is instead advised to read the well-intentioned newspapers whose only goal was to give good advice to the Shah as well as to the public, and awaken them.

The relationship between guilds and the emerging Iranian working class is unclear. The electoral law made no mention of workers as a distinct class with a privileged right to vote. This was a result of, more than anything, the traditional structure of Iranian society. As will be discussed in the Fourth Chapter, in the early twentieth century many of the contemporaries equated workers with those labouring in large-scale industrial establishments, of which Iran

He criticizes the former for not being able to do anything but publish the books of Sa'di, a master of Persian literature who lived in the 13th century, and others, while the latter is blamed for being an incompetent architect whose buildings are collapse one after another. He then questions what benefits this kind of person could bring to state affairs as they would only occupy the floor and prevent others from speaking. Ettehadiyeh Nezami, *Majls*, 287 footnote 126.

⁶³ Fallah-Tootcar, "Social and Political," 73.

⁶⁴ No issues of *Anjoman-e Asnaf* are available. Of *Bamdad*, only the 9th, 13th and 20th issues are available. I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Fallah-Tootcar for providing me with copies of these three issues.

⁶⁵ Fallah-Tootcar, "Social and Political," 71.

did not have many at that time. Although the assumptions as to the existence of fatherly and egalitarian relations between the guild masters and their employees are problematic enough, among the constitutionalist forces workers seem to regard guilds as their closest allies. To understand the course of the relations between the two it is important in order to be able to follow the trajectory of Iranian the working class.⁶⁶ Guilds have historically been an important social group who not only took active part in social projects but also functioned as an important actor in local politics. Their representation in the First Majles had added to this role. In this way, they exercised political power both in the capital and the provinces.

The link between the capital and the provinces is illustrated by an incident which occurred in Hamadan in 1906. Hoarding of food staples, especially of grain, constituted one of the main causes of sporadic famines in Iran. When Hamadan suffered from a scarcity of wheat, in 1906, guild members who were backed by the governor, Zahir al-Dowleh, along with the population of the town, attacked the landlords they considered responsible for hoarding. To this effect they sent a petition to the Prime Minister Moshir al-Dowleh in which they stated that while Hamadan had an annual wheat production of two hundred thousand kharvars and while the annual need of the town was only twenty five thousand kharvars the landlords horded grain, pushing people to hunger.⁶⁷ A few days later on 11 September 1906 they sent another petition this time to the Shah in which they complained that “mercy is removed from the hearts of wheat dealers”.⁶⁸ In the ensuing meeting between the Governor and the landlords the latter insisted on a free price system for wheat. Zahir al-Dowleh, on the other hand, read the telegraph of the Prime Minister which also contained the order of the Shah as to the release of necessary wheat to the market. Yet the landlords proved reluctant to comply with the order. Subsequently two hundred guild representatives sent another petition to the Shah which read as follows:

Our khans need money to spend in the theatres of Paris and other cities of Farangestan, [Europe] while our beloved children paled out of hunger. Where is the Sultan of the Muslims and their

⁶⁶Willem Floor states that guilds cannot be considered a true representative of workers. W. Floor, *Labour and Industry in Iran* (Washington: Mega Publishers, 2009), 29. On the other hand, Farhang Qasemi argues that workers’ electoral alliance with guilds in 1906 was a result of the lack of any other viable alternative, or put differently workers’ voted for guilds’ representatives because they had to. Farhang Qasimi, *Sandikalism dar Iran* (Paris: Bunyadi Musaddiq, 1985), 57. Both arguments are based on the assumption that there already was an Iranian working class which accommodated itself against other societal groups. They also overestimate the distinction between guild-based and non-guild types of production although, at least as far as the early twentieth century is concerned, such a clear cut distinction is problematic. As will be discussed in the fourth chapter, it is true that an industrial working class was emerging during the period, but they had not yet defined their interests in a way that was essentially different from those of the guilds.

⁶⁷ Fallah-Tootcar, “Social and Political,” 100. A *kharvar*, or a donkey load, equals one hundred kgs.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 100.

Honourable Ruler? Where is the justice of Anushirvan⁶⁹ which passed to the ruling dynasty of Iran? How can justice allow for the hungry people to cry out of hunger in spite of this benevolence of glorious God, and how can it allow an 'ashura⁷⁰ to take place in this city? How can the Excellent Shah of shahs of the Muslims enjoy ten different foods in his meal while we are hungry and miserable?⁷¹

Their demand was the release of each kharvar at ten tumans and Zahir al-Dowhleh promised them that he would ensure the release of twenty five thousand kharvars at that price.⁷² However, no viable solution was reached and the guilds members closed their shops in 5 October and took sanctuary in the telegraph office. They sent Hajj Sheikh Taqi Vakil al-Ro'aya to Tehran to discuss the issue with the Prime Minister. Subsequently he acted as a deputy in the First Majles. The incident is important in several respects. First of all, it clearly shows the local power centres, the landlords, guilds, the notables, the governor, and the relatively weak authority of the central governments in the provinces. Secondly, it adds to our understanding of the already problematic class-based representation in the First Majles. Vakil al-Ro'aya was a leading merchant and later the head of Hamadan Union of Merchants. Therefore, there is a disagreement as to whether he represented the guilds in the First Majles or not.⁷³ It is safe to suggest then that even if we leave aside the ambiguities of the Persian word *tabaqeh* for class, the pattern of representation in this Majles was determined by subjective class identification more than objective class positions. Therefore one should first reveal the specific class structure inherent in a given class habitus to disclose the structural dimension of what are seemingly inexplicable alliances. The third point concerns the issue of free-price system versus protectionism or some sort of self-subsistence. The last point endured through the Qajar period and well into the Pahlavi years. In the lack or viable of transport facilities, the free-price system was not regarded a suitable option since it could lead to famines in one region while another enjoyed a good harvest. Yet, on the other hand the country was long under foreign economic domination and the treaties signed with various states rendered price control practically infeasible.

⁶⁹ The Sassanid King Khosrau I who is accepted as an exemplary just King in Iranian history.

⁷⁰ The tenth day of the Hijri month of Muharram. In hijri year of 61 Hussein, son of Caliph Ali and the grandson of Prophet Muhammad, and several members of his family were killed in Karbala deprived of water and food. The petitioners compare their hunger with that of Karbala martyrs.

⁷¹ Fallah-Tootcar, "Social and Political," 101.

⁷² Ibid., 102.

⁷³ While Fallah-Tootcar, for example, counts him as a representative of guilds (see: "Social and Political," 104) Afary does not (see: *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 73).

The twelfth article of the Fundamental Laws stated that “no one, on any pretext or excuse, shall have any right, without the knowledge and approval of the National Consultative Assembly, to molest its members”. Furthermore, even if a deputy committed a crime he could not be arrested or punished without “the cognizance of the Assembly”.⁷⁴ Mohammad Ali Shah, however, did the unthinkable and subjected the parliament to bombardment in 1908, badly shaking the basis of the ‘populist alliance’. Thus started what is known in Iranian history as Lesser Despotism which ruled for almost a year between 1908 and 1909. It once again became clear that the Iranian Majles, unlike the Ottoman one, lacked any substantial armed backing in the capital, hence it dissolved rapidly. Iran was now the arena of provincial politics and forces. A full-fledged assault on the constitutionalists was launched, leading to the execution of several of them such as Jamal al-Din Va‘ez and Malek al-Motekellemin, to name two prominent figures, and to the exile and escape of many others. Royalism mixed with a discourse based on reaction against the so called *bed‘at* or reprehensible innovation in Islam constituted the core of the anti-constitutionalist movement. Although the resistance, mainly centred in Tabriz, against Mohammad Ali Shah’s absolutism was to restore the parliament in less than a year’s time, the revolution had lost much of its fervour. Anti-constitutional religious clamour was easily reacted to and condemned by the leading constitutionalists, but in the wider public, particularly among the merchants and artisans, some were left baffled. To this were added some unpopular economic and political developments. For example, the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 which divided Iran into a southern British sphere of influence and a northern Russian one, along with a neutral zone including Tehran, added to the anxiety over the integrity of the country, although parliament was not to blame for this. Besides, since the exorbitant court expenditures had always been a major concern for many of the constitutionalists, they sought ways to curtail it. To this end, in 1907 a budget was drafted which not only targeted the extravagance of a few courtiers but also threatened the livelihood of thousands who made their living in the royal palace, in its various workshops.⁷⁵

With the termination of the first phase of the constitutional experiment, the political significance of Iranian guilds in the capital was also lost, and they were never to recover it. This shift was largely a result of a process during which a new political setting was emerging, which rested on new types of social groups using new discursive tools. Also, deprived of their

⁷⁴ Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 364.

⁷⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, 94.

former economic strength, once they lost their political ground, trade guilds did not hold on very long to their social position. The ambiguous relations within guild organizations between the master, and the journeymen and apprentices, were in time replaced with a more rational and interest-based understanding. Many former craftsmen having gradually turned into wage labourers accelerated this process. Thus the gradual disintegration of the guild structure was a major step in the making of the Iranian working class.⁷⁶

The Crisis of Parliamentary Politics: The Second Majles and the End of an Era

The constitutionalists who were centred in Tabriz ultimately gained victory and succeeded in restoring the constitutional system by capturing Tehran and banishing Mohammad Ali Shah from the country. Iran now entered a new phase of parliamentary politics. A number of factors played a determining role in the shaping of this period which continued until mid-1920's when the Qajar dynasty was replaced by the Pahlavi. First of all, the Electoral Law produced for the elections to the Second Majles brought about major changes. Secondly and in conjunction with the first, ideological differences which were already there from the turn of the century onwards became more pronounced, making it possible to talk about party politics during the Second Majles as indicated in many studies on the period. Thirdly tribal forces, particularly the Bakhtiয়ারis in the south, proved decisive in restoring the parliamentary system. Thus, from 1909 onwards they played major roles not only by occupying ministerial posts but more importantly, in regional politics. Fourthly, having already strengthened their position in Iran in 1907 Russia and Britain became more involved in the country's politics both in the capital and in the provinces. These and other developments seriously influenced state-society relations in Iran during the period and formed the bases of later transformations. Now each of the above points will be discussed separately.

The new Electoral Law drafted through the end of the Lesser Despotism abolished the *tabaqeh*-based electoral system and introduced a two-stage method throughout the country including Tehran.⁷⁷ This meant that in the quarters of a city or in the towns of an Electoral Division the electorate would elect those persons, called the Elected, who would in turn go to the centre of the Electoral Division to elect the requisite number of deputies to the Majles.

⁷⁶ Many of the aspects and developments of Iranian guilds remain understudied. Furthermore, how to approach to labour employed in guilds is also far from clear.

⁷⁷ For an English translation of the law see: Browne, *Persian Revolution*, 385-400. The following details regarding the law is taken from there.

The electorate were supposed to be Persian subjects and at least twenty years old, as opposed to twenty five years old in the former law. Also if they were not natives of their districts they should have settled there for at least six months prior to the election. Property qualifications were also modified. Accordingly, the electorate should fulfil one of the following three prerequisites: they were supposed to possess property amounting at least to 250 tumans (fifty pound sterling) or have a yearly income of fifty tumans (ten pound sterling); otherwise, they should annually pay at least ten tumans (two pound sterling) as tax. Those barred from right to vote were: foreign subjects, women, “persons whose apostasy from the orthodox religion of Islam has been established in the presence of a duly qualified representative of the Holy Law”, thieves, murderers and members of the naval and military forces actually in service.

The following qualifications were looked for in the candidates: they were supposed to be Persian subjects aged between thirty and seventy with adequate reading and writing skills in the Persian language. In terms of faith they should be Muslim unless they represented Christians, Jews or Zoroastrians; and to be locally known and trustworthy. Those who failed to fulfil necessary qualifications for candidacy and those persons barred from the right to vote were barred from being elected along with the sons, brothers and paternal uncles of the Shah. Each of the Bakhtiari, Qashqais and Ilat-e Khamseh (Five Tribes) of Fars, Turkomans and Shahsevans of Azarbaijan would send one representative to the Majles. The number of the deputies was reduced from 160 to 120. According to the new law, Tehran which formerly sent sixty deputies would send fifteen while the provinces obtained more seats than before. Most notably Azerbaijan was given as many as 19 seats. It is argued that the law was not based on sound knowledge of the populations of the provinces and cities and the decision as to the numbers of deputies relied on estimation. Also, getting to the electoral divisions was another challenge due to the long distances. Such obstacles, and the ambiguities in the Electoral Law, caused several complaints.⁷⁸

In the end the composition of the Second Majles came to be substantially different from the First. According to Dowlatabadi “the Second Majles had an air of wealth to it. It was filled with the members of the nobility and the wealthy. No attention was paid to the choice of the

⁷⁸ Ettehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Majles va Entekhabat*, 132. This lack of sound geographical knowledge along with the two-stage election method constituted the basis of the critiques about the Electoral Law of 1909. For example the Isfahan Union of Trade Guilds in June 1911 argued that these two factors turned the elections against popular will. It was further argued that this law was prepared during Muhammad Ali Shah’s despotic rule and harmed the utmost important issue of equal representation. Raziye Yoozofi Neyi, *Asnad-e Tejari-ye Advar-e Avval ta Panjom-e Showra-ye Melli* (Tehran: Library, Museum and Documentation Centre of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, 2009), 273-4.

masses of the nation. The seeds for this change were planted at the time when a two-stage election procedure was decided upon'.⁷⁹ The Second Majjles commenced on 15 November 1909 with the participation of only sixty one deputies out of 120. The structural changes laid the groundwork for ideological fragmentation too. Unlike the First Majles party politics was in play. The political atmosphere in the capital also played a role in this regard. First of all along with Mohammad Ali Shah prominent anti-constitutionalists were either exiled or executed, such as the high-ranking cleric Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri who was hanged following the Civil War in Tehran. This in turn resulted in the consolidation of the constitutional form of government despite the internal conflicts amongst constitutionalist forces which mostly originated in bids for greater power. Yet, the elimination of the common enemy in turn brought the already-existing but somehow postponed ideological differences to the fore. The main cliques were Democrats and Moderates while smaller groups such as Accord and Progress and The Progressives of the South were also formed.⁸⁰ Here a brief analysis of the two main parties, the Democrat Party and the Moderate Party, will be provided.

Socialist ideas had already gained ground in Iran from the early twentieth century onwards. Such figures as Haydar Khan Amu Oghli and Narim Narimanov had founded in 1905 the Social Democratic Committee of Iran whose members were known as Social Democrats (*Ejtema'iyun 'Amiyyun*) in Baku where many Iranians lived and laboured. They consequently founded cells within Iran and the Iranian Social Democratic Party was founded in 1905. Social Democrats presented themselves as Democrats in the Second Majles for fear of negative reactions.⁸¹ Led by Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh the central committee of the party consisted of Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh, Solayman Mirza Eskandari, Mirza Baqer Agha Qafqazi, Mirza Abd al-Hosayn Khan Vahed al-Molk, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Mosavat, Mirza Ahmad Qazvini and Mirza Mahmud Khan.⁸² According to the Democrats, the twentieth century carried the same significance for the East as the seventeenth century carried for the West in the sense that the 'outmoded feudal system' was to be replaced by the overwhelming power of capitalism.⁸³ Iran would also join this inexorable current of history. The party also expressed its determination to preserve the constitutional system and the rule of the parliament. Also according to the program of the party all of the members of the nation were

⁷⁹ Quoted in Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 262.

⁸⁰ Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh, *Kaveh*. 15 July 1918.

⁸¹ Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 264.

⁸² Fereydoun Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasi-ye Ijtemai dar Nahzat-e Mashrutiyyat-e Iran* (West Germany: Noupad, 1985), 136.

⁸³ Mansureh Ettehadiyeh-Nezamafi, *Maramnamaha va Nezamnamaha-ye Ahzab-e Siyasi-yi Iran dar Dovvomin Dowreh-e Majlis-e Shura-yi Melli*, (Tehran: Nashr-e Tarikh-e Iran, 1982), 4.

equal before the state irrespective of their ethnicity or religion. Freedom of the press, organization and movement were also stressed in the program.⁸⁴ About economic issues the program was rather detailed. Apart from financial matters such as direct and indirect taxes, the program also touched upon the following labour issues: no child under the age of fourteen could be employed; the workday should not exceed ten hours; workers must have one day of the week week off; factories should have certain necessary facilities for work and meet standards of sanitation.⁸⁵

Two points in the program deserve separate mention as far as labour and class issues are concerned. First, in the texts from early twentieth-century Iran the standard Persian equivalent of class was *tabaqeh pl. tabaqat*. The Democrats, however, stated that ‘the wellbeing of the country can only be obtained through a unity of the *senf* of the masses’.⁸⁶ The term *senf* has historically been used to refer to a single trade guild such as *senf-e dabbagh* (tanners’ guild). Here however, it was used to mean class. Also, Mohammad Amin Rasulzadeh, a prominent Democrat and the editor of *Iran-e Now*, the Democratic Party organ was ‘the only distinguished thinker in the party’s ranks’, used the same word in his *Critique of the Moderates’ Party or Social Moderates* which was one of the first detailed discussions on socialist ideas.⁸⁷ In this work, he mentions *senf-e karegaran* (working class) and *mobarezeh-e senfi* (class struggle). On the other hand, although apparently Rasulzadeh makes no clear-cut distinction between *tabaqeh* and *senf* he repeatedly uses *tabaqat-e momtazeh* (privileged classes) and places *senf-e aksariyat* (the popular classes) against them.⁸⁸

According to Adamiyat the preamble of the Democratic Party’s program which contained the theoretical issues regarding socialism and class was also authored by Rasulzadeh.⁸⁹ This makes the connection between the two texts clearer. Also as mentioned earlier unlike the First Majles trade guilds did not directly partake in the Second Majles and this made this shift of meaning possible. Secondly, the program was based on a clearly linear and progressive understanding of history and an objective perception of classes. Accordingly, as the world progressed, it was suggested, industrial tools and implements would also progress.⁹⁰ Therefore unsurprisingly no mention was made of the non-factory labour which doubtlessly

⁸⁴ Ettehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Maramnamaha*, 6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁷ The full text of this work appears in Ettehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Maramnamaha*, 59-82. Also for an analysis of it see: Fereydoun Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasi*, 95-126.

⁸⁸ Ettehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Maramnamaha*, 63 and 72 respectively.

⁸⁹ Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasi*, 281.

⁹⁰ Ettehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Maramnamaha*, 3.

encompassed the greater part of the labour force in Iran. Although most of the articles included in the Democratic Party's program, particularly those related to labour issues, were largely to remain on paper, they were revolutionary in many respects. *Iran-e Now* started publications as an independent daily in August 1909 but was edited by several leading Democrats. Many of the social issues from the criticism of class society to the position of women and to ethnic and religious prejudices were discussed in this journal for the first time.⁹¹

Revolutionary or not, the ideas expressed by Democrats infuriated more conservative circles both within and outside the Majles. Gradually the Moderate Party was formed. Led by Murteza Qoli Na'ini, Mohammad Sadeq Tabataba'i, son of the prominent mojtahed, a high ranking Shiate Islamic theologian, Tabataba'i, and Ali Mohammad Dowlatabadi, younger brother of the democrat Yahya Dawlatabadi, Moderates gained a wide support from various classes. Compared to that of the Democrats their program was far from coherent.⁹² It stressed the importance of Islam as a uniting bond amongst Iranians. It then summarized the Party's main perspective under seven articles where emphasis was made on progress, centralization, obligatory education, improvement of the armed forces as well as of the foreign relations in order to develop trade. In the third and fourth articles, attending to the situation of those who toil (*ranjbaran*), and improving their living conditions are stressed. Moderates regarded Democrats' ideas as a source of 'devilry and corruption' and a cause of disorder in state affairs.⁹³ Behbehani, a leading Moderate, severely attacked Taqizadeh and even obtained a fatwa from the leading ulama in Najaf as to his apostasy from Islam.⁹⁴ Islam was again at the core of the clash between the two parties and their supporters. Democrats' emphasis on the separation of religion and state apparently resented not only the ulama but also other conservative groups including a good part of the members of the trade guilds. Generally speaking, the lower classes were rather conservative and under the influence of the clergy. Thus any allegedly anti-Islamic move or idea provoked them. For example agitated by an article published in *Habl al-Matin* of Tehran trade guilds in the city pressed for and secured the banning of the newspaper as well as the imprisonment of its editor Mirza Hasan

⁹¹ For a detailed analysis of *Iran-e Now* see: Afary, *Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, 273-283.

⁹² For the full text of the program see: Ettehadiyeh Ettehadiyeh Nezammafi, *Maramnamaha*, 89.

⁹³ Adamiyat, *Fekr-e Demokrasi*, 145-6.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

Kashani.⁹⁵ The assassination of the leading cleric Behbehani further escalated the tensions and resulted in the closing of *Iran-e Now* and the exile of Taqizadeh.

Another significant development of this period was the ever-increasing influence of tribal elements in Iran. Their influence both on the capital and in the provinces was furthered through their participation in restoring the constitutional government in 1909 and continued roughly until mid-1920's. The political instability in Tehran provided a suitable atmosphere for Turkomans in north Khorasan, Shahsevans in Azerbaijan, and Kurds in Lorestan to disregard the central authority and expand their own to neighbouring towns and villages. The position of the Bakhtiari chiefs was particularly impressive in mid-1911. As Samsam al-Saltaneh presided over the government in Tehran, the palace guard and the War Ministry were under different branches of this tribe while Sardar Asad, the former minister of war, continued to be a prominent figure in the capital. Also from 1909 on all of the governors of Fars were from the Bakhtiari tribe. This escalated both inter- and intra-tribal conflicts. Furthermore, the six leading chiefs of the Ilkhani and the Hajj Ilkhan families of the Bakhtiari tribe signed agreements with the Anglo-Persian Oil Company for the protection of the company's installations in return for a 3 percent share of the profits.⁹⁶

This political instability and fragmentation stimulated further foreign intervention in the country. While the British were busy strengthening their position in the south, the Russians were alarmed by the policies of the Majles and regarded them as contrary to their interests. The appointment of the American, Morgan Shuster, as treasurer-general of Iran and his economic and political policies brought about the Russian ultimatum of 1911. Having already occupied Anzali and Rasht in the north, the Russians delivered an ultimatum to the Majles with the following conditions: Shuster would be dismissed; no foreign adviser would be hired without a mutual consent from the British and Russians; and an indemnity would be paid to cover the expenses of the expeditionary forces in Anzali and Rasht. The Majles at first rejected the ultimatum but the Russians marched to Qazvin, and open confrontations took place between the Russian troops and Iranians, who suffered many casualties. Widespread public demonstrations for the rejection of the ultimatum reached a peak with this move, and Russian goods were boycotted. The boycott was a part of a larger issue of excessive imports

⁹⁵ Fallah-Tootcar, "Social and Political," 253-4. The ideas which invoked such groups were repeatedly expressed in *Iran-i Now* which functioned as the official organ of the Democrat Party. Starting its publication in August 1909 it continued, albeit a short interim in 1910, to be one of the most influential newspapers until 1911 when the Second Majles was dispersed.

⁹⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, 107.

and a result of the already existing opposition to Russian economic penetration. The following petition sent from in 1911 provides a good illustration of the anti-Russian feelings and the popular disillusionment from the Majles:

How long should we, the oppressed and helpless people, bear the merciless transgressions and unlawful violence of the northern neighbour [Russia] which each and every day produces new and countless transgressions and removes our security by various tricks? Does international law not apply in Iran? [...] Do you not pay attention to the future of this country? Will you not question the groundless existence of the troops of the northern neighbour? [...] Do you not consider ourselves accountable in before God and people?⁹⁷

Yet the protests and boycott failed and ultimately the Majles accepted the ultimatum and submitted to the Russian demands. This brought the end of the Second Majles in 1911. After the first constitutional experiment between 1906 and 1908, parliamentary politics failed once again. This time the final blow came mainly from external factors. The new era was predominantly characterized by local politics, security crises and a quest for order.

Constitutionalism without a Parliament: Local Politics and the Rise of Reza Shah

In Iran there was much disparity between popular expectations from the constitutional system and what it actually brought about. For the masses, constitutionalism entailed dignity for themselves and the homeland, stability and political as well as economic growth. For many it was like a magic wand which could heal any of Iran's problems. Yet the subsequent developments largely lagged behind these expectations. The Revolution was successful in creating a political community in Iran but its achievements were overshadowed by its failures. The Anglo-Russian Agreement of 1907 and the Russian Ultimatum of 1911 disillusioned people, and the constant confrontations between royalist and constitutionalist forces seriously exhausted them, further deteriorated their living conditions and stripped them of security.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ "From Isfahan to Tehran, March 1911", in Yusofi Neya, *Asnad-e Tejari*, 206. Apparently, such feelings did not always materialize affective boycotts. Thus, the extent and the popularity of the boycotts were not the same in every corner of the country. Although in the north and in the capital the enthusiasm was rather high but in such cities as Isfahan the situation seems to be different. A report on the trade of the town in 1911 states that being under the pressure of the clergy the merchants boycotted Russian sugar and other goods but in march 1911 this did not bring about any apparent effect on trade. FO 248/1029, 1911, "The Trade Report for the year 1910-1911".

⁹⁸ There were several reports to in this regard. For example, in Mazandaran, northern Iran, Consul Rabino informed the Legation in 1911 that "the nationalists and ex-Shah's supporters between them have robbed the unfortunate inhabitants of Mazandaran of all they had". Quoted in Muhammad Ali Kazembeyki, *Society, Politics and Economic in Mazandaran, Iran, 1848-1914* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 191. In the same year, G. Grahame, the British consul in Isfahan, made the following observation: "Now that clerical pressure has relaxed,

From 1911 onwards Iran entered the Naseri Period when Naser al-Molk, who had been acting as a regent to the under-aged young Ahmad Shah since the beginning of this year, ruled without a Majles. This period was marked by rising provincial powers rather than parliamentary politics. The First World War added to the disintegration of provinces from the centre. Although Iran remained neutral during the war, the country was partly invaded by the Ottomans and Russians in the north along with the continued presence of the British in the south.

The political instability in the capital and the inability of governments to resist foreign penetration widened the gap between Tehran and the provinces. Britain and Russia had substantially consolidated their position in the country. While they played decisive roles in the capital they were also influential in the provinces. In March 1915 Britain and Russia signed the Constantinople Agreement. Accordingly, while the British extended their sphere of influence to the central neutral zone Russians obtained full freedom of action in the north. Besides, the Third Majles which met in 1914 was, in less than a year, dismissed by the Russians again. In the provinces they exercised their influence through their political missions. Apart from being a popular location for *bast*, the foreign legations were also involved in local matters. The following letter written by an 'unknown party' and entitled 'collective appeal to the ambassadors of all governments' summarizes the general feeling against foreign powers. Allegedly intercepted at post office in Qazvin on its way from Tehran to Tabriz, the letter is worth quoting at length:

Although we are certain that Their Excellencies [sic.], the ambassadors are well aware of all events that have occurred in this country, and possess full knowledge of the hardships and sacrifices sustained by the Persian nation, in her effort to attain liberty and establish a constitutional system of government, nevertheless perceiving in the actions of the present Cabinet, which pretends to have the support of the British Government – such acts, as closing our newspapers and meetings – a danger and menace to the constitutional system of our country. We hereby appeal to you, in the name of the defence of freedom and law, to come to our assistance.

It is evident to all those who are informed of the history of our country during the last twelve years that, from the very beginning of the revolutionary movement in our country, the sympathies and the hopes of the nation were turned toward the English, whose previous representatives, in the face of the oppressive and aggressive measures of the tyrannical Russian government, had rendered considerable assistance, and displayed goodwill to those who were striving for the freedom of their

the merchant classes are said to be expressing the view that foreign intervention will be a blessing. There is great curiosity in the bazaars to know whether the Russian have actually taken possession of Tabriz and whether they have established a Governor of their own there". FO 248/1049, 1912.

country. Since the treaty 1907, however, and the change of representative, namely from the time the British Government, in spite of all the awful blows dealt on Persia by the Tsar's Government, assumed an attitude of silent watchfulness and withdrew all assistance from the struggling democracy of Persia, and gradually, as it appeared that the British Legation was showing moral assistance and encouragement to the oppressive steps of the Tsar's Government, the same general dislike and hatred which were felt against the Russian Government now reverted to the British Government.

At the outbreak of the European War and the appearance of a third diplomacy in Persia [i.e. Germany], the general feeling and sympathy of the liberty-loving were turned to Germany, with the hope that seeing this, the English would renew their previous views of and defend the national and legitimate rights of the Persians and their independence. Great efforts were made in this direction until finally the Government at London, perceiving the results of the ill-behaviour of their former representative, rekindled a great hope in the hearts of the Persians by recalling their Minister and replacing him by Sir Percy Cox. From the moment of the latter's arrival all eyes were turned to him and great were the hopes laid on him. But regretfully in view of the conduct and course of the present Cabinet, which is definitely anti-constitutional, anti-democratic and which moreover pretends to be backed up by the British Legation, the hopes of Persians have turned into despair.

We therefore consider it necessary to invite the attention of the diplomatic representatives to the following:

If the pretensions of the present Cabinet are true, and H. E. the British Minister had, through such traitors and unprincipled men revived the operations of the despotic Russian Government, then he should answer the following questions in order that the Persians may know their position and duty prior to the assembly of the peace conference.

Are the declarations of the British Government and the English Press concerning non-interference in Persian affairs sincere or not?

Does the democratic Government of England permit of violation of liberty and lawless acts in Persia?

Had England any aim other than commercial speculations in Persia?

Does the independence and progress of Persia interfere with the commercial plans of England?

Is it possible now to deceive and blind-fold the Persians as usual with absurd and tinted phrases?

Is it supposed that the Persians will continue to be silent in the face of all illegal interference?

Is not [sic.] the support and encouragement of tyrants and criminals in this era of socialistic ideas a shame and disgrace?

Are the losses and damages incurred by Persia and the Persians through various intrigues and devices sufficient?

Is Persia guilty in happening to be a neighbour of England?

Are the robberies and crimes perpetrated by the members of the present Cabinet and their treachery to Persia unknown to the diplomatic representatives and do they require confirmation?

There are these and many other questions which cannot be inserted here.

If in fact there is not mutual understanding between the British Legation and the Cabinet and they (the English) prefer general sympathy and good feelings then they should openly declare this and their non-interference in the internal affairs of Persia and thus lift off the minds of the people the general anxiety and distrust.⁹⁹

The disillusionment with foreign powers elaborated in the above letter was a widespread phenomenon in Iran during the 1910's. The Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 added to the sentiment. The agreement, which was never ratified by the Majles since there was none in place for the previous four years, "gave the British a free hand, to the virtual exclusion of others, in the affairs of Persia".¹⁰⁰ The British would lend required advisors to Persia and supply munitions and equipment for a national army which was to be trained by British officers. Also two million pounds sterling would be provided to Persia for necessary reforms, customs tariffs would be revised and assistance would be provided for railway construction.¹⁰¹ The British and the Premier Vosuq al-Dowleh came under fire both inside and outside the country. The political turmoil and unpopular decisions raised the provinces to prominence in national politics once again. Generally speaking, provinces had already become of great political importance during this period in two different ways. On the one hand tribal elements extended their influence and hence political power as indicated above. Also, there was dissatisfaction from governors in various parts of the country. On the other hand, nationalist uprisings took place, particularly in the north. In 1920 Sheikh Mohammad Khiyabani and his Democratic followers took control of Tabriz with a great part of Azerbaijan which they now named Azadestan (The Land of the Free). In Gilan Mirza Kuchak Khan had already triggered a rebellion which is known as the Jangali (Forester) Movement in Iranian history for the first group of *Jangalis* took to Gilan's forests (*jangal*). Backed by the Red

⁹⁹ FO 248/1259, 1919.

¹⁰⁰ Denis Wright, *The English Amongst the Persians During the Qajar Period 1787-1921* (London: Heinemann, 1977), 178.

¹⁰¹ Wright, *The English*, 178.

Army troops by 1920 the *Jangalis* sized control of the region and proclaimed the Soviet Republic of Gilan.¹⁰²

Economically speaking, several important laws, with major economic and social consequences, were passed by the Majles between 1906 and 1911. In 1907 a committee was appointed in order to examine financial reform which was directly linked to the issue of land tenure. Subsequently four measures were adopted: pensions and grants paid to a large number of individuals were either greatly reduced or completely abolished; revisions were made in provincial revenue assessments; the *toyul* system was abolished; and the conversion rates, were abrogated.¹⁰³ Also due to the disastrous effects of the First World War and its aftermath a number of measures were taken to support the poorer classes which will be discussed in the Third Chapter. Yet, lack of viable infrastructural facilities and political problems impeded any sustainable economic growth which would positively affect the lives of the larger population. Taken as a whole, Iran was wedged between the two superpowers of the period, Britain and Russia, and therefore its economic policies were made in a context of semi-colonization, with the full ramifications of this in both the political and economic realms. Although the constitution theoretically remained in effect after 1911, it only existed on paper. Following the bombardment of the First Majles it had taken 18 months until the second one was convened. Once the Second Majles was dissolved, Iran had to wait almost for three years for the Third Majles, which survived for only eleven months. It was only by the end of the First World War that the Fourth Majles commenced in 1919, to remain in force for two years, after which it took another eight months for the Fifth Majles which crowned Reza Khan as Reza Shah Pahlavi and ratified the change of dynasty in 1925. Overall, between 1906 and 1925 the Majles remained in force for only seven years in total.¹⁰⁴

The history of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution is, in a sense, a history of centralization on different levels. The fragmentation of the armed forces, mostly tribal, the lack of any viable national market and the chronic inability of an efficient tax-collection system had long stoked demand for the establishment of an effective central government. Constitutionalism at

¹⁰² About the Jangali Movement see C. Chaquèri, *The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, 1920-1921: Birth of the Trauma* (Pittsburgh: Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies 21, 1995).

¹⁰³ Ann K. S Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 178-9. *Toyul*: the term covers a variety of land grants in Qajar Iran. In some cases it was a grant attached to certain offices. In other cases it was a grant of *khaleseh* (crown land) as a salary. In some instances, particularly in tribal contexts the *toyul* holder was underobligation to provide military contingents. Sometimes it simply referred to tax-farming right of a given land. Ibid., P. 139. A toyul's conversion rate is the assessment of the revenue of a piece of land and its conversion into cash at a fixed rate. Lambton, *Landlord*, 152.

¹⁰⁴ Ettehadiyeh Nezamafi, *Majles*, 5.

first provided a necessary stimulus for the increasing integration of the provinces with the centre. Local power bases were more or less well-represented in the First Majles. Yet, from the Second Majles onwards, provinces, or at least the have-nots residing therein, were further pushed to the margins of the constitutional system. One paradoxical feature of centralization during this period was that the material means to bring it about were largely absent. Communication and transportation facilities were insufficient. The following illustrates the unfavourable situation of transportation in Iran:

A British firm shipped a consignment of piecegoods from Manchester in October 1909. Reforwarded from Bushire for Tabriz on the 22nd December 1909, these goods were abandoned at Dashtarjin (about 40 miles south of Shiraz) in January 1910, the muleteer refusing to proceed further on account of the insecurity of the road. Eventually, i.e. in May 1910, the goods reached Shiraz and were reforwarded from there for Isfahan in July but got no further than the first stage, Zarghan, about 24 miles north of Shiraz, the road further north being blocked. Brought back to Shiraz on 6th December 1910 they were reforwarded on 6th January 1911 and arrived in Isfahan in March 1911, having taken approximately 19 months from the date of their despatch from Manchester to that of arrival at their destination.¹⁰⁵

The Constitutional Revolution brought diverse social groups into the political sphere in Iran and contributed to the making of a political community which was underway especially from late nineteenth century onwards. Nonetheless, it ultimately failed to rid Iran of its chronic problems of economic deterioration and political instability. In a sense, the Constitutional Revolution had “destroyed the traditional centre of despotic power without producing an adequate substitute.”¹⁰⁶ As the well-to-do felt insecure about their property, the lower classes were disillusioned by instability and external oppression. A widespread belief emerged in the need for a strong government which, according to many, was important above all else. The military coup launched in 1921 took shape in such an atmosphere. Henceforth Reza Khan, later on Reza Shah, would ensure much of the desired leap-forward in terms of territorial integrity, political independence and economic growth at the expense of undoing much of the achievements of a genuine parliamentary experiment, albeit of a much precarious nature, of the preceding two decades.

¹⁰⁵ FO 3 dec. 1911, (248/1029) “Isfahan Trade Report” by G. Grahame.

¹⁰⁶ H. Katouzian, quoted in Gavin Hambly, “The Pahlavi Autocracy: Rize Shah, 1921-1941,” in *The Cambridge History of Iran Vol. 7*, ed. Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly and Charles Melville (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991), 244-296. Here 214.

From Freedom to Security: Reza Shah and the Period of Pragmatist Modernization

The two decades of Iranian history between 1921 and 1941 have largely been dealt with in a manner heavily laden with the modernist paradigm.¹⁰⁷ Industrialization, secularization and nationalism are often presented as the main triumvirate of Pahlavi modernization.¹⁰⁸ What distinguished Pahlavi modernization from the “renovation” (*tajaddod*) of previous generations was its radical attitude both in its form and content. The Pahlavi modernization was selective in the sense of giving immediate priority to certain issues while postponing, and even dismissing altogether, certain other issues. Centralization, accompanied with a nationalist outfit, and industrialization, equated with large-scale industrial establishments were the two most immediate priorities of this modernization. Pahlavi modernization was not only selective but also had several contradictory features. The parliamentary guise of the system was preserved and the constitution remained intact throughout. Yet from the Fifth Majlis in 1925 onwards while the Majlis lost much of its real power, and the constitution was often ignored. Also while such grand military and economic projects as universal male conscription and the Trans-Iranian Railway Project were undertaken, they usually added to the burden of the poorer classes, rather than improving their living and working conditions. This feature struck contemporary observers such as Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen, the British Minister in Tehran, who in 1935 criticized the Pahlavi modernization project for being “progress for progress’ sake”, because of the implementation of policies allegedly without too much consideration for whether they suited the conditions of the country.¹⁰⁹ The following is a discussion of Pahlavi modernization in the context of centralization, which I present in order to provide a backdrop for the next two chapters.

In February 1921 two men, Reza Khan who was a commander of the Cossack Brigade based in Qazvin and the Seyyed Zia Tabataba’i, a liberal journalist, launched a relatively uneventful military coup. Seyyed Zia was soon appointed as Prime Minister but shortly after had to leave the country and was replaced by Qavam al-Saltaneh. Acting after the coup first as the

¹⁰⁷ This is often reflected in the titles of the existing literature although in many other works titled otherwise the modernist approach dominates too. The following are only a few examples: Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961; Donald N. Wilber, *Riza Shah Pahlavi: The Resurrection and Reconstruction of Iran* (New York: Exposition Press, 1975); Touraj Atabaki and Eric J. Zürcher eds., *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Ataturk and Reza Shah* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004); Stephanie Cronin, ed. *The Making of Modern Iran Riza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁰⁸ However, to refer to the particularity of this process in Iran, “modernization” is at times preceded with other words like “authoritarian”, which apparently refers to the lack of individual autonomy in this type of modernization unlike the European one (Atabaki and Zürcher, *Men of Order*, 2), and “pseudo”, by which mainly lack of “a proper understanding” of modern scientific and social development is meant. Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: 1926-1979* (Hong Kong: Macmillan, 1981), 103.

¹⁰⁹ FO 371/20052. “Annual Report, 1935”.

Commander in Chief (*Sardar-e Sepah*) from 1921, then the Minister of War from 1922 and finally the Prime Minister from 1923, Reza Khan was by mid-1920's the undisputed leader of Iran even before his coronation as Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1925. He owed his early prestige largely to a number of operations he launched against local power bases which had accumulated an immense material wealth that translated at the same time to political power. This in turn paved the way for greater foreign influence as foreign powers found it more reasonable to negotiate with actual local power holders than with the weak central authority. For Reza Khan and the ruling elites around him, centralization was of utmost importance, and this could only be achieved by dismantling local power bases. Furthermore foreign influence was an equally discernible hindrance to progress and modernization. Thus they saw in every move towards political or economic progress a blow to foreign domination. In a series of military operations between 1921 and 1925, he had suppressed, often in a bloody manner, his opponents and regional uprisings. By terminating the Jangali Movement in 1921 he at once eliminated a major internal threat and checked Russian influence in northern Iran. The same was true of the campaigns he launched against several tribal leaders, most significantly against Sheikh Khazal who was the Sheikh of Mohammereh and a British protégé.¹¹⁰

The literati and the ruling classes celebrated this not merely as yet another step towards territorial integrity but more importantly as halting the overwhelming influence of the British. In the meantime a number other revolts such as the one against Mohammad Taqi Khan, a gendarme colonel in Khorasan and against Esma'il Agha Semko, a Kurdish tribal leader in northwest Iran, were also crushed and the state authority was restored in these regions too.¹¹¹ In the face of these significant achievements little room was left for his opponents to disfavour Reza Khan in the eyes of the public. The following remarks of Seyyed Hasan Modarres, a staunch opponent of the Minister of War and vice president of the Fourth Majles, aptly illustrate this ambivalent attitude:

“We have no fear of Reza Khan. Why should we speak with reserve? We must speak frankly. We have the power to dismiss and to change the government, the Shah and everyone else. We can also dismiss Reza Khan if we so desire, and nothing is easier... This authority of the Majles is supreme... However, the good qualities of the Minister of War outweigh his bad ones... He is a

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the tribal politics during the First Pahlavi Period see: Stephanie Croning, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

¹¹¹ For a discussion of the tribal politics during the First Pahlavi Period see: Stephanie Croning, *Tribal Politics in Iran: Rural Conflict and the New State, 1921–1941* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

mere fly on the face of our nation. In my opinion the Minister of War had major merits and minor defects.”¹¹²

Not only did the ‘supreme authority’ of the Majles come to be more apparent than real, but it also appeared that Reza Khan was, for many Iranians, more than ‘a mere fly’ on the face of the nation. He had already turned into a hero in the eyes of an increasing number of people owing to his promising moves towards the consolidation of security in the country and the relative flourishing of mercantile activities. This point was expressed by some two hundred merchants in 1922 in a letter where they displayed their gratitude to the Minister of War in the following manner: “before our beloved commander saved us, the Islamic Empire of Iran was disintegrating. The army had collapsed, the tribes were looting, the country was the laughing stock of the world. Thanks to the commander, we now travel without fear, admire our country, and enjoy the fruits of law and order.”¹¹³

Yet, Reza Shah’s real show of strength came following his resignation as Minister of War in October 1922 shortly after Modarres’ above remarks. The first reaction came from his officers who went as far as parading through the streets of Tehran in support of their commander. More importantly, however, petitions poured into the Majles from the provinces for the rejection of his resignation. In some cases petitioners were rather aggressive and even threatening. Because of their significance in shedding light on popular perceptions of the political process, these petitions deserve to be analysed at some length. The following observations are based on thirty six petitions which were sent in support of Reza Khan upon his resignation.¹¹⁴ Although the crisis continued for about only ten days, the echo it created in the provinces was immense, as was the speed with which the news spread. Until the end of October 1922, apparently even after the crisis settled down and Reza Khan withdrew his resignation, the Majles kept receiving letters from all over the country, including Anzali, Isfahan, Astarabad, Khorasan, Golpayagan, Mashhad, Rasht, Yazd, Kermanshah, Malayer, Rafsanjan, Shiraz, Kerman and Borujerd. The petitioners ranged from guildmen to merchants and from the clergy to ordinary people, whose opinions have so far been underrepresented in the current literature. The letters started by expressing their respect for the Majles and praying for its perpetuation. Then the supplicants shared their dissatisfaction with resignation by adding in some cases that people took sanctuary in telegraph offices and even stopped work to

¹¹² Donald N. Wilber, *Riza Shah Pahlavi*, 58-9.

¹¹³ Ibid., 67.

¹¹⁴ LMDICP. d4/k28/j15/p44. “Kanareh Giri-yi Vezarat-e Jang”.

which they would only return once the crisis was solved. They then emphasized the services undertaken by Reza Khan, often called *Vazir-e Mo'azzam* (the Glorious Minister) and *Hazrat-e Ashraf* (the Honorable Presence) in the letters, in restoring peace to the country and paving the way for its progress. The telegraph sent from Golpayagan, a town close to Isfahan, in 17 October 1922 openly targeted the opponents of the 'beloved' Minister of War who, the petitioners argued, was the First Man of the country (*shakhs-e avval-e mamlakat*). The letter criticized the opponents of Reza Khan for not having seen the plunder and looting committed by the Bakhtiয়ারis. An intense concern for security and peace dominated the discourse of the petitions. They made repeated references to the plight of the country which, they argued, the patriotic Reza Khan reversed. The letter sent from Rasht on 15 October 1922 adequately summarizes the prevalent popular feeling about the crisis:

To the Sublime Majles, to the Prime Ministry, through Hojjat al-Islam Behbehani to all the ulama and through Hajj Amin al-Darb to all merchants and guilds member and to Iran Newspaper.

If the Majles is to be influential in the country and if the nation is to possess laws and gain respect before other nations, this will only be attained through the Majles. The creation of disciplined troops and military divisions jealous for their country will provide the Parliament its first and foremost protector. [...] The Minister of War is renowned for his effort to form a government in Iran, and to revive thousands of troops under the flag of Iran and he is well-known for his love for the independence and progress of his country. Through various struggles he restored security in Gilan, Azerbaijan and Khorasan. [...] Because of his resignation people in our town stopped working and gathered at the telegraph office. Thus we request you to block the ways to seditious elements and to cut the hands of the devious people and work and fight for the protection of laws and order which are the first task of the Majles and the military forces. We ask the Minister of War to withdraw his resignation and inform us on the matter so that we go back to our jobs.¹¹⁵

Following this incident Reza Khan followed a steady rise to greater power and was finally crowned in 1925. In this he was celebrated by a significant part of the population and supported by modernist nationalists. In the Fourth and the Fifth Majles he was supported by certain groups. These groups were formed from four parties: the conservatives of *Hezb-e Eslah-taleban* (Reformers' Party); reformers of the *Hezb-e Tajaddod* (Revival Party); and the radicals of the *Hezb-e Susyalist* (Socialist Party).¹¹⁶ In the first group Modarres, Firuz Farmanfarmaian, Qaval al-Saltaneh, and Seyyed Ahmad Behbehani, son of the famous mojtaheds who had been assassinated in 1909, were among the leading figures. The Revival

¹¹⁵ LMDCIP. d4/k28/j15/p44. "Kanareh Giri-ye Vazir-e Jang".

¹¹⁶ The following information is based on Abrahamian's study unless otherwise mentioned. Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, 120-128.

Party was formed by young Western-educated individuals such as Abd al-Hossayn Teymurtash, a major Khorasanian landowner, Prince Firuz Mirza, a Qajar prince and a lawyer and Ali Akbar Davar. Such prominent constitutionalist figures from the previous generation as Taqizadeh, Bahar, Mustowfi al-Mamalek, Ali Zoka al-Molk (Forughi), and Shahrokh Arbab Kaykhosrow were also associated with the Revivalists. The Socialist Party was led by Mirza Sulayman Eskandari, Mosavat and Qasem Khan Sur, the editor of *Sur-e Esrafil*. They were also allied with the Communist Party. They have published: *Paykar* (Battle); *Nasihat* (Exhortation); *Sada-ye Sharq* (The Voice of the East); *Faryad-e Kargaran-e Azerbaijan* (Cry of the Azerbaijan Workers); and *Banvor* (Worker) in Armenian.

The Revival Party was highly influential on Reza Shah and its ideas were largely in line with Pahlavi modernization. The following were among the principle publications of the Revivalists: *Iranshahr* (Country of Iran) published by Hosayn Kazemzadeh in Berlin between 1922 and 1927; *Farangestan* (Europe) edited by Mostafeh Kazemi in Germany between 1924 and 1926; and *Ayandeh* (The Future) edited by Mahmud Afshar in Tehran in 1925. The creation of a centralized state was among the main concerns of the Revivalists. They called for “separation of religion from politics, creation of a well-disciplined army and a well-administered bureaucracy, an end to economic capitulations, industrialization, replacement of foreign capital by native capital, transformation of nomads into farmers, a progressive income tax, expansion of educational facilities for all, including women, careers being open to talent, and replacement of minority languages throughout Iran by Persian.” Through these measures the power of the tribal forces, the financial and judicial powers of the clergy, the autonomy of minorities, and foreign influence would be broken, which would in turn lay the ground for the establishment of a modern centralized state. Furthermore such moves would also remove ‘disunity’ which, in Ahmad Kasravi’s words, was “the worst calamity that [could] befall a nation”. He formulated the bases of disunity as follows:

Factionalism is one of the worst maladies afflicting Iran. Factionalism is caused by religious sectarianism: I can count fourteen separate sects, each with its own separate goals, interests, and leaders. Each in fact is a state within a state. Factionalism caused by tribal and linguistic differences: there are innumerable tribes and at least eight major linguistic groups. And factionalism caused by wide social differences – between the city and the country, the young and the old, the modern educated elite and the traditional-minded masses.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, 126.

A number of measures were adopted for the creation of a nationwide market and further territorial integrity. In 1927 the Trans-Iranian Railway project, which linked the Caspian Sea through Tehran to the Persian Gulf, was launched, to be completed more than a decade later. Overall the two thousand miles of roads which existed in Iran in 1925 had multiplied to 14,000 by the end of the Reza Shah period.¹¹⁸ Infrastructural measures were accompanied by a number of economic legislations such as the following; the law exempting industrial and agricultural machines and instruments and their component parts from import duties for ten years (1925); a law for the establishment a state monopoly on sugar, sugared goods and tea (1925); the establishment of the National Bank; abolition of guild taxes on 216 guilds; and the abolition of capitulations in 1927. During this time Arthur Millspaugh, the American Administrator General of the Finances, was in control of finances until he was dismissed in 1927 and in 1928 tariff autonomy was attained. The policies concerned macro projects and paid little, if any, attention to the subaltern classes. Thus the following remarks written in 1929 by R. H. Clive, the British Minister in Tehran, hardly exaggerated the situation:

Although there is perhaps a growing consciousness in responsible circles that the needs of the poorer classes of the population will have to be attended to sooner or later there is no doubt that window-dressing is still the order of the day. Apart from the questions of security and communications one looks in vain for any indication of real value in the so-called reforms of the Pahlavi regime. Even the ambitious railways project is the child of national sentiment rather than that of material necessity. Tehran must have more water, better lighting, wider street, because Tehran must be counted an up-to-date capital. But no thought is given to the unhappy poor whose houses are ruthlessly pulled down, the compensation voted by the Majlis accruing as everyone knows to the benefit of the municipal authorities whose destructive propensities consequently pass all rational bounds. Venereal disease is said to affect 80 percent of the urban population; the infantile mortality in Tehran is estimated at 60 percent; yet these vital problems claim far less attention than that of the dress, and monies which would be spent in attempts to solve them continue to be wasted on the external trappings of civilization.¹¹⁹

The 1930's were the golden age of grand projects. The economic depression during these years called for more bureaucratic control over the national economy. Especially during the Eighth Majles which commenced in 1930 further economic measures were adopted resulting in the consolidation of the state's control over economic development. Reza Shah had declared that "we wish this Majles to be known in the history of the country as the 'Economic

¹¹⁸ Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921: The Pahlavis and the After* (London: Longman, 2003), 53.

¹¹⁹ R. H. Clive, FO 371/13799, Annual Report, 1929. The economic performance of Pahlavi modernization and its social consequences, especially in the sphere of labour, constitute the themes of the following two chapters.

Parliament` (*Majles-e eqtesadi*).”¹²⁰ In 1931 a law was passed which established state monopoly over foreign trade. Taken as a whole the state had filled in the vacuum left by the gradual removal of local power bases and it did so to an unprecedented extent through the newly established ten ministries. These ministries were the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Roads and Industry and they employed 90,000 civil servants living on government salaries.¹²¹ In 1937 the previous division of a few large provinces (*iyalat*) and a large number of small districts (*velayat*) was replaced by a more elaborate arrangement which established: eleven provinces (*ostan*) governed by governor-generals; forty-nine countries (*shahrestan*) governed by governors; numerous municipalities (*bakhsh*) governed by manors; and large districts (*dehestan*) governed by officials appointed by the Ministry of the Interior.¹²² Increasing centralization also attracted opposition since the traditional means of production, transportation or arbitration provided a source of livelihood for large numbers of people. Industrialization policies or the modernization of transport and communication facilities or the centralization of judicial affairs inevitably evoked resentment from these groups as in the case of the carriage drivers of Rasht. Reza Shah and his entourage paid particular attention to the northern provinces of Iran which received the lion’s share of attention from modernization policies. In January 1931 the drivers sent a petition, with twenty two stamps on it, to the Majles in which they complained about the deterioration in their business due to the increasing numbers of motorcars. Their reaction to the decision illustrates a typical response to the centralization policies of the state. They wrote:

In the past when there were no cars the business of this weak people was good and we used to pay 12 qrans as a monthly tax. When the tolls were cancelled we had to give 17 qrans and two shahis. [...] Later we were ordered to give three tumans although because of the increasing number of automobiles we work from the morning until four at night to only earn our bread. What we earn is not enough for our horses, the stablemen and our families since each have us have ten or twelve persons in our family to provide for. Despite all difficulties we have so far complied with the order

¹²⁰ Willem Floor, *Labour and Industry in Iran*, 127.

¹²¹ Abrahamian, *Iran Between two Revolutions*, 136-137.

¹²² Ibid., 137. From this Abrahamian concludes that “for the first time in the modern era, the hand of the state reached out from the capital into the provincial towns, counties, and even some large villages” (p. 128). Although the extent was this time was beyond any previous attempts, this is clearly an overestimation of the above arrangement since several similar arrangement have been made particularly during the WWI and its aftermath. Also it appears from the petitions that a version of the above division was more or less in effect even in early 1930s.

and paid three tumans. But we humbly request the sacred Majles to take pity on us and reduce the taxes so that we increase our prayers for you.¹²³

In March a new petition arrived to the same effect containing more details about the bitterness of their living conditions. Apparently achieving no tangible results, the drivers sent a third petition in November 1931 which added new dimensions to the issue. After repeating their complaint about the spread of motorcars in Iran, particularly in Gilan which, argued the petitioners, seriously hurt their business, the decision of the Municipality to strictly forbid the passage of carriages from the bazaars dealt yet another blow to their business. People were no longer able to reach the drivers easily when they needed. The drivers asked in the end the removal of the ban on the carriages and the restoration of “order”. Following internal correspondence between the Majles and the Ministry of the Interior the latter informed the former in December 1931 that the ban in the bazaars was for the safety of pedestrians and at the large streets and districts the carriages could move freely. The same kind of complaints arose about the trade monopoly law and similar new legislations.¹²⁴

The ever increasing penetration of the state power and the growing bureaucratization constituted a major turning point in state-society interactions in Iran. Besides, apart from these ‘material’ aspects the Pahlavi modernization included a wide range of cultural dimensions such as the dissemination of education, imposing certain dress codes and ‘language engineering’.¹²⁵ The main aspiration behind such policies was to further the centralization of authority and constructing and penetrating the ideological pillars of it to the wider population. With regard to the language issue there have already been several attempts in the late Ottoman Empire and Iran to simplify the language and the alphabet. Yet, the radical attitudes taken towards language by the early Republican elites in Turkey or by the ruling elites during the Reza Shah period in Iran were substantially different. Now, the unification of linguistic groups under one exclusive language constituted the core of the linguistic policies rather than the simplification of the alphabet. Put differently, language was instrumentalized in order to

¹²³LMDCIP. d8/k5/j20/p1-50-gilan, “Complaint from the stagnation of their business due to the increase of motorcars”, 10 January 1931.

¹²⁴ It appears that the unrest was particularly concentrated in Khorasan province. See for example: LMDCIP: d8/k178/j13/p51-100-khorasan-sistan, “Complaint about the transgressions of monopoly officials”; d8/k179/j13/p101-150-khorasan-sistan, April 19312, “Complaint about the transgressions head of the local finance department about the amount of opium”; d8/k180/j13/p151-200-khorasan-sistan, “Complaint about the customs administration of Zahedan regarding the prohibition for certain amount of mercantile goods”, August 1932; d8/k184/j13/p351-400-khorasan-sistan, “Complaint about the manner of inspection of monopoly officials and request for punishment”, August 1932; d8/k185/j13/p401-460-khorasan-sistan, “Complaint about the ill-treatment of the monopoly officials of Ghonabad”, November 1932.

¹²⁵ John R. Perry, “Language Reform in Turkey and Iran”, in *Men of Order*, ed. Atabaki and Zurcher, 238-259.

achieve a higher degree of centralization. The following case vividly illustrates how such policies influenced state-society relations in Iran during the period in question. The Deputy of Armenians in Tabriz sent a petition in 1931 in which he complained about the linguistic policies and the attitude of the Head of the Directory of Education in the city. He complained about “the unprecedented negative attitude towards the Armenian language, singing in Armenian and the Armenian schools”.¹²⁶ According to the petition, the American school in Tabriz invited the Deputy to deliver a speech in its fiftieth anniversary celebrations since two hundred Armenian boys and girls studied there. But he was prevented from speaking in Armenian and was told to speak either in Persian or in English. Also Mademoiselle Shahgelan [?] was invited to give a concert but she also was told by the Directory that she could sing in Persian, Italian, Russian and French but not in Armenian. Armenian schools were banned from organizing events and so were the Armenian artists from using the Armenian language. To this effect announcements were written in Armenian and posted on the street. Finally the Deputy stressed the adverse consequences of this kind of measures which would “separate the Armenian nation (*mellat-e Arameneh*) and Iranian people (*ahali-ye Iran*)”. The main and the larger agenda behind such policies was the submission of all social groups to state authority. Ethnic groups, linguistic groups, tribal elements and finally social classes, primarily workers, should be seen as parts of this policy.

Once more or less confident as the absolute ruler of the country, Reza Shah took steps to concentrate power in his own hands by eliminating the powerful men around him. Yet the parliamentary guise of the system was preserved and the constitution remained intact. His modernizing policies fundamentally transformed Iran. By the end of Reza Shah’s reign thousands of miles of roads and railways had been constructed, hundreds of schools, including the highly influential Tehran University, had been established, an immense bureaucracy had been created. In addition, tens of large-scale industrial establishments employing hundreds of thousands of workers had been erected. Forced by the occupying British and Russian forces when Reza Shah abdicated the throne in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, judged by the outer standards of modernization, left behind a modern country, but with all the inherent complications of top-down modernization. It was within this political context that the Iranian working class was made and negotiated its interests.

¹²⁶ LMDCIP. d8/k187/j14/55-azarbaiejan, “From the Deputy of Armenians”, Mach 1931.

Concluding Remarks

The proclamation of the constitution by the ailing Mozaffar al-Din Shah in 1906 contributed to the making of a political community in Iran. Diverse social groups participated in the making of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909. Initially the most popular demand voiced by the masses and the elites alike was the formation of a House of Justice which would ensure a just order and remove arbitrary rule. Although the low level of large-scale industrialization determined the course of urban-based collective labour activism, labour became in this period an issue of unprecedented importance. For this development, not industrial workers, but those who were employed in craft industries were responsible. Also, the development of a distinctive worker identity also took place in this period. This development was a result of a complex process where the majority of workers found their livelihood threatened first due to the European economic domination and then because of the factory-based industrialization which paid little, if any, attention to anything other than the materialization of macroeconomic development and grand industrial projects. As will be discussed in the following chapters, confrontational labour activism carried little chance of success due to the weakness of state control over economy or the tightened state grip over economic development—which constituted two directly contradictory processes. The majority of workers, however, chose non-confrontational means of labour activism and developed sophisticated and sustainable discursive means to work the system ‘to their minimum disadvantage’, to use Eric Hobsbawm’s phraseology.¹²⁷ This and other labour issues will be discussed at greater length in Chapter-5. However, first the development of industrialization in Iran will be investigated in the next chapter which lays the groundwork for a discussion on labour issues.

¹²⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “Peasants and Politics,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 1 (1973): 13.