“If I deserve it, it should be paid to me”: a social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry 1951-1973

Jefroudi, M.

Chapter Three

NON-BASIC OPERATIONS, WHERE PRODUCTION MEETS REPRODUCTION

One of the main tenets of classical economists lies in the separation of the realm of production and reproduction as indispensable to capitalist production. The "free worker", who has nothing but his/her labour power to sell for subsistence, does so in the labour market and engages in production in the workspace. The worker and the employer face each other only in the workspace and labour market, which brings forth the assumption that the latter has no involvement in the realm of reproduction apart from the wages s/he pays. This argument has the further consequence of relegating all the mechanisms of domination in the sphere of reproduction to a separate private realm, and thus searching for solutions, if any, in that realm as well.

However, this separation can only be maintained, if necessary, at a theoretical level. Social reproduction theory articulated by feminists such as Lise Vogel, Johanna Brenner and later by Tithi Bhattacharya and feminists of her generation, have argued for the indispensability of labour

outside the production sphere to the making of the capitalist system.[415] As Laslett and Brenner state, social reproduction involves the "work of maintaining existing life and reproducing the next generation," which often takes place outside the workspace.[416] Brenner and Laslett underline its difference from "societal reproduction," which they argue involves "the perpetuation of modes of production and structures of class inequality inscribed within them."[417] According to them, the work of maintaining the existing life, i.e. the organisation of social reproduction, is the driving force in the organisation of gender relations and gender inequality.[418]

In socialist feminist circles recently, the usage of the term is extended once again to cover both the reproduction of gender relations and the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, which I also adhere to.[419]

While making the mechanisms of exploitation and domination at household level and the labour involved in the reproduction processes visible is a crucial part of challenging the separation of these two realms, the story does not begin or end there. In fact, the concept of socially necessary labour time, which refers to the time the workers have to work to

415 Lise Vogel, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014). Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives," *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 381–404. Brenner, *Women and the Politics of Class* (New York: Monthly Review, 2000). Tithi Bhattacharya, "How Not To Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class," *Viewpoint Magazine*, no. 5: Social Reproduction (2015), https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/how-not-to-skip-class-social-reproduction-of-labor-and-the-global-working-class/.

416 Laslett and Brenner, "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives," 383.

417 Ibid.

418 Ibid.

419 See the two recent issues dedicated to social reproduction: Historical Materialism, Volume 24, Issue 2 (2016) and Viewpoint Magazine, Issue 5: Social Reproduction (2015). Building on Michael Lebowitz's *Beyond Capital,* and Marx himself, Tithi Bhattacharya has skillfully argued that the reproduction of the wage labourer is integral to the reproduction of the capital relation. See Bhattacharya, "How Not To Skip Class: Social Reproduction of Labor and the Global Working Class."

be able to sustain themselves and their families, is an equation that involves unpaid, often feminized, labour put into the reproduction of the existing life.

In this chapter, which deals with oil workers' lives outside the workspace, the feminized labour at household level is not at the center. Instead, the Company's direct involvement in the reproduction of labour power via its non-basic services is scrutinized. This is in line with the main approach in this thesis, which covers the key axes of the social history of workers in the Iranian oil industry in the three decades under study. The study of feminized labour involved in care work, particularly at the level of the household, is pertinent to labour history of any industry, albeit beyond the scope of this work.

The Company's direct involvement in workers' non-workspace lives provides a good case to observe the interconnections of the production and reproduction spheres at some of their points of greatest density. Extraction of surplus labour is based on the relation of the time a worker has to work in order to provide for his/her subsistence, and the extra amount of time s/he works on top of that socially necessary labour time.[420] See:

Workday= Time spent for necessary labour + Time spent for surplus labour

For the capitalists, there are two main ways of increasing the surplus labour time. Leaving aside the employment of coercion on the workforce, which is in fact, far from a rarity, the first of these methods is making him/her produce more in the given period of time by means of new techniques and technologies. In this way, the time spent for necessary labour is shortened, which results in the production of relative surplus value. The

420 See Marx, "Chapter 9: The Rate of Surplus-Value," in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Volume 1 (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).

second one involves the extension of the workday, thus producing absolute surplus value. Both methods have been used extensively in various sectors in different historical and geographical contexts. However, another method to extract more relative surplus value, keeping the workday and technology fixed, is reducing the cost of living for workers.[421]

As we have seen in the disputed posters presented in the previous chapter, the Company had used this latter method intensively. By subsidizing essential items bought from Company stores, providing free health care, educational opportunities, and giving allowances for housing, it lowered the costs of living for the employees on its payroll, and thus shortened the necessary labour time, increasing the relative surplus value. Having a standard employment relationship was the prerequisite of having access to these amenities and the minimum wage arrangement was predicated on this lowering of livelihood expenses. This sharpened the inequalities among the workforce and strengthened the interpersonal links between the Company and the employees in the payroll, extending the loyalty of the workers beyond the borders of the workspace. The establishment of the identity of "being of the Company" – *Sharket-e Nafti* - among employees of the Company, attests to the success of this project.

What in the Company terminology were called non-basic operations, such as public and industrial training, public transport, road maintenance, housing, medical care and related social benefits were the Company's essential activities in the realm of reproduction. Without these non-basic operations; any site of accommodation, any industrial training or any sanitary measures, it would be impossible to carry out one day of oil production in the industry. Moreover, that was where the Company's cooperation and, rarely, conflict with the state became more visible.

The Iranian oil industry was not exceptional in this sense. The

421 Ibid., "Chapter 16: Absolute and Relative Surplus-Value."

refinery city of Abadan and the towns of the fields areas constituted the first examples of company towns in Iran. Since the late 19th century, firstly in the US and then in Britain, France, and Germany, company towns, where production and reproduction would be undertaken by the company in charge were seen as a practical solution for the industries founded in areas where either no or insufficient infrastructure existed for the new labouring population.[422] While the primary aim of these towns were providing the means for social reproduction, the less scrutinized function of them was monitoring, controlling and socializing the labour force in the way the industry at stake was interested in.[423]

Active engagement of the oil company in the reproduction of its labour force in the company towns extended the population under study both qualitatively and quantitatively as it meant taking the labouring population beyond the oil worker in the factory to the worker engaged in all sorts of reproductive work; from cooks and waiters in the canteen, to the domestic servant bearing a ration card for shopping at the company stores, to the contracted construction worker building houses for the oil workers, to the petroleum guards responsible for maintaining the security of the oil wells. These non-basic services were also important in the extension of the Company's sphere of influence beyond a commercial company; assuming state like attributes and responsibilities that created a realm of constant formal and informal negotiations with the state, and a strong claim over the reproduction and control of the body of workers.

This chapter dissects the living conditions of the oil producing community focusing on these "non-basic operations" of the Company. The way housing, education and health facilities were organized not only demonstrates their interconnectedness in shaping the workers' lives, but

422 Kaveh Ehsani, "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman," *International Review of Social History* 48, no. 3 (December 2003), 373.

423 Ibid.,362.

also provides us with a microcosm to study the interaction of the state, the Company and the workers in maintaining the stratified structure of the oil producing community with the accompanying mechanism of political hegemony. The type of activities that the Company engaged in makes it hard to answer the question of where the Company ends and where the state begins.

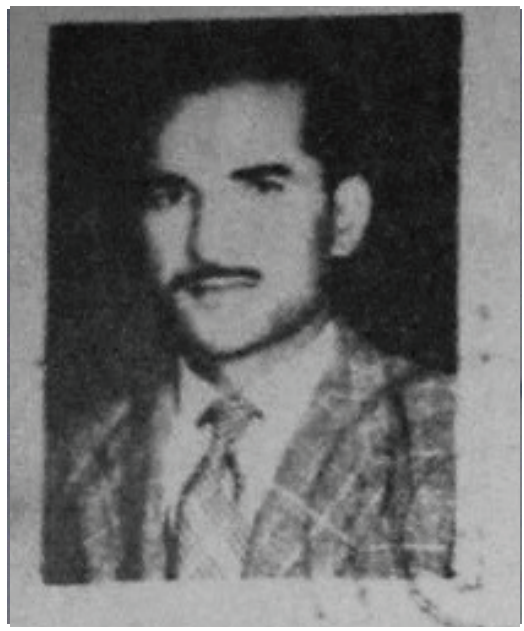
The institutionalisation of these services dated back to 1930s, codified with the 1933 Concession and later with the 1954 Consortium. The poor quality of their provision had frequently been asserted in workers' reasons for dispute, and they had been an essential part of the negotiations between the Iranian state and the Company in drafting new agreements. The practice and the archival documentation of the Company demonstrate that training and housing had particular weight among the other "non-basic" services of the Company.

In this chapter, the history of housing in the oil industry will be followed by the history of education and health facilities. But first, I will illustrate what living with Company meant with short accounts by/on three people; Reza, Maryam, and Kazem, all living and working in the oil producing area in the period under study. Their stories are far from unique. Working in the Southern oil fields and the Abadan refinery meant living with the Company. It meant going to the hospital run by the Company upon getting ill, sending your children to Company sponsored schools with Company run buses if you could, shopping from Company run stores with ration cards, spending afternoons and weekends in Company managed clubs, and holidays in the north of Iran in company camps if entitled.

Reza

Every day, Reza, born in 1927, a worker at the power plant of first the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, and later the Consortium, would take a few steps down from his home, walk over the bridge over the river and be at work at 7.30 in the morning in the Tembi electric factory of Masjed Soleyman (See Picture 14). It was the hooter of the factory that woke him up in the morning and it would take him ten minutes to be at work. He worked until 12.00, walked back home, had his lunch and return to factory ten to 1 pm. When he left work at 4.30, he would go home and rest. He did not like to go to the workers' club in the fields' area. He did not like to play cards, or drink. When he married, he moved from his bachelors' quarters, where he had a room of six-meter square, to a house shared by two other families in the same neighborhood.

Picture 14



Reza's photo cropped from his primary education certificate given in 1966. Reza's personal archive, accessed in 2012 in Shahinshahr.

Originally from Chahar Mahal, he did not want to be a farmer like his father and aspired to be a "technician", a *fanni.* His cousin, who worked at the Oil Company in Masjed Soleyman, helped him get a job with the Company after he finished his military service.[424] He started before the nationalisation and retired after the revolution. His first job was attending to the concrete mixer, then after three months he was employed for shift work (there were three shifts, one for resting and two working shifts of eight hours) at the newly found power plant. He learnt the job on the shop floor from an Indian foreman, called Jahan *Hindi*, the Indian Jahan. Jahan taught Reza a new skill every week and tested him afterwards. Reza would follow the tasks designed for him by Jahan, and when he finished them he would sometimes make things to take home from the salvaged material like steel pieces and wires, such as beds to sit on in the garden. He attended the night courses organized at the Company and got his primary school diploma in 1966, when he was thirty-nine years old. He retired as foreman.

His children would take the *chub khati*, the score-stick, to the Company's bakery and buy bread every day. The baker would not always score the stick. In return, Reza would do electrical repairs in the bakery when necessary. For this, he would use the tools of the power plant of the Company he was working at. They would pay the butcher and the bakery every fifteen days that he was paid. Talking about his service for the oil company after retirement and living in Shahinshahr, he was proud to work at the same job, at the same factory, with the same ID number, sometimes used as a substitute for his name, for more than twenty-five years.

After retiring, Reza sold his house that he had constructed on company leased land in Ahwaz and moved to Shahinshahr, a small town populated by retired oil workers after the start of Iran-Iraq war. Walking in the town would reveal how weighty the experience in the oil company had been for workers and employees of the Company. They would all name

424 Reza R., interview with the author, 26.05.2012, Shahinshahr.

themselves as *sharket-e nafti*, "of the oil company" and they would all play chess and drink tea, mostly after breakfast until lunch. However, some would do this in the newly renovated association of retired oil employees' center, and some would take their renowned spots in the Ferdowsi Park. The Ferdowsi Park is at the end of the Ferdowsi Avenue, where the association is located. This separation is a legacy of the experience of working in the oil industry. Most, indeed probably nobody, would object or even notice workers' presence in the employees' association. Yet, they did not belong there and they have lived long enough to internalize the stratified structure of employment in the oil industry. Speaking as a retired oil worker in his eighties, Reza envied his son in law's health insurance, that provided him with a good health service in a company hospital and free medication, while he only had access to ordinary hospitals without any privilege of being "of the oil company." [425]

Maryam

Maryam was born in Masjed Soleyman in 1939 (See Picture 15). Her father worked as an interpreter for the Company employees. Upon marrying Reza at the age of fourteen, she moved to a three-roomed house they shared with two other families at Tembi in Masjed Soleyman. Each family had a room opening to a common courtyard, where the toilet was located. There was no kitchen and no piped water. They bought water delivered to their street.

Maryam learnt tailoring herself and started to make clothes and sell them to neighbors. She claimed that eventually she earned the same amount of money as her husband would earn monthly. Some other women in the neighborhood, wives of oil workers, would do similar jobs at home. Apart from tailoring, hairdressing, and eyebrow threading was

425 Based on interview with Reza R. in Shahinshahr, 2012.

among the services taken on by these women. However, Maryam was clear that no oil workers' wife would go to work in houses as servants. Indeed, the servants employed at staff houses were predominantly men. It was not only women who undertook non-Company side jobs to contribute to the family budget. Maryam would buy milk from a neighbor, an oil worker, who had a couple of cows in his garden. Later she raised some herbs and vegetables in her little garden as well. Some would sell the pulses given by the Company in the market. She did not like the rice given by the Company and would take it back to store and buy a different type upon paying the difference in price.

Picture 15

Photo taken by the author while Maryam was doing her daily grocery shopping in Shahinshahr, Iran, 2012.

When they moved to Bibiyan neighborhood, she had an open kitchen, where a stone, lit all day by gas provided by the Company, was made use of to cook. Maryam remembered that her skin darkened in time as she had to attend the red, hot stone most of the day and she would feel like fainting after each time cooking. She gave birth to three sons and

a daughter, all at her mother's home, although she could go to ompany hospital. "It was not well-received" for women to give birth outside the family home, she reckoned. She would receive invitations from the Company to attend literacy classes, which she attended for a short while but did not continue, as it was hard to follow the course with four children. She remembered with pride that the health inspectors of the Company visiting their place would appreciate her. The inspectors would ask to take her second son with them to visit the neighbors to show him as the model of a healthy, oil company baby. [426]

Kazem

Kazem was working as cook in Charles Schroeder's house in 1958 (See Picture 16). Schroeder was head of the Payroll department in Abadan and employed Kazem before his family arrived to join him in Abadan. Kazem lived in the bazaar area of Abadan and was Arab. His monthly salary was equal to a high skilled worker or an Iranian non-graded clerk. In addition to cooking, he would also do the cleaning at the house. Kazem cooked everyday for Charles. When he left on Thursdays, he would leave a plate of food and a pan of soup for Charles to eat on Friday, Kazem's day off. He had suggested this to Charles so that he would not eat out and save money. He would do the shopping, both from the bazaar and the staff stores. While buying from the bazaar he would add a commission fee to the bill, as it was usually believed that foreigners would not be able to do their own shopping in the bazaar. Kazem would cook mostly European dishes for Charles and his family. Both for economic reasons and to have more control over the household diet and shopping, the Schroeder family stopped employing him after a year.[427]

426 Based on interview with Maryam R. in Shahinshahr.

427 Letters of Schroeder to his family. Courtesy of Paul Schroeder, Orono, Maine.

Despite the fact that domestic workers employed in staff homes were not Company employees, they were entitled to shop from company stores. Before the nationalisation of oil, recommendations to staff with respect to domestic workers were recorded in staff manuals. Moreover, the Company acted as a facilitator to find domestic workers for foreign staff. They would be entitled to benefits from the Company upon proving good service for a number of years.[428]

Picture 16

Charles Schroeder, "Kazem the cook, May 1958" Harvard University, Visual Information Access (VIA).

428 See Chapter 2.

Housing

"The Companies never undertook to house all their employees."[429] Rather direct, but a precise summary of the housing policy of the oil companies from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company to the Operating Companies of the Consortium.

The International Labour Organisation (I.L.O) mission to Iran released its report titled *Labour Conditions in the Oil Industry in Iran* in 1950, appreciating the Company's achievement in a "comparatively short time in spite of exceptionally unfavorable circumstances" while blaming local landlords for the overcrowding and unfavorable housing situation "outside" the Company area. The report mentioned a division of the city into two, one part resembling a modern European housing estate, and the other made of congested mud houses.[430] According to the figures of ILO report, in Abadan, ninety per cent of salaried staff was given accommodation in company houses, while the figures were seventeen per cent for labourers in 1949.[431]

This report did not stay unchallenged. Just after the nationalisation of oil, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) published its own contra report to the ILO report of 1950. Apart from charges of partiality made against the commission sent by the ILO, the NIOC report criticized the apologetic discourse that the former report employed. The NIOC report's critique of the housing section of the former report was prominent. It argued that from 1920 until 1933, when the new consortium agreement was signed, the Company "did not build a single house, room, shack or

429 "Evolution and present situation of the home ownership schemes and future plans for housing staff and labour employees" Tehran, 1971. BP Archive, ArcRef: 193662.

430 ILO., *Labour Conditions in the Oil Industry in Iran: Report of a Mission of the International Labour Office* (London: Staples Press Limited, 1950), 31-32. IISG 1998/2550.

431 Ibid.

shelter for the Iranian worker".[432] Moreover, it was emphasized that the neighborhoods suggested as being "outside company areas" were working class neighborhoods populated by labourers of the Company, who had not been provided with accommodation (for three different types of labour dwelling see Picture 17, 18, and 19).

Indeed, the Company's own archives (BP archives) recount the following figures in 1950 and puts flesh on the numbers presented above. The dispute is not on the aggregate percentage. However, a detailed account reveals the unequal distribution of houses among labourers. Already having less advantageous social and economic conditions in comparison to the staff of the Company, workers' access to housing was hierarchically discriminative. The previous figures for 1949 involved 937 houses for foremen (ninety per cent housed), 1980 houses for Grade I workers (twenty seven per cent housed), 485 houses for Grade II workers (eight per cent housed), 73 houses for Grade III workers (two per cent housed) and 373 houses for the unskilled (four per cent housed) among other groups.[433] Furthermore, the areas claimed to be outside the Company's zone in the ILO report, Bahmanshir, Farahabad, Bahar and Ahmadabad, were listed among four major labour housing estates in Abadan in the Company papers. (For a map of Abadan see Picture 20).

432 National Iranian Oil Company, *Some Documents on the Conditions of the Iranian Workers under the Ex-Anglo Iranian Oil Co.*

433 BP Archive, ArcRef: 68186.

Picture 17

Charles Schroeder, "New houses for labour," Abadan, 1958-59, Harvard University VIA.

Picture 18

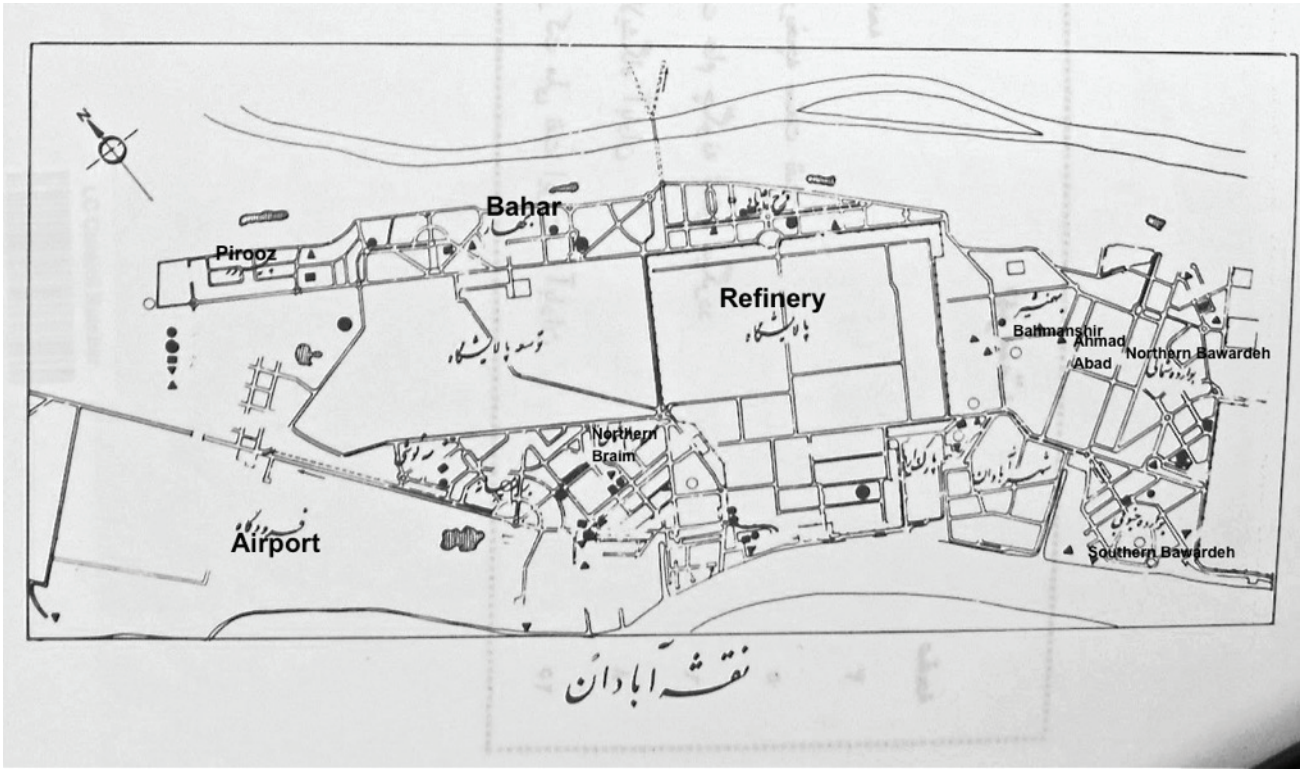
A tented camp for workers in Abadan, late 1940s.

Some Documents on the Conditions of the Iranian Workers under the Ex-Anglo Iranian Oil Co. NIOC.

Picture 19

Charles Schroeder, "Family home [made] of shipping crates, Abadan bazaar," 1958-59.

Picture 20



Naft va Abadan, 2, Sherkate Sahamiye Tasfiyeye Naft Iran, 1964, Library of Congress. (English inserted by the author)

The ILO report described the four labour housing estates as such:

"The Bahma[n]shir Estate, which was built before the War, consists of brick-built houses and is occupied by married and bachelor Iranian labour, the Pakistani and Indian Labour of the Company and some Iranian Non-Graded staff. The average family on this Estate at the end of 1949 consisted of the employee, his wife, four children and two lodgers. Of the adult males living in Bahma[n]shir 88 % were employed by the Company."

…

"The F[a]rahabad Estate, built during the War, contains brick-built houses and is occupied by married Iranian labour and some junior Iranian staff. An average family at the end of 1949 consisted of the employee, his wife, three children and two lodgers, 85 % of the adult males living at F[a]rahabad being company employees."

…

"The Bahar Estate, consisting of brick-built houses, is increasing in size, the main expansion in labour housing being concentrated on this Estate. Part of the Estate was built during 1945-1946 and the conversion of these houses was completed by early 1950. (…) Some 78 % of the adult male population of this area is employed by the company."

…

"The Ahmadabad Estate consists of quarters built of mud bricks and was constructed during the war. The Estate is occupied by married Iranian labour, the average size of the family at the end of 1949 being the man, his wife, two to three children, and one lodger. 88 % of the adult males living at Ahmadabad were company employees.

Quarters in this estate are now being demolished and replaced by brick houses constructed by a local building firm, which is assisted by the company in obtaining materials and technical advice. There is no electricity supply in the area, surface

drainage is lacking in the majority of the lines and roads and paths are not asphalted. Drinking water points and lavatories are communal."

Apart from these four estates, housing in a camp of 360 tents was also mentioned. The "lodgers" mentioned in the above explanation of the residents refer to extended family members, such as old widowed or unmarried uncles or aunts or grandparents, the presence of whom were frequent in households, and were far from being temporary.

The Company report was written just after the ILO Committee visited the area, and its findings portrayed a much less optimistic vision than the ILO report, despite the latter's claim of neutrality. Another source from the same year testifies to the fictitiousness of the "outside company" category in housing. Visiting Abadan in 1949, the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) commission was approached by AIOC management stating that no Company employees lived in Kharasabad, a shantytown marked by "standing water, and general filth and degradation." However, talking with the inhabitants of the town, the Committee discovered that nearly all Kharasabad's population worked for the Company.[434]

The Company's policy of segregation with respect to housing was not just a matter of a city with two sections due to favorable company housing and a "local type of urban agglomeration"[435] as the ILO claimed, but was based on an approach to city planning that reinforced and produced such segregation. Touraj Atabaki argues that Abadan was a triple city, hierarchically segregated, with Europeans on the top, Indians in the middle and Persians at the bottom.[436] Borrowing from Abu-Lughod,

434 Michael Edward Dobe, "A Long Slow Tutelage in Western Ways of Work: Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and Aramco, 1923-1963" (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008), 107.

435 I.L.O., *Labour Conditions in the Oil Industry in Iran: Report of a Mission of the International Labour Office*., 32.

436 Touraj Atabaki, "Far from Home, But at Home: Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry," *Studies in History* 31, no. 1 (2015), 100-104.

Kaveh Ehsani argues that Khuzestan's company towns were "dual cities", as they were designed to be divided into several segregated spaces. As Ehsani emphasized, and as is also argued here, oil towns' duality firstly came from their division into formal and informal spaces. [437]

Mark Crinson, in "Abadan: planning and architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company" argued that Abadan was in effect a colonial company town composed of a "collection of urban forms gathered around an oil refinery". [438] According to Crinson, the refinery was actually working as a *cordon sanitaire* between the oldest residential estate of the company, the bungalow area of Braim, which developed as a residential area for European senior staff, and the "native city of colonial imagination"[439] embodied in the "town" or bazaar (see Picture 21 for Braim and Picture 19 for the Abadan bazaar).[440] From its initiation, the Company's concern was to provide housing and social amenities primarily for its non-Iranian employees. According to Crinson, company housing was divided into three classes. First was the fully-furnished housing for British staff and a few junior Iranian senior staff; second, partly furnished houses for non-European junior staff; and third, unfurnished "facilities" for workers. The large numbers of contract workers, who were far from being temporary, were not even classified as potential recipients of housing or other social amenities promised to workers of the Company.[441] They belonged to the "informal" space.

437 Kaveh Ehsani, "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman," *International Review of Social History* 48, no. 3 (December 2003), 383-84.

438 Mark Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," *Planning Perspectives* 12, no. 3 (January 1997), 342.

439 Ibid., 342.

440 Ibid., 343.

441 Ibid., 347.

Picture 21

Schroeder, "SQ 1098, Feb. 1958," Staff housing, Braim. Harvard University, VIA.

While the complaints about the quantity and quality of housing were a substantial matter in the resentments that gave rise to the nationalisation movement, it was the unequal share of the amenities among the oil producing community that established the core of the frustration. In 1952, Roy M. Melbourne, the First secretary of US Embassy in Tehran would word it as such:

> Iranian vanity which activates men more than economic realism was justifiably offended by the social as well as economic walls the British built. The employees might previously have enjoyed nothing better and perhaps not as good as the tents given them by the company or the mud and tin dwellings which they erected unaided. Yet the daily sight of the well-housed, smug and assured foreign people about them accentuated a real issue of inadequate housing as an emotional issue and that emotionalism largely contributed to the popularity of the seizures of the oil industry.[442]

The seniority in the employment ladder and skill chart converged with ethnic divisions. The labour housing estates mentioned above (Ahmadabad, Bahmanshir, Bahar and Farahabad) were for non-European labour; Segoushe Braim, Amirabad, and Bawardaye Shomali (Northern Bawarda) were neigbourhoods for non-European staff. The ethnic division surmounted the labour/staff or European/non-European divisions. For example, Ahmadabad, a residential area for the workers of the Company who were at the lowest echelons of job hierarchy, was known to be quarters populated by Arabs.[443] All the neighbourhoods mentioned above, except Ahmadabad, were designed by the same architect, J. M. Wilson.[444]

442 "Commentary on the Iranian Publication "Some documents on conditions of Iranian workers under the ex-Anglo-Iranian Oil Company" From Embassy Tehran, Iran to Department of State, Washington. 6/8/1952. 888.06/8-652, NARA.

443 Isma'il Fasih, *Asir-e Zamān*, n.d.

444 Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," 351.

Despite its mountainous geography, Masjed Soleyman was organized by divided living spaces according to job, rank and ethnicity as well. Most of my interviewees were living in Tembi and Bibiyan, known to be the quartiers of the workers. Despite the lack of any reference to a clash or discriminatory treatment among workers of different ethnicities, none of the workers living in these two neighbourhoods stated that they had non-Muslim neighbours, while most of them named the neighbourhood *Nomreh 40* as the neighbourhood where Armenians used to live. Kaveh Ehsani states that *Nomreh* 40 was the neighbourhood of low ranked staff. Senior managers lived in *Shah Neshin*, literally meaning the seat of the King, senior staff in *Naftak* and *Talkhab*, lower level staff in *Nomreh 40*, *Camp Scotch*, and *Pansion*-e *Khayyam*, and workers in *Naftoun*, *Do Lane, Seh Lane, Bibian*, and others.[445] Ehsani's example of separate cemeteries for workers and staff in Masjed Soleyman is a striking illustration of the extent of segregation.[446]

In this highly segregated milieu, Bawarda came out as a project, a "manifesto of racial mixing, an experiment in non-segregation" (See Picture 22).[447] One of the first of the British staff living in the estate, C. L. Hawker, first a labour welfare officer, and then an educational and training adviser, testified to Bawarda's mission of integrating British and Persian Staff in an interview conducted in 1984 .[448]

The timing of the first housing plan for the "formal space," 1936, and the vision it embodies is telling for registering the cornerstones of the history of housing in the Iranian oil industry, which I argue follows historical conjunctions of labour activism.

445 Ehsani, "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman," 391.

446 Ibid., 385.

447 Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," 351.

448 "Interview with C. L. Hawker, 22nd June 1984" in BP Archive, ArcRef: 142640.

Picture 22

Bawarda, Private collection of Nasser Khaksar, Photographer unknown.

To house or not to house: the quest

The architect Wilson drafted the first plan in 1934, just after the new concession of 1933, a product of the Iranian state's push for the Iranianisation of the oil industry and the strikes of the late 1920s, among others.[449] He argued that the Company should introduce new measures to meet the nationalist demands that were on the rise in the Middle East since World War I, and drafted Bawarda district as a part of such an effort to bridge the gap between the Iranian and British employees of the Company. [450] However, it did so on the basis of a link between the Iranian and British employees of the Company that shared more or less the same level in the employment hierarchy. The Iranians who lived in the Bawarda district before the nationalisation of the oil industry were Iranians "generally educated in the British universities, who had attained senior positions in the Abadan hierarchy."[451] The plan aimed to provide

449 See Chapter One.

450 Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," 351.

451 Ibid., 356.

accommodation for eighty per cent of married supervisors and twenty-five per cent of married artisans.[452] The Company's housing policy, which dismissed the accommodation needs of the workers at lower levels of the job hierarchy, was narrated as "a tendency to put the emphasis on quality rather than quantity in its housing provision" in the official history of the BP.[453] Following these first drafts, a *Proces Verbal* that framed a five-year plan involving the improvement of worker housing and amenities in Abadan was concluded on April 2, 1936.[454]

With the eruption of World War II, things got worse for the oil workers. Exploration activity was suspended; production was reduced due to the disruptions in shipping and consecutive fall in demand.[455] The number of Company employees in Iran – together with those employed on company projects by contractors was reduced from 51,060 at the end of August 1939 to 26,271 at the end of August 1941, when the allied troops entered Iran and the occupation started.[456] However, the actual population of concern was more than six times of this formal figure. The Company records mention 170,000 people as employees and their dependents in 1942.[457] With the occupation, an increase in the demand for Iranian oil by the British and the Soviets emerged. Abadan refinery produced aviation fuel for military operations.[458] Apart from aviation fuel and oil for internal consumption, demand for oil to make asphalt for roads and depots, was

452 Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: Volume 2 The Anglo-Iranian Years,1928-1954,* 99.

453 Ibid.

454 Michael Edward Dobe, "A Long Slow Tutelage in Western Ways of Work: Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and Aramco, 1923-1963" (Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008), 72.

455 Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: Volume 2 The Anglo-Iranian Tears,1928-1954.*, 238.

456 Ibid., 239.

457 "Food and clothing supplies and farming and agricultural development" in BP Archive, ArcRef: 129346.

458 Dobe, "A Long Slow Tutelage in Western Ways of Work: Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and Aramco, 1923-1963", 9.

also on the rise.[459] With the revival of production after the occupation, the number of employees reached to 65,000 at the end of war. It was admitted by the Company General Manager in Iran, Pattison, that large numbers of workers had to camp in the open in 1944.[460]

The waves of strikes in the oil fields and Abadan led by communist *Tudeh* Party members in spring 1946, culminated in the Abadan general strike in July 1946, which lasted three days. Shortages in housing and poor medical and social amenities were among the main concerns of the striking workers of 1946.[461] Dobe points to the effect of the strike in the Company's reevaluation of its housing policy from the records of the ARAMCO, the Personnel Planning Committee of which paid a visit to review the AIOC operations in Abadan. The mission took place in 1949 and involved interviews both with the British and Iranian senior staff of the Company. After their visit, the committee discussed "how the strike had scared AIOC into doing a lot more to help the workers, particularly in the area of housing." After the strike, the Company engaged in building housing for doctors, preachers and teachers in the labour quarters of Bahmanshir; stores and recreational facilities for "different classes of people" were built in Farahabad.[462] The ARAMCO committee evaluated this improvement of the housing situation with respect to the British governments' pressure on the Company to avoid the threat of communism.[463] Of 21,000 houses that the Company constructed between 1936 and 1950, half were built after the general strike of 1946.[464]

459 Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: Volume 2 The Anglo-Iranian Years,1928-1954,* 240.

460 Ibid., 246.

461 Habib Ladjevardi, *Labour Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 124-136.

462 Dobe, "A Long Slow Tutelage in Western Ways of Work: Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and Aramco, 1923-1963," 106.

463 Ibid., 107.

464 Ibid., 130.

With the evacuation of the British staff and non-Iranian workers in 1951, the housing situation took another turn. The reports from the post-nationalisation, Pre-Consortium era recount that Iranian Staff moved to the houses previously occupied by British staff, while some three hundred houses in Braim were reserved for foreign technicians the nationalized oil industry needed. Most of the house relocations were meant to be provisional. [465] The very first thing that the Iranian administration engaged in was finishing up the houses under construction.[466] The reports of the Pre-Consortium working group mentioned that the NIOC senior staff would be happy to get foreign assistance but "they would not be willing to give up their jobs, salaries, and in particular houses."[467] As the oil production had come to a halt due to the blockade, no significant change happened in the quantity of the housing available until the late 1950s.

The US report prior to the Consortium agreement states that no labourer receiving the minimum wage was eligible for company housing in 1954. The housing allocation was done on a points-based system. This was the same system employed before the nationalisation of oil. The worker received one point for each Rial pay he received above 40 Rials a day, plus two points for every year's service (for the first five years) and one point for every year's service after five years.[468] This system rendered it hard for the unskilled worker to gain enough points to be eligible for housing. To give an illustration: a worker with a basic pay of fifty-five Rials must have had forty years of service to collect sixty-five points, the minimum required for a house in 1954. However, it would take ten years for a worker with a

465 "Memorandum based on Mr. Kazerooni's Information." FO 371/110051.

466 Kazerooni, "Extract letter from Tehran, dated January 17, 1954" in FO 371/110051 and "Preliminary notes on a visit to the fields areas of Khuzestan, Persia. 11-17 February, 1954."

467 "Persian Oil," T.R.D. Belgrave, Foreign Office, London. February 23, 1954. FO 371/110051.

468 "Present Labour Situation at the National Iranian Oil Company" 888.06/10-754 Dispatch no 192, 7/10/1954 in *A Guide to confidential U.S. State Department central files, Iran, 1950-1954: Internal affairs, decimal numbers 788, 888, and 988, and foreign affairs, decimal numbers 688 and 611.88,* Harvard University.

pay of ninety Rials a day to qualify for a house. Twenty-four per cent of the labourers at the Abadan Refinery, forty-three per cent of the labourers in the fields and all staff employees were housed before the Consortium stepped in. [469]

The borders of the formal and informal spaces of the oil cities were challenged by the workers. The workers who had access to company housing subletted some of their rooms to other workers who needed housing, despite the regulations forbidding this. The total registered population of the workers' areas, Bahmanshir, Farahabad, Jamshid and Bahar was thirty-nine thousand, which resulted in a density figure of 6.3 persons to a house. However, NIOC research revealed that this figured doubled from time to time, the severest being as many as fourteen residents living in three room houses in Farahabad, reported to be the residence area of the lower ranking workers. [470]

Picture 23

Bahmanshir,"Red Bungalows,"
Private collection of Nasser Khaksar. Photographer unknown.

469 Ibid.
470 Ibid.

Picture 24

Schroeder, "Bahmanshir village, Abadan." 1958-59, Harvard University, VIA.

One other solution of the Company for the housing problem at Abadan was to provide workers or construction companies with salvage material for them to build houses. Karun housing area was an example of this initiative. [471]

The situation at the fields was better in terms of bare housing. While twenty-eight per cent of the workers of Abadan were housed, the percentage was forty-three in the fields. However, houses did not have individual access to water or gas and shared a common water point and a common kitchen with gas outlet. Houses were scattered due to the availability of land and workers could grow wheat or vegetables in their

471 Ibid.

gardens. [472]

The Consortium agreement of 1954 rendered the NIOC responsible for "non-basic services," including housing. However, the transfer of these functions did not take place immediately. The NIOC was not keen to shoulder these essential functions without having the necessary information, experience, and infrastructure. The Operating Companies were not willing to transfer them straightaway, either. The First Secretary of British Embassy, responsible for Labour Affairs, A. G. Read reported that senior consortium officers "did not expect an early decision on the transfer of responsibility for such services", primarily as it was not easy to define "what constituted a non-basic operation." Read wrote:

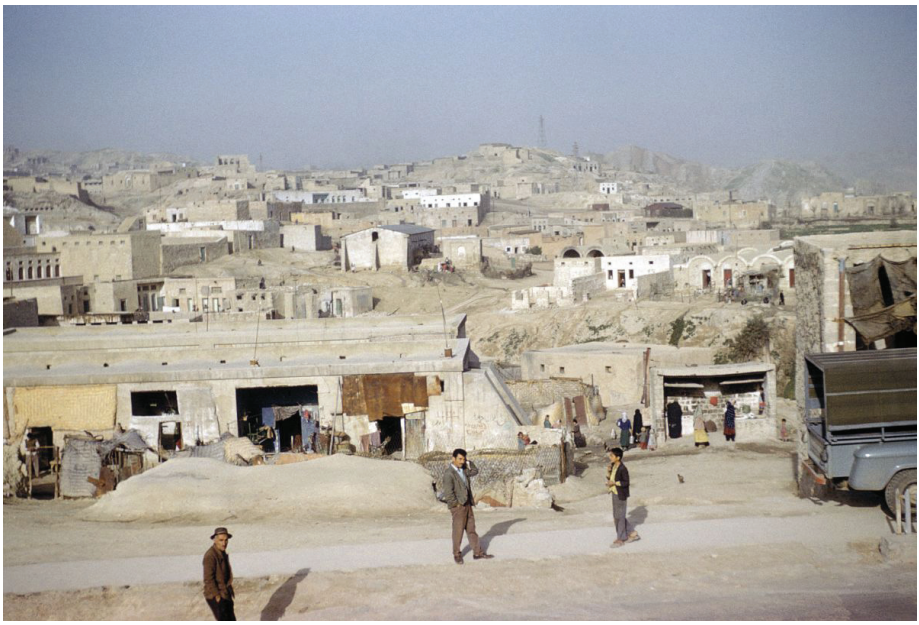
> The General "Fields" Manager said that it was not clear yet which company would be responsible for servicing roads and constructing houses at sites at which "wild cat" operations might be carried out. It seemed to be generally agreed, however, that it would redound to the credit of NIOC if they were to assume responsibility for welfare services at an early date.[473]

Read's report mentions the completion of five hundred houses in Abadan by the end of 1954. The recounted figures for housing are slightly higher than the US report dating from before the Consortium.

472 Ibid.

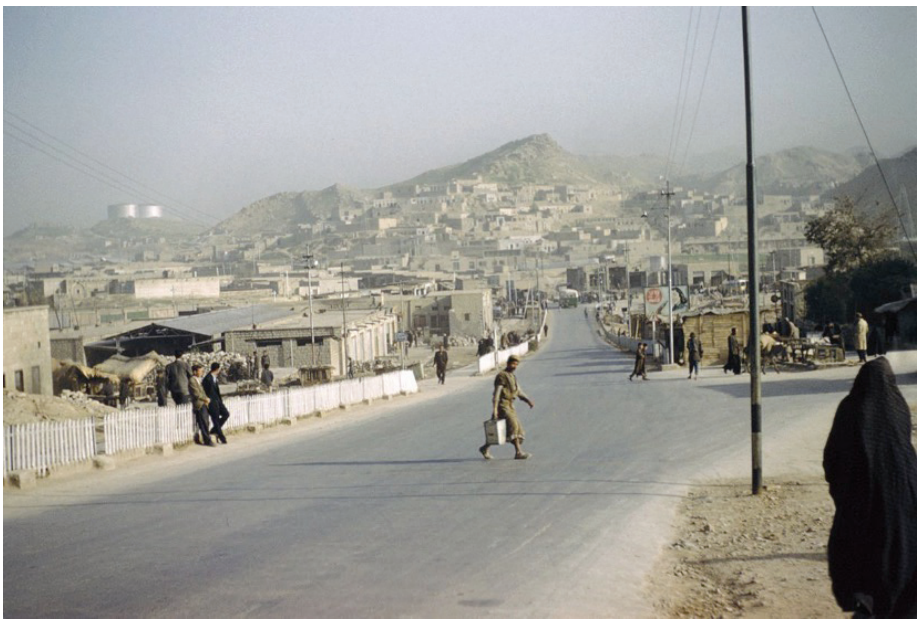
473 "Labour and Social Affairs in Persia. Labour Attache's Review for Period October 1954- June 1955", 8. FO 371/114871.

Picture 25



Schroeder, "Town Scene, MIS [Masjed Soleyman]," 1958-59, Harvard University, VIA.

Picture 26



Schroeder, "Main Street, MIS [Masjed Soleyman]," 1958-59, Harvard University, VIA.

The 1955 revision of wages in the oil industry increased house maintenance fees for the company housed workers and incorporated the rental allowances that the non-housed workers previously got in the wages.[474] According to the minimum wage agreement of September 1957, the house maintenance charge for housing was as follows:

Table 8

	Abadan/ monthly	Fields/ monthly
One room	300 Rials	240 Rials
Two rooms	420 Rials	420 Rials
Three rooms	540 Rials	540 Rials
Four rooms	660 Rials	660 Rials

"Wages in the Iranian Oil Industry: Oil Consortium Area, Khuzestan. Minimum Wage agreement of September 16, 1957" LAB 13/1092.

The same report recounts a kilo of yogurt to be fifteen Rials, and fish to be twenty-eight Rials per kilo. The minimum wage was ninety-nine Rials per day. It is reported that only workers with a daily wage of 150 Rials and twenty-five years of service had the chance of access to housing.[475]

Usage of temporary housing such as tents for regular housing, extra "lodgers" in family housing due to extended families, and/or houses occupied by non-Company workers were mentioned in the Company documents.[476] The disparity between the formal housing policy and the actual allocation had further examples. The situation of staff housing in Abadan in 1957 was explained as such: "Housing in Abadan is about adequate for staff at the present time but only because some 700 units originally allocated to labour are occupied by staff members and their

474 Ibid., "Labour Matters in the Persian Oil Industry: Report on Labour Attache's visit to Khuzestan 3rd to 7th April, 1955."

475 LAB 13/1092.

476 BP Archive, ArcRef: 65376.

families."[477] Moreover, the reports of 1967 pointed to government employees and non-Company employees occupying nine hundred staff houses and seven hundred labour houses.[478]

Bringing in the Bank: the invention of "freedom" of accommodation

The Company report on housing and home ownership in 1968 starts with this sentence, clarifying the formal housing policy: "In the Agreement Area, we have never attempted to house all employees and only in locations where there is no local community has it been considered necessary to house everybody."[479] Lack of housing and inadequacy of social amenities continued to cause disruption and gave rise to strikes in 1957.[480] Even the documents pertaining to the Iranian Oil Operating Companies of the Consortium would acknowledge the pressure put on the Companies by labour and junior staff for adequate housing and social amenities. In order to "reduce the pressures" and not to shoulder the responsibility of building more houses, a new solution for housing problem was introduced: the 1958 Home Ownership Scheme. First, with the extension of oil operations to Ahwaz, 769 houses were built in Ahwaz and starting in 1963, 300 houses in Abadan. These houses were sold to eligible employees on installments up to twenty years, at about cost price with an addition of an administration fee. The NIOC provided free land for the labour housing in Ahwaz. Furthermore, an addition to housing allowance was added to the wages of the unhoused workers.

In addition to the 1958 Home Ownership Scheme, a house procurement loan scheme was also introduced for employees of the

477 LAB 13/1092.
478 BP Archive, ArcRef: 127030.
479 Ibid., 24.
480 See Chapter 4 on Labour Activism.

Company to borrow money to build, purchase, repair or improve their own housing in 1960. The selected banks would arrange the interest rate with the employee and the house would be used as a "collateral" for a value estimated by the bank that would only lend up to seventy per cent of the value of the property (fifty per cent of it upon NIOC recommendation[481]), the worker having to borrow more money from his savings fund with the Company to put up the other thirty per cent.[482] This mechanism illustrates how the worker was put under at least a double loan and became dependent on the banks with the "new solution" to housing. This scheme also initiated a close alliance between the banks and the Company in extracting the loan given for house ownership. Operating Companies would do payroll deductions every month for the repayment of installments and passed them to the bank.[483]

While the 1958 introduced "home ownership plan" was targeted for junior staff and workers, the "home procurement scheme" was for staff. To be eligible for home procurement loans the employee had to have at least five years of credited service with the NIOC and/or operating companies; the conditions for eligibility pressed that the worker and his/her spouse did not own a residential house in the town where the employee worked or wanted to construct or purchase a house; S/he and his/her spouse did not own real estate with rentals or incomes equal to or higher than the rent paid for the residential home. Provided that the applicants met these criteria, those who were aged over forty would be given priority. The next group would be the employees accommodated in company housing and the rest would be evaluated according to seniority in the job hierarchy. No employee would be granted a loan more than once throughout his/her

481 BP Archive, ArcRef: 78016.

482 "Iranian Oil Operating Companies- Evolution and Present Situation of the Home ownership schemes and future plans for housing Staff and Labour Employees." Tehran, April 1971, in BP Archive, ArcRef: 193662.

483 BP Archive, ArcRef: 78016.

service. [484]

After 1961, housing allowance became a part of collective labour agreements and given to employees not housed by the Company, irrespective of whether they had a housing loan or not. [485] In 1964 a modified home ownership scheme for labourers was introduced. That was similar to the house procurement scheme designed for staff in 1960, however, no banks were involved this time and Operating Companies would administer it with an interest free loan. By 1970, one fourth of the workers' applications were approved by the Company. [486]

Therefore, 1960s housing policy was a combination of housing allowances given to labourers, home ownership loans for workers and staff and the maintenance fees paid by staff and labourers for the company houses they occupied. The evaluation of this housing policy was summarized as such in 1967: 239 houses for (junior) staff and 830 for labour through the homeownership scheme; 873 loans taken by staff through the house procurement loan system; 1953 loans taken by labourers through the revised house procurement scheme. However, most of the time the maximum amount given by loans was not enough to purchase or build a house, which would result in the employees' withdrawal of their loan request.[487]

The reasons for the Company's change of perspective with regards to housing were not singular. The incapacity of the Company in providing adequate housing, recurring strikes and disputes due to it, and the change in the political attitude towards marketisation of the welfare benefits were the main pillars of the turn to home ownership schemes in 1960s. However, the fact that the Consortium agreement brought forth the necessity of transfer of all estates by the Operating companies to the NIOC at the end

484 Ibid.
485 BP Archive, ArcRef: 193662.
486 Ibid.
487 BP Archive, ArcRef: 127030.

of the agreement period fed the Company's disinterest in building houses for its employees further. Housing the workers was seen and worded as a burden, while workers' quest for housing without company assistance was seen as their "freedom of accommodation". [488]

The 1968 Annual Review of General Personnel Affairs of Iran Oil Operating Companies stated:

> Housing requirements would decrease as soon as we would be able to streamline our organisations and run down our work force by separating surplus employees. […] Eventually employees would require more freedom of accommodation in the context of the improved general housing situation in towns such as Abadan and Ahwaz. Having "got out of" furniture, we are now considering the possibilities of getting out of employee housing in the Agreement Area (housing represents about one third of the Non-Basic budgets). [489]

By the 1970s, the percentage of the housed workers and staff got higher. In the agreement area ninety per cent of staff and eighty per cent of labourers were housed.[490] However, the main reason for this was not an improvement in the housing, but a reduction in the number of employees. As was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, the Consortium engaged in reducing the number of its workers, starting right away from 1954, hence the "surplus labour" problem.[491] In 1972, the number of employees (both staff and labour) in Abadan had fallen to 9923 from 24661 in 1958. The figures for the fields were 6952 in 1972 as opposed to 18,977 in 1958.[492]

The segregation between living spaces along the axes of collar

488 Ibid., 26.

489 Ibid. There are examples of agreements between the Company and the municipalities on the terms of transferring the public services following the sale of Company houses to employees. See 293-48699, National Archives of Iran, Tehran for the case of Kooye Behrooz in Ahwaz in 1973.

490 BP Archive, ArcRef: 193662.

491 See Chapter 2.

492 BP Archive, ArcRef: 142646.

line and nationality of employees was so persistent that even after the revolution, workers occupying houses in Braim, Bawarda, and Bahmanshir were reported to argue that as workers it was not appropriate for them to live in Bawarda and Braim. The student activists of *Pishgam*, related to the guerilla group People's Feda'is, noted that occupying the houses in Braim would be unimaginable if it was not a collective initiative.[493]

Education

While the Company had never attempted to house all its employees, educating them was on its priorities list. It was a major actor in the organisation of education in Abadan and the oil fields of the South. Its involvement varied from constructing and managing schools for its workers and potential workers, before and after their employment, to collaborating with the Iranian state in constructing and managing public schools, or to providing fringe benefits to teachers employed by the state. The schooling enterprise, which involved building kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, hosting literacy classes, training workshops, post-employment courses, a technical school, and sending students abroad, deserves itself to be the subject of an in depth study.

For the Company, the general education (primary and secondary schooling, literacy classes, language classes) and trade oriented education at all levels, from the very first training and test shops to the Abadan Technical Institute, were parts of a combined effort. Here, a closer look at the organisation of the education in the oil producing community offers a glimpse of the densely interwoven mechanisms of interaction between the three main actors in the *place* of oil production, being the state, the Company and the workers, in the making of the workers' lives.

493 3/1/1358 (1979), 296-18966, The National Library and Archive Organisation of Iran.

The Take-Off Period

The first educational initiatives of the Company can be seen as resulting purely from practical necessities, and were therefore pragmatic in its literal meaning. Founding a new industry in a geography populated by people who did not have experience in the kind of enterprise that was engaged in necessitated teaching the people the skills that were crucial to run the industry. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had its British experts and Indian skilled workers at its reserve, whom it brought to the concession area to kickstart the industry. However, the unskilled workers, who would compose the main body of the oil workers in the following years of the industry, were too costly to be "imported" from other parts of the country. Therefore, the first initiative was to hire people and teach them the necessary skills for the industry under the supervision of the imported, mostly Indian, foremen. The Iranian workers were trained to work as fitters, turners, transport drivers, firemen and pumpmen in the early days of the industry.[494] This was not only a low-cost option for the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company but was also coded in the agreements between the Company and the Iranian State.[495]

After this first phase had passed, the Company's involvement with the education of the oil producing community became more elabourate and multilayered.

General Education

Kindergartens: The Company founded the first kindergartens in Abadan in the late 1940's. Three of them were constructed in Ahmadabad, Bahmanshir and Farahabad. Abdolali Lahsaeizadeh, who has written an extensive sociological study on Abadan, argues that the Company constructed schools in such places that the workers, the staff and the people

494 Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: Volume 2 The Anglo-Iranian Years,1928-1954,* 94.

495 See the Chapter One on Iranianisation of the industry.

of town would be able to benefit together, mostly to fabricate the feeling that there was no discrimination involved.[496] Lahsaeizadeh's claim reveals the resentment in the society towards company-oriented segregation.

However, a little detail about the transportation of the children of the staff to the kindergartens further exemplifies the logic of stratification involved in the organisation of production. Lahsaeizadeh states that the children of the staff were carried to the kindergartens with the trolleys that were used to transport workers in the mornings. Those trolley buses, called *trayli* by the workers,[497] were different from the buses that were used to transport staff to work in the morning. However, there is no mention of transportation for workers' children. Apart from the three kindergartens in Ahmadabad, Bahmanshir and Farahabad, a kindergarten in Bavardeh named *Parvaneh* for the children of staff and one in Braim for the British were founded. [498]

In 1954, the detailed oil report of the US Embassy lists nine kindergartens in Abadan with a total number of 1603 students, 668 girls and 935 boys. Of these nine kindergartens, one of them was run by the government and the other eight were *Melli* schools, which despite the literal meaning of the name, being national, points to their being private schools. However, the picture was not that clear even at the level of kindergartens. The US embassy report mentioned that seven of the eight private kindergartens are for children of labourers and that the Company paid for the thirty eight teachers working there.

496 Abdolali Lahsaeizadeh, *Jame-eh Shenasi-e Abadan* (Tehran: Kiyan Mehr, 2005), 466.

497 Interviews by the author.

498 Lahsaeizadeh, *Jame'h Shenasi-e Abadan,* 467.

Picture 27

Workers' buses, *trayli* or *yek gherani*. 1941.
Private collection of Nasser Khaksar, Photographer unknown.

Picture 28

Staff bus, line 83, commuting between Bawarda and Braim, 1947.
Private collection of Nasser Khaksar. Photographer unknown.

Primary and secondary schools

The first primary school in Abadan was founded by Armenians in 1925 in a rented house with two rooms, schooling fifteen to twenty Armenian students. [499] The Oil Company started in the late 1930's to build primary schools in Abadan and transfer them to the Ministry of Education upon completion. In the 1940's, mixed primary schools were opened.

Due to an illness that resulted in hairloss caused by poor hygiene, a separate school for bald children was founded. This school, *Nobonyad Golshan*, was founded in 1945 in Ahmadabad, which is known to be a labourer quarter mostly populated by unskilled workers of Arab origin, who were not benefiting from company housing. In the school year of 1947-48 this school of bald children had 352 students, some of whom would be transferred to regular schools after they were healed. [500]

In 1954 when the Consortium stepped in, there were twenty six primary schools in Abadan schooling 15978 students, 5741 of them being girls, and seventeen primary schools in the fields (Lali, Naft-e Safid, Gach Saran, Ahwaz, Agha Jari, Haft Kel and Masjed Soleyman) for 8710 studentsThe school in Masjed Soleyman was the most populated one with 4429 students. There were secondary schools in Agha Jari, Haft Kel and Masjed Soleyman.[501]

The axes of ethnicity/religion and staff/labourer were the most salient in the organisation of general education. In most cases there were no formal exclusion mechanisms, however the fact that the state was not supplying resources for the schools of the minorities, that the stratified structure of the housing of the employees of the Company meant that children of similar profiles of the employees shared the same schools due

499 Ibid.

500 Lahsaeizadeh, 467-69.

501 Page 1 of Enclosure no 16, Dispatch no 192 in *A Guide to confidential U.S. State Department central files, Iran, 1950-1954 : Internal affairs, decimal numbers 788, 888, and 988, and foreign affairs, decimal numbers 688 and 611.88,* Harvard University.

to the neighbourhood they lived in, and that it was only the employees in the upper pay strata who could afford to send their children to private *melli* schools proved that a lack of formal obstacles was not enough to create an inclusive and pluralistic organisation of education. [502]

> The report notes:
>
> Of Melli Primary schools, one is for the children of Staff Employees (mostly those living in the Bra[i]m Housing Area) , one is for Armenians, and two are supported by the townspeople of Abadan. Children of labourers go only to the Government Primary Schools. [503]

In the fields, of seventeen schools two were private and noted to be "for the children of Staff Employees who can afford the fees." Thirty per cent of the students in Abadan and twenty per cent of the students in the fields were reported as not being connected to the Company directly. Therefore both the supply side of the educational facilities (founded either by the Company or by the state or by private communities/townspeople) and receivers of this service (employees of the Company and townspeople of Abadan and the fields) reveals the embeddedness of the experience of the workers of the oil company with the experience of the oil producing community in general.

Even in the early 1920s, when no primary or secondary school existed in the oil towns (except the Armenians' primary school), the Company gave financial support to the missionary Stuart Memorial College in Esfahan, where a number of sons and relatives of the Company employees studied. [504] The first Iranian general manager of the Company and the highest degree Iranian employee of the oil company Mostafa Fateh was also a graduate of the Stuart Memorial College. The link between Stuart Memorial College and the Company not only involved students

502 Ibid.
503 Ibid.
504 BP Archive, ArcRef: 129346.

who were related to the Company employees or who later worked at the Company, but also the staff of the school, who undertook positions at the Company upon quitting work at the College. C. L. Hawker, who became the education and training advisor of the Company in 1930's, was the Principle of the school during Fateh's time.[505]

These foundational steps of constructing general educational facilities by the Company continued in the 1950's, when approximately thirty primary schools were constructed by the Company and then transferred to the Ministry of Culture. By 1970, there were 133 primary schools in Abadan, twenty of them being constructed and managed by *Sepahe Danesh,* the education corps of the state led reform program, named White Revolution.[506] Of these schools, twenty-seven were private and eighty-seven were public.[507]

While the collaboration between the Iranian state and the Company was denser in the organisation of primary education, the higher the level of schooling went, the more the Company was in charge. The first high school in Abadan, the Razi school, was founded by the Company in 1936 and up until the nationalisation of oil, the English teachers of the school were recruited from the staff of the oil company. In 1950s , thirty high schools were constructed by the Company and transferred to the culture directory, *edareye farhang*. [508]

Despite the active cooperation of the Company and the Iranian state in constructing and managing primary and secondary education facilities in the refinery area of Abadan and the oil fields for decades before the nationalisation, the facilities were not adequate for accomodating all prospective students in mid 1950s. Giving the example of Agha Jari, where seven primary schools and one secondary school were operating in a two-

505 BP Archive, ArcRef: 142640.
506 See "State's White Revolution" in this chapter.
507 Lahsaeizadeh 471 .
508 Ibid., 472-73.

shifts system in 1955, the US Consul at Khorramshar, Rolland H. Bushner, argued that the shortage resulted from lack of teachers and the increase of workers' demand for educational facilities for their children. The report of the Consul on the employee relations in the Iranian Oil Exploration and Production Company. written after a visit to the oil fields of Masjed Soleyman, Agha Jari and Haftkel, sheds light on the degree of collaboration between the Company and the state and the impact of workers' demands:

> Another important difficulty is the inadequate number of school teachers arising largely from lack of housing. Although the Company pays each teacher a living allowance equal to one third of his government salary, his total income is nevertheless so low that even where housing can be found in the bazaar he can scarcely afford it. The difficulty of the situation is augmented by the increasingly widespread demand of labourers that their children have educational opportunities. [509]

In addition to the Company's institutional involvement in founding schools, some Company employees took individual initiatives to contribute to the educational needs of their community as well. For example, Shahin (Shaben) Gharabeygian [Picture 29], who was born in 1922 in Tehran, and who worked as a civil engineer at the Company, founded a secondary school for Armenian boys in Abadan, the Adab Highschool, in 1958. In his correspondence with the Ministry of Education, he was asked to undertake that he would not ask for any financial assistance from the Ministry, to prove that he had at least 100,000 Rials in his accounts, that he would employ teachers with appropriate credentials, and to commit to rules and regulations.[510]

509 "Employee relations in the Iranian Oil Exploration and Production Company" Rolland H. Bushner, Khorramshahr Consulate to Department of State in Washington. 2/9/1955. Dispatch no 4. 888.062/9-2155 in *Confidential U.S. State Department Central Files. Iran, 1955-1959 Internal and Foreign Affairs,* Harvard Library.

510 3/3/1337 (1958), 297-13473, The National Library and Archive Organisation of Iran (NLAI), Tehran.

Picture 29

Shahin (Shaben) Gharabeygian, Company staff member and founder of Adab Armenian Highschool for Boys in 1957. Photograph cropped from the documents he had submitted to the Ministry of Education, 3/3/1337 (1958), 297-13473, The National Library and Archive Organisation of Iran (NLAI), Tehran.

Literacy Training

Literacy training can be evaluated both under the title of general education and trade-related education. It was organized primarily by the government. Pre-nationalisation reports on education in the oil industry differentiate between the evening classes of the Company and the evening classes of the government in the 1940's as such:

> The Governments' classes in elementary Persian only are held on five nights a week, and are attended by men who wish to become literate or to improve their standard of ability in their own language. The Company's classes, which are held

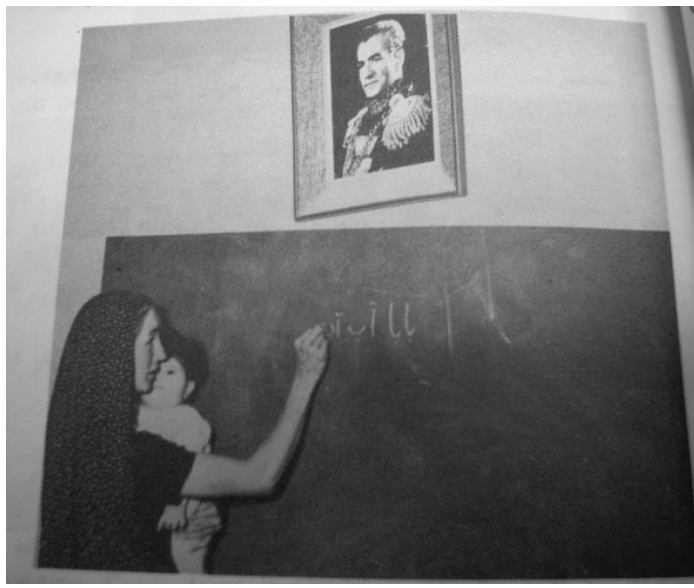
> on three nights a week and comprise some 60 classes, cover the whole range of English readers […] and students must be literate in their own language before they are addicted to the classes. [511]

Fighting illiteracy was one of the main pillars of the state led reform program, aka the White Revolution, introduced in the mid-1960s. Before that, the company courses focused on English literacy and workers were encouraged to attend the public classes for general literacy. The achievements in public literacy classes and evening classes for primary and secondary education affected workers' emoluments at the Company.[512] However, the cooperation between the state and the Company became denser in fighting illiteracy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The pages of the Oil Company journal, *Yaddashtha-ye Rouz* (*Daily Notes*), record the Company's collaboration with the literacy reform of the Government, hosting literacy classes not only for its formal workers, but also for their spouses and temporary (contract) workers in late 1960s and 1970s. The example of the General Managers of the National Iranian Oil Company, acting as the head of the National Committee to fight against illiteracy in the oil towns shows the degree of cooperation/enmeshment between the state and the Oil Company in organizing literacy classes in that era.[513]

Literacy classes were mostly held separately for men, women and children; and at times for mixed groups. The Collective Agreement of 1969 registered the increase in the literacy award paid to workers who obtain official certificates for literacy (4th grade), primary school (6th grade), secondary school (9th class) and high school diploma (12th class).[514]

511 BP Archive, ArcRef: 129346.
512 Interviews with Reza.
513 *Yaddashtha-ye Rouz*, 1351(1972), no: 2333 and 1347 (1968), 997.
514 BP Archive, ArcRef: 120587.

Picture 30

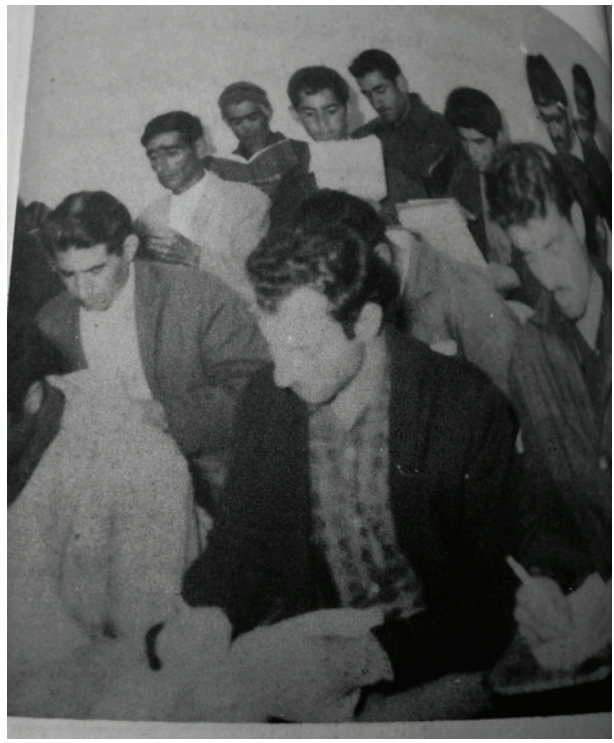


Literacy classes for wives of oil workers.
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1349(1970), no. 1380, NIOC, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

Picture 31

Literacy classes for wives of oil workers.
Iran Oil Journal, October 1968, no. 122. NIOC. Library of Congress.

Picture 32



Literacy class for oil workers.
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1347 (1968), no. 841. NIOC. Oil Ministry, Tehran.

Picture 33

Manager Eqbal giving literacy certificates in Abadan.
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1346 (1967) no. 773. NIOC. Oil Ministry, Tehran.

The cooperation between the public authorities and Company officials in reducing illiteracy continued in the early 1970s. In one of the relevant pieces of correspondence between the director of the Literacy Corps and the General Manager of the National Iranian Oil Company, the former pointed to Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's stated goal that there should not be any illiterate person in Iran between 6-35 years of age by the end of 1350 (1972). The director suggested that the Company should take responsibility for the age group 12-35 in the oil producing South in order to be able to meet the decreed goal.[515]

Trade-oriented Education

In the first days of the industry, the industrial skill-focused education was organized through training and testing workshops. The first apprentice training and test shop was opened in Abadan in 1925. In these workshops, provisional workers were trained to be fitters, turners, wiremen, drivers, firemen and pumpers. Later an electrical training section was added to the program. Testing was an essential activity in these workshops to assess the skill level of the workers in order to determine their grades. There were 120 apprentices in 1926. The apprentice workshops were followed by cookery schools in Abadan and Masjed Soleyman. [516] Dobe argues that the addition of electrical training and cookery schools at this takeoff period demonstrates the effort to construct a "bulwark against the need to import Indian labour again" as Indians had a monopoly over these positions in the first decades of the industry.[517] However, in these first workshops of the Company, it was mostly the Indian technicians who mentored the Iranians to become "fitters, turners, molders, blacksmiths, carpenters, armature winders, general repair electricians, boiler makers, welders (electric and

515 11/8/49 (1970), 297-26308, The National Library and Archive Organisation of Iran (NLAI), Tehran.

516 "Education and Training in Iran," BP Archive, ArcRef: 142640.

517 Dobe, "A Long Slow Tutelage in Western Ways of Work: Industrial Education and the Containment of Nationalism in Anglo-Iranian and Aramco, 1923-1963," 34.

acetylene) and instrument makers."[518] Replacing the Indian workers at the highest skilled level required educating Iranians not only in technical skills but also arithmetic and the English language.[519]

With the introduction of the new concession in 1933 and the subsequent general educational plan prescribed in article 16 of the new concession, the Company was pushed to undertake technical education further to train Iranians in the necessary skills for the industry.[520] The skills that would affect the Iranianisation of the industry were hard to obtain in Iran. Therefore, if one part of this new concession regime required opening new technical schools in Iran, the other part involved sending students to Britain for trade and university education. For the latter part the Company favored trade education over university education, as the Company management "believed they would need a long slow tutelage in the British way of work."[521] By 1935 an agreement on a 50/50 split between university education (at Birmingham university) and trade training (in Newark) in Britain was reached between the Iranian state and the Company. [522] Before nationalisation, about a hundred Iranians were sent to Britain in this framework. In 1956 alone, fifty Iranians were trained abroad with Consortium Companies' sponsorship.[523] While the overseas education's destination was solely Britain before the nationalisation, the training fields included oil fields in Venezuela and the US, and refineries in the US, the Netherlands, and France in the Consortium era.[524]

The Consortium's schematic representation of its educational activities (See Picture 34) demonstrated that for the Company, training

518 Ibid., 52.
519 Ibid., 56.
520 See Chapter One on Iranianisation.
521 Dobe, 64.
522 Ibid., 70-71.
523 David Finnie, "Recruitment and Training of Labour. The Middle East Oil Industry," *Middle East Journal* 12, no. 2 (1958), 139.
524 BP Archive, ArcRef: 195722.

involved both general education and trade-oriented education after the nationalisation as well.

Picture 34

Training division, 1956. ArcRef: 195722, BP Archives

In 1956, apprentice training included general education and was given to fourteen to sixteen-year-old trainees. As was the case in the first training workshops in the industry, testing was an essential part of the apprentice training after the Consortium.[525] The non –technical staff training (secretarial, supervisory, and English) included conference leadership, report writing, typing, stenography, office procedures, English classes, and correspondence courses. The English lessons, planned for one hundred hours of advance training for Iranian staff, were counted as working hours. Moreover, following the introduction of an education scheme in 1958, staff could benefit from special leave period to pursue higher education.[526]

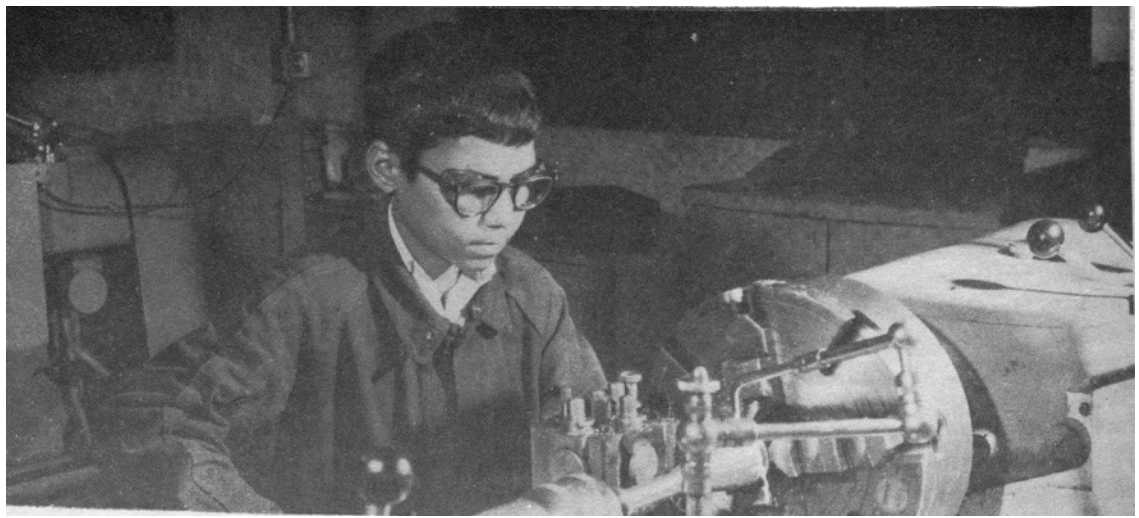
525 Ibid.
526 LAB 13/1351.

In the late 1960s, the Company financed industrial education in two technician and three artisan schools in Iran, as well as two overseas schools.[527] The concern of preparing a new job classification scheme in 1967 brought forth an emphasis on skill improvement (as opposed to basic apprentice training) and put testing back on the agenda.[528] By 1970, on-the-job training for workers was accentuated, and as the education facilities in Iran on secretarial skills, language acquisition, and industrial training had developed, employees were sent for overseas training much less than previous decades.[529]

The Abadan Technical Institute, which merged academic and trade oriented training, was the most important institution in the educational engagement of the Company.

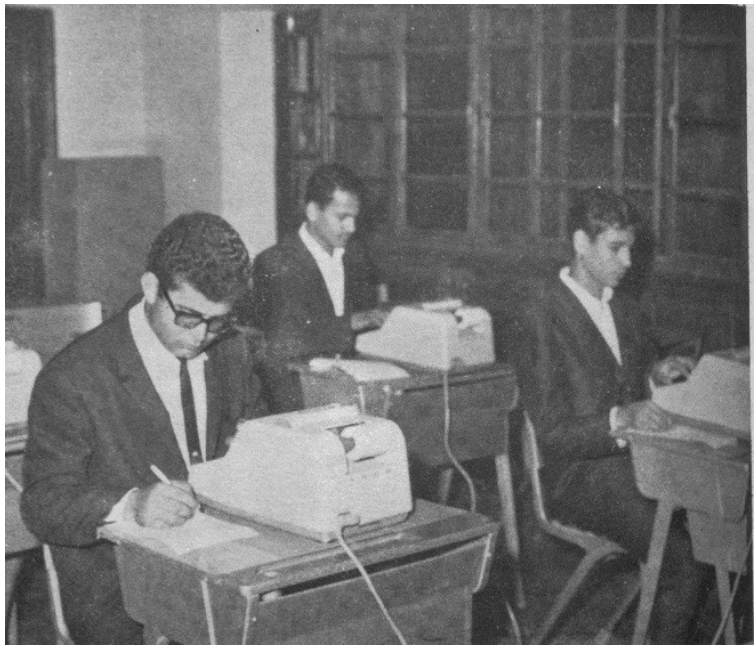
527 BP Archive, ArcRef: 127030.
528 Ibid., "Addendum to the 1967 annual review of general personnel affairs."
529 BP Archive, ArcRef: 193653.

Picture 35



"Chiseling at the Ahwaz vocational school." *Iran Oil Journal*, November 1968, no. 123, NIOC, Library of Congress
(The same picture is captured as training workshop Agha Jari in *Yaddashtha-ye Rouz*, 1347 [1968], no. 799, Oil Ministry, Tehran.)

Picture 36

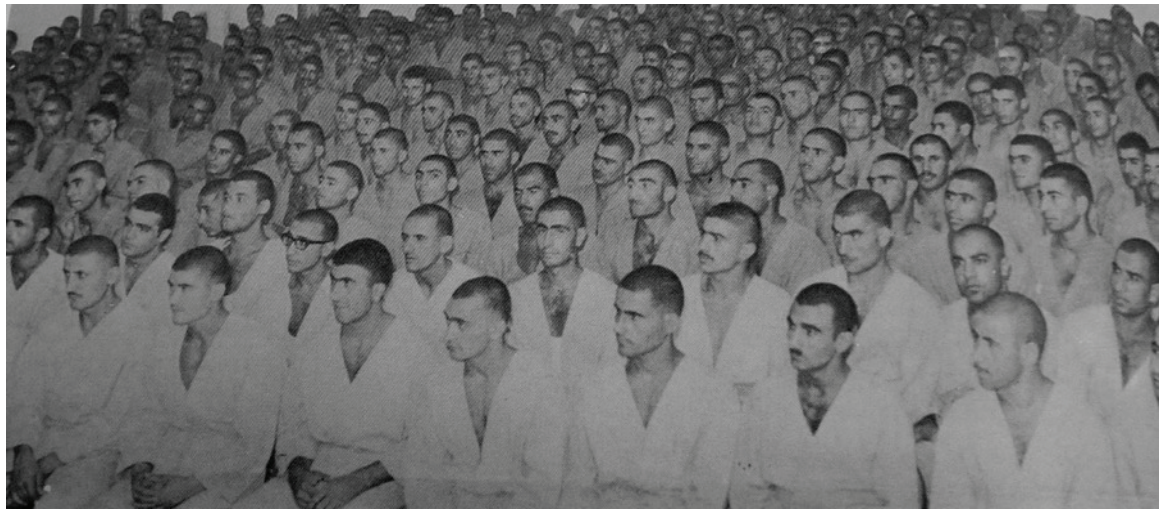


An Accountancy class at the commercial high school.
Iran Oil Journal, NIOC, November 1968, no. 123, Library of Congress.

Picture 37

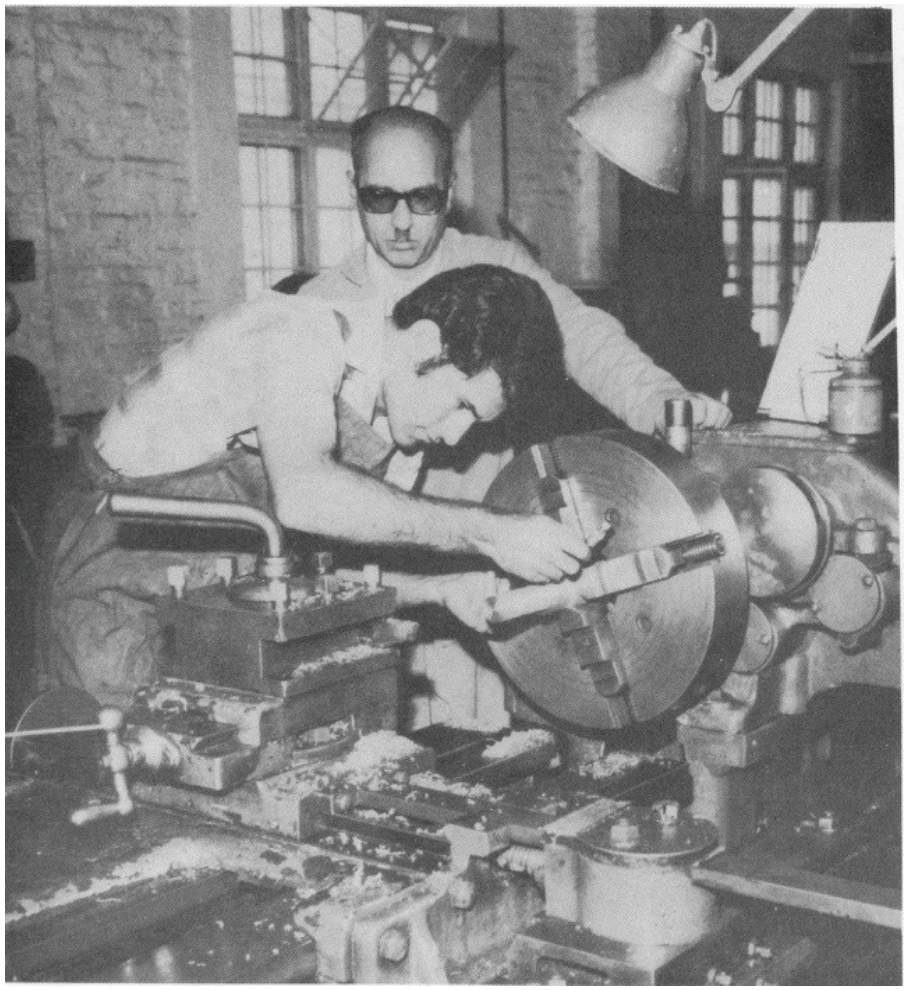
A View of a workshop at Agha Jari.
Iran Oil Journal, September 1969, no. 132, NIOC, Library of Congress.

Picture 38



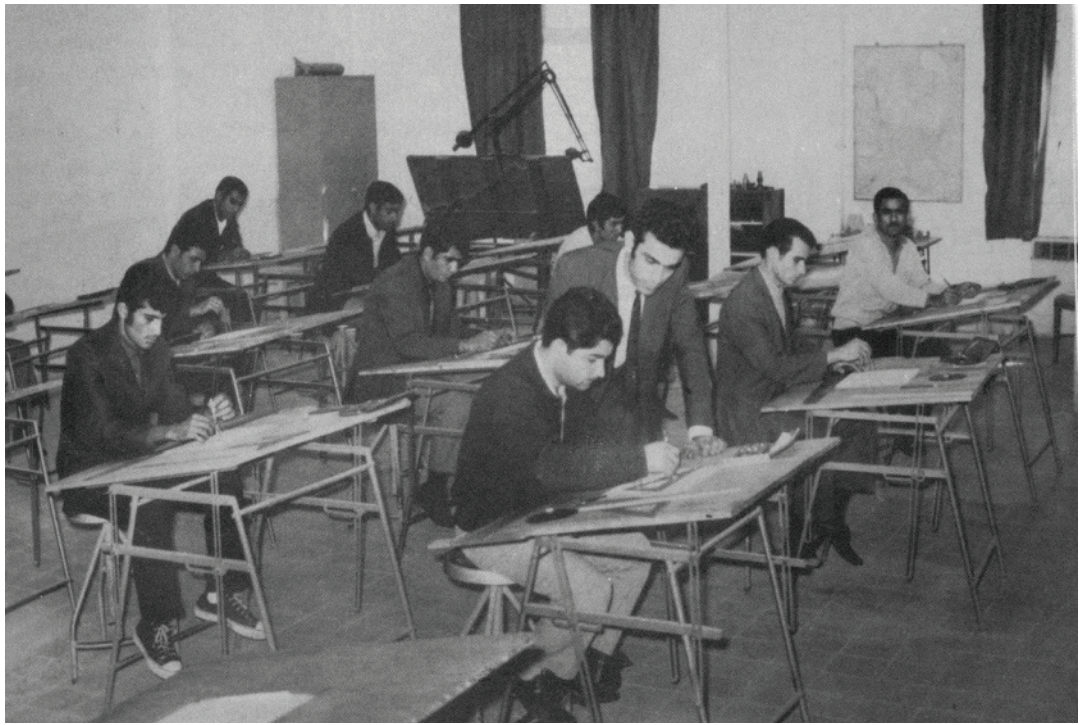
"Graduation ceremony of workers at Guard Training Center,"
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1353 (1974), no. 2858, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

Picture 39



"A mechanic trainee undergoes a course of turnery under the supervision of his instructor," Ahwaz Training Center in *Iran Oil Journal*, July 1970, no. 142. NIOC, Library of Congress.

Picture 40



"A technical drawing class related to electrical circuit courses in Ahwaz training Center," *Iran Oil Journal*, July 1970, no. 142, NIOC, Library of Congress.

The Abadan Technical Institute

In 1939, the Abadan Technical Institute, the leading institution for oil workers' training in Iran and the most prominent vehicle for social mobility in the oil producing community, was opened. Its first principal was Reza Fallah. The Abadan Technical Institute had three names consecutively; it was founded as the Abadan Technical School, named as the Abadan Institute of Technology, and later as the Abadan Petroleum School. The Abadan Technical School was the pioneer institution in the oil producing regions where trade oriented (technical and commercial) and general, college level academic education, merged.[530] Its curriculum involved engineering, technical petroleum engineering, business administration and accounting, to which gas engineering and chemical engineering were added just after the institute was released from being a part of the non-basic operations of the Company in 1968.[531]

The Institute was entirely financed by the Company but it was under the academic scrutiny of the Ministry of Education. The length of the courses varied according to the training the students undertook. The graduates of secondary school certificates (12 years of education) had two options. For working at high technician posts in engineering and chemistry, they were trained for five years. In order to become foremen, junior shift engineers or clerical assistants studied for two years. The students who were half way in their secondary education (9 years) could study part time for four years to get the certificate of the Institute to work as foremen, junior shift engineers, junior draughtsmen, health inspectors or clerical assistants.[532] A two-year part time education would instead give them the opportunity to work at a low-grade clerk post. The number of students at

530 Dispatch no 192 in *A Guide to confidential U.S. State Department central files, Iran, 1950-1954: Internal affairs, decimal numbers 788, 888, and 988, and foreign affairs, decimal numbers 688 and 611.88,* Harvard University.

531 Lahsaeizadeh 479-83.

532 For an overview of higher education in Iran see Ali Pour-Moghaddas, "Higher Education and Development in Iran," *Higher Education* 4, no. 3 (1975): 369–75.

the school increased rapidly in the first decades. Between 1940 and 1947, the school graduated 138 students.[533] Starting with 150 students in 1940, the number of attendees to the technical certificate program more than doubled in nine years, reaching 350 students in 1949.[534] With the addition of various other high education possibilities in the mid-1960's, the number of students decreased gradually. In 1970-71, the Institute had 211 students 21 of which were girls.[535]

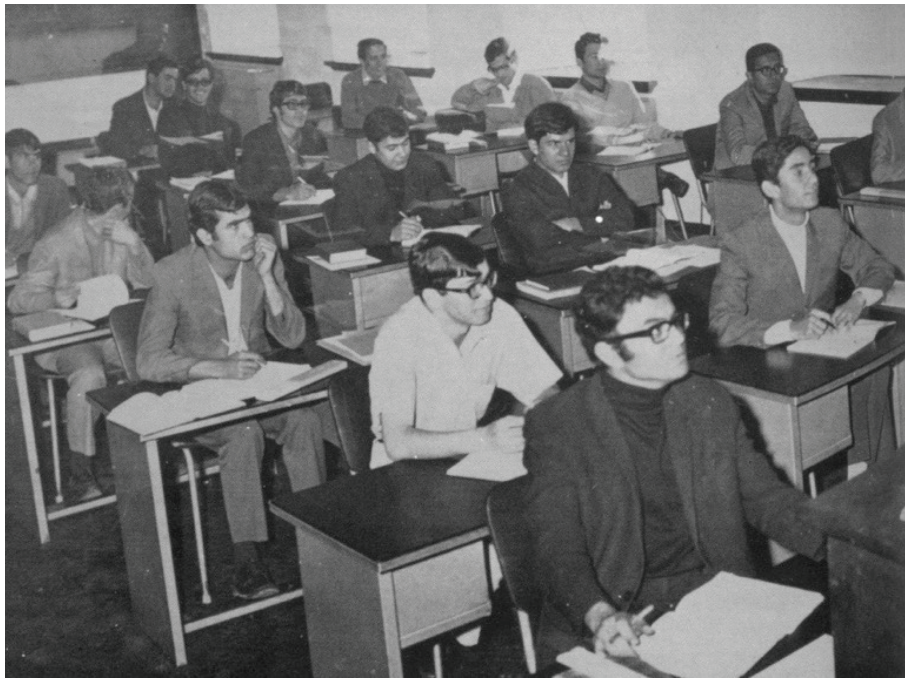
Up until late 1960s, it was solely an institution that provided employees for the oil industry. In the 1960s, a very limited amount of its students started to work in other industries upon graduation. A company report in 1968 cited that the need for Abadan Technical Institute graduates had decreased and it was hard for the Company to compete with other companies in employing the graduates. The case of Business Administration graduates was given to illustrate this point.[536]

Picture 41

Charles Schroeder, "Abadan Institute of Technology," 1958-59, Harvard VIA.

533 Lahsaeizadeh 483.
534 Dobe, 73.
535 Lahsaeizadeh 483.
536 BP Archive, ArcRef: 127030.

Picture 42



"Abadan Institute of Technology,"
September 1969, no. 132, *Iran Oil Journal*, NIOC, Library of Congress.

The Institute was a boarding school and students were served meals three times a day. Apart from facilities of the school, the students were also entitled to use the staff recreational facilities such as pools, cinemas, and clubs. The Abadan Technical Institute students were outspoken and active in the struggle preceding the nationalisation of oil. Reports pertaining to the pre-nationalisation strikes in Abadan point to various activities of the technical school's students, including a sit down strike demanding lower passing marks for the examinations, a permit to ride the staff buses rather than the labourers', and strike pay. [537] It was argued that together with the Tudeh support, it was the students who caused "the virtual shutdown of

537 "The strike in the AIOC oil concession area." May 17, 1951, in 59/250/41/11, NARA.

the Abadan refinery with its 37,000 hard bitten oil workers."[538] In pre-nationalisation strikes, students of the Institute argued that their strike was not a strike in solidarity with workers but a strike in its own, focusing on their own demands.[539]

The Institute was one of the places that you would see the interaction of the state, the Company, and the workers negotiating over control and resources. It was not only the actual strikes that they were involved in, but also the logistic support that they gave to Tudeh inspired actions, which brought them under the state's surveillance. For example, the flyers distributed by Tudeh members were suspected of being printed in the Institute, as they were the ones who had access to those kind of printing machines.[540]

Upon nationalisation, no new students were admitted to the Institute until the Consortium settled in. The former Personnel Manager at Abadan Refinery, Kazerooni, recounted that the Institute was employed in re-educating Company employees for new posts after nationalisation (for example, accountants were educated in engineering).[541] This re-education was not an exception to the two-year long stalemate situation after nationalisation. The Company continued to engage in re-education particularly after defining the problem of "surplus labour" as the determining issue of labour organisation in the late 1950's and early 1960's.[542] This "training for transfer" made it possible to transfer nearly one and a half thousand workers to construction activities in which the Company was engaged in 1956.[543]

After the Consortium settled in in 1954, US influence on the institute became weightier. In 1958, the educational advisor to the Oil

538 Ibid., 25.
539 Ibid.
540 Ibid.
541 FO 371/110051.
542 See Chapter One.
543 BP Archive, ArcRef:195723.

Consortium and to the Abadan Technical Institute, Dr. Ralph Hutchison, requested the Department of State to approach the US members of the Consortium for financial help for the Institute to turn it into an "American-style engineering college."[544] Together with the American missionary schools in Istanbul, Beirut and Cairo, it was seen to be one of the most prominent instruments for American influence in the region. [545] However, since its founding days up until the early 1970s, when its monopoly over the technical education in the region was gradually reduced, it continued to be one of the main centres of anti-American political activism as well. The fight against communism, in which the nation state, the global powers and the Company were at least mid-term allies, represented one of the trends of continuity that passed through nationalisation, and of which the Abadan Institute was a battle site. One of the tactics employed to break-up the political activism in the Institute was dispersing trainees in staff housing rather than accommodating them at the Institute's dormitory. [546]

Students of the Institute were not only active in the movement for the nationalisation of oil, but also in the movement against the monarchy, which culminated in the Revolution of 1979. Consulate reports cite two students of the Institute getting arrested upon distributing anti-government leaflets in Abadan about police violence against anti-Shah protesters in Tehran during the 1963 protests. Upon noticing anti-government leaflets in the town, the intelligence service SAVAK made a raid on the student dormitories at the Institute targeting the usual suspects, and anti-government material was found resulting in the arrests. [547] However, the

544 "Memorandum of conversation,"1958. RG 59/ 11, NARA.

545 Ibid.

546 "The Problem of Communist Infiltration" in 1954 Oil Report, Dispatch no 192 in *A Guide to confidential U.S. State Department central files, Iran, 1950-1954: Internal affairs, decimal numbers 788, 888, and 988, and foreign affairs, decimal numbers 688 and 611.88,* Harvard University.

547 "Two Abadan Institute of Technology Students Arrested for Distributing Anti-Government Printed Material," US Consulate, Khorramshahr, June 15, 1963, in RG Box 3942, NARA.

Institute was also an institution that reproduced the very same stratified nature of the society that they were fighting against.

The students surely saw themselves as a part of the industry, however they did not identify themselves with the workers but with the staff. Formally they were counted as junior non-graded staff, being in the high strata of the Iranian employment hierarchy but a lower staff position with respect to their non–Iranian counterparts. As we have seen in previous pages, the demands of the Abadan Institute students, crystallized during pre-nationalisation strikes, were on the one hand better opportunities for employment upon graduation, higher wages and labour rights such as strike pay. On the other hand, they demanded their distinction from the workers by a right to use staff busses and staff social amenities such as clubs and pools, therefore contributing to the exclusionary mechanisms of the organisation of labour relations in the industry. [548]

Moreover, being one of the most prominent institutions of social mobility, it exposed the limits of social mobility as well. The US Consular report on the political and economic conditions of the Arab minority in Iran in 1963 would point to the underrepresentation of Arabs in the staff positions filled by Iranians, but also underrepresentation of Arabs in the pool of future staff employees, that was composed of Institute students. While more than half of the populations of Abadan and Ahwaz were composed of Arabs, and forty-five per cent of the labourers working in the refinery were Arabs, there was only one Arab student among a hundred seventy engineering students of the Abadan Institute, which was defined as the training school for Iranian staff employees of the Consortium and the National Iranian Oil Company.[549]

548 "The strike in the AIOC oil concession area." May 17, 1951, in 59/250/41/11, NARA.

549 Central foreign policy file 1963 Political and Defense box 3941 E1613A, NARA.

Medical and Sanitary Amenities

"Sanitary conditions in the workshop, while not high by Western standards, are often considerably better than the home of the low-wage earner", stated the US Department of Labour's report in 1964.[550] The statement made about the general situation in Iran, was very much to the point for the oil industry in the South. In an environment where in summers the temperature could reach up to fifty degrees Celsius, where no running water was available for a large part of the population, and contagious diseases like malaria, cholera, and trachoma could be observed; clean water, ventilation, and clean food constitute indispensible health amenities. The place of oil production, with its dense network of people living and working with the Company in its formal and informal spaces, made the health and sanitary situation in the workplace directly linked with the general health and sanitary conditions of the oil towns, despite the will of the Company.

When the Company started its operations in the oil fields and the Abadan refinery was founded, there was no institutional health service in the region. As a part of the concession requirements and due to practical necessities, the Company had to start engaging in health services beyond the workplace. This engagement involved both curing and preventive measures.[551]

550 Willard W Wirtz, *Labour and Law Practice in Iran* (United States. Bureau of Labour Statistics, n.d.).

551 ILO., *Labour Conditions in the Oil Industry in Iran: Report of a Mission of the International Labour Office,* 39.

Picture 43

Charles Schroeder, "Women getting fresh water at public faucet," 1958-59, Harvard VIA.

Picture 44

Charles Schroeder, "Women getting fresh water at public faucet," 1958-59, Harvard VIA.

The first initiatives took place during WWI. Small hospitals, each having capacity for approximately twenty patients, were formed in Masjed Soleyman, Ahwaz, and Abadan in huts and tents.[552] The first well equipped hospital was founded by the Company in 1927 in Abadan, and started curing the employees affected by the contagious diseases in the region, namely malaria, trachoma, and plague. As a result of the centralisation efforts of the Iranian state after 1925, the Health Administration of the Khuzestan region was founded in Abadan, following the institution of the new hospital. [553] The Abadan hospital had departments for internal diseases, infection, dialysis, CCU, physiotherapy, pediatry, gynecology, and neurology, as well as operation rooms. Apart from this hospital, a number of clinics specializing in allergies, ophthalmology, dentistry, and research were opened. The formal Company residential neighborhoods of Bawarda, Braim, Bahmanshir, Farahabad, Shahabad, and Bahar, each hosted one dispensary. Apart from these, there were a central 24/7 dispensary and a quarantine hospital for contagious diseases in Abadan. [554]

The stratification within the employees persisted in these hospitals. There were separate wards for staff and workers in the hospital, which differed in terms of the quantity of the beds available and the general quality of the service. The total number of beds was 252 when the hospital was founded and was doubled before the nationalisation of oil. In 1949, there were 450 beds, 137 of which were reserved for staff and 313 for workers according to the ILO report published in 1950.[555] Given the fact that workers' numbers amounted to at least three times those of the staff, this allocation seems slightly biased in favor of the staff. However, the Iranian report prepared as an answer to the ILO report argued that the picture was much more grim. Firstly, while it was the senior staff who had

552 BP Archive, ArcRef: 129263.

553 Lahsaeizadeh, 500.

554 Lahsaeizadeh, 502.

555 For the founding figures see Lahsaeizadeh, 500. For pre-nationalisation figures see the previously cited ILO report, 1950.

more than seventy of the beds, the junior staff had around fifty beds and the whole labour population (up to thirty-two thousand according to the figures at the time) had to share less than three hundred beds. Secondly, there were a number of beds reserved permanently for shipping employees, who were not stationed in Iran, and the senior staff would occupy beds of the junior staff and the junior staff occupied the beds officially allocated to workers. Therefore, the workers could not make use of those allocated beds, either. The number of patients doctors had to see in a working day was presented to illustrate the picture further. A doctor who was in charge of three dispensaries, had to see more than six hundred patients in one day in Masjed Soleyman. In the Farahabad district of Abadan, a doctor had to see around three hundred patients a day, which already meant less than one minute per patient, taking account of their entry and exit times to the room. [556]

By the mid 1920s all medical centers in the oil fields and the refinery area were merged in one department under the direction of a chief medical officer. Subsequently, a health department active in disease prevention and maintaining a standard of sanitation and hygiene was formed, with employment of British inspectors. Later the Medical Department was divided according to the operation areas of the Company, and by 1932 there were three medical departments located in Masjed Soleyman, Abadan, and the Northern areas such as Nafte Shah and Naft Khaneh, at the Iran-Iraq frontier. Travelling dispensaries were also provided in the oil fields and on the pipeline during construction times. [557] Expansion of medical and health services had an impact on employment practices as well. Pre-employment medical examinations ruled out "unfit" workers in the 1920s. However, from the 1930s onward, treatment and when necessary some operations were taken into account before employing "potentially effective

556 National Iranian Oil Company, *Some Documents on the Conditions of the Iranian Workers under the Ex-Anglo Iranian Oil Co,* 18-19.

557 BP Archive, ArcRef: 129263.

employees." [558]

From the beginning, fighting and preventing contagious diseases was one of the main tasks of the medical and health departments of the Company. During WWII, cholera, tuberculosis, typhus, plague and dysentery were on the rise. Thus, the Company took preventive measures both in the Company and "non-Company" areas more systematically. The workers working in the refinery had to disinfect their clothes every morning in steam disinfectors. This was done at the doors of the refinery.[559] Then they would have shower and take back their clothes. A public bath was set up for non-Company people in Abadan (See Picture 45). Moreover, DDT would be sprayed on the streets.[560] However, the Iranian report on *Labour Conditions in the Oil Industry in Iran: Report of a mission of the International Labour Office,* argued that until 1951, workers' houses in the fields areas were not sprayed with DDT or any other insecticides. [561]

A separate health department for the training centers was also set up. After a scanning of the trainees in 1943, it became clear that trachoma was widespread among them. Of 1990 trainees, 1054 were stricken by trachoma.[562] By 1939 specialist clinics for the treatment of trachoma had already been founded in Abadan. Between 1940 and 1944, between two and three thousand cases were detected every year. Together with trachoma, malaria was among the most widespread illnesses affecting employees of the Company. [563] An extensive scheme against malaria was therefore devised. The mosquitos, which transmitted malaria had a flight range of five kilometers, and so the fight had to be extended to all breeding areas of mosquitos within a five-kilometer radius of all inhabited areas. The

558 Ibid.

559 Lahsaeizadeh 502.

560 Lahsaeizadeh 503.

561 National Iranian Oil Company, *Some Documents on the Conditions of the Iranian Workers under the Ex-Anglo Iranian Oil Co,*19.

562 Lahsaeizadeh 503.

563 Also see BP Archive, ArcRef: 110926.

estimated labour time required for this operation was claimed to be 87664 labour days. [564] After the nationalisation of oil, the fight against malaria gained momentum. By 1956, all oil-producing areas were disinfected. In the 1960s' the Company provided up to four liters a month of free insecticides, or *imshi* as they were named locally.[565] In addition to these preventive and curative measures, the Company also employed incentives. From 1959 onwards, competitions among Company workers were organized on the question of "how can we keep ourselves hale and hearty." The first three in the competition would be presented with an award. [566]

Picture 45

Charles Schroeder, "Public bath house, Abadan" 1958-59, Harvard VIA.

Tuberculosis was an important health issue in the 1950s. Some of the workers who had to go through treatments for long periods would lose their jobs at the Company, and write petitions to the Iranian Parliament and the Shah to get them back. The partners of workers accompanying them to Tehran for medication would also petition for assistance to

564 BP Archive, ArcRef: 129263.
565 BP Archive, ArcRef: 194548.
566 Lahsaeizadeh 506. Confirmed by interviews.

survive in the capital city.[567] In 1955, Ziyaeddin Neghabet, a deputy in the Iranian Parliament, took the initiative to respond to these petitions by writing to the government. In his letter, Neghabet stated that in Khuzestan 300 people were struck with tuberculosis and sent to Tehran for treatment every year. He affirmed that after treatment these workers were not taken back by the Company, and due to unemployment and poverty they would get sick again. He mentioned the specific case of 49 workers in this situation who had written to him. He asked for the healed workers to be placed at jobs, which did not need much physical effort. His suggestions included sales departments, pumping stations or any other simple job in Khuzestan. He asked for a commission to be formed to solve the related workers' problems.[568]

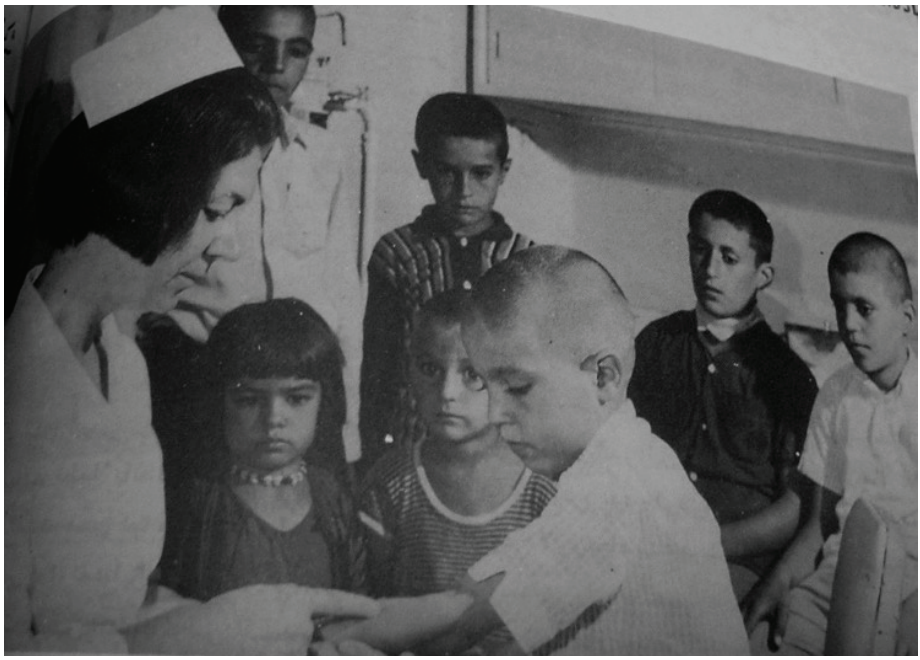
The other diseases that the oil-producing community faced from time to time were cholera, plague, typhus, and smallpox. Cholera appeared in 1923, and again in 1927 and 1931. In 1923, it killed around one thousand people in Abadan, at least seventy of them employees of the Company. Sanitary improvements, clean water supply, food supervision and vaccines produced in the Company's laboratories reduced the impact of the epidemic in the following occurrences. Plague was affected the community in 1923-1924 and a successful anti-rat campaign reduced the incidence of the disease later on. Typhus was widespread in 1943, which was assumed to be imported via Russian refugees in the North. Vaccination was provided to thirty thousand people in three years. Smallpox became endemic during WWII as well. It was also reduced by vaccination. Apart from these contagious diseases, respiratory infections (tuberculosis), as well as skin and cellular infections were among the most widespread medical problems. In 1945, thirty thousand patients had respiratory infections and

567 See petition of Fatullah Karimi in 12/1333 (1955) and of Sekine Assadokht in 7/1334 (1955) in 240-28919, The National Library and Archive Organisation of Iran (NLAI), Tehran.

568 Ibid., 15/12/33

more than ten thousand patients were diagnosed with skin and cellular tissue infections.

Picture 46



"Center against tuberculosis in Masjed Soleyman,"
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1347 (1968), no. 800, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

Injuries were also widespread. Of 6776 injuries that were reported, 5693 were caused at work. Lahsaeizadeh argues that apart from these injuries and other directly work related diseases, the Company did not want to cover the medical costs of workers who had contagious illnesses, arguing that the 1949 labour law only covered illnesses that occurred due to work. The writer argued that the workers' living conditions, their lack of access proper nourishment and sanitary conditions facilitated the spread of these illnesses, and that the Company was responsible for those conditions. Indeed, according to the agreements signed with the Iranian state and the collective agreements signed with representatives of labour, the Company was responsible for the living conditions of the workers. Thus, workers' expectation of Company compensation of losses occurring as a result

of contagious diseases, and to receive medical care at the expense of the Company was predictable and not irrelevant.

Compensation for workers in Iran was legally recognized in 1930 for railway workers. A program for compensation for industrial accidents and occupational diseases became a part of Worker's Social Insurance Law in 1960. These were defined as accidents and diseases "while and by reason of duty." Lists of such diseases per industry were supposed to be drawn up successively, but they were not. The benefits included free medical care and treatment, covering the expenses of the transfer of the patient and his/her companion, providing artificial limbs or prosthetic devices, and cash benefits for temporary disability, among others. Moreover, legislation for industrial hygiene and sanitation, focused on the workplace, was set out in 1959. [569]

The dualistic character of the oil town, divided into formal (the Company area) and informal sphere (non-Company area) was contested once again by requirements for the upkeep of the formal space. The Company, particularly after the centralisation efforts of the Iranian state in late 1920s, was responsible for providing medical and preventive general health services only in the spaces that it deemed as Company spaces. However, as workers were not only living in the formal spaces of the Company, despite the official argument, and actual life could not be divided into the formal and informal space given not only the movement of people, but also the flow of water and the movement of other species, such as mosquitoes among others; the Company had to take measures in "non-Company" areas as well. While at the receiving side of these services the formal and the informal merged, at the provider side, the picture was not clear cut either. The Iranian state at times pushed the Company out of its zone of influence (in the late 1920s) and pulled it into the picture with the new concession (1933), the requirements of the labour laws

569 Wirtz, *Labour and Law Practice in Iran,* 49-51.

(1949 and 1959) and most prominently, with its introduction of the White Revolution. As we will see in the following part, the White Revolution was the reform program that covered all areas under scrutiny in this chapter (housing, education, and health). As we have already seen in the section on education, Company officials acted as the executives of these state reforms from time to time. In the domain of health, this enmeshment was practiced as well. For example, in the 1960s, health inspectors sent from the Company visited workers' houses. They organized weekly educational sessions at the workers' club, and the inspectors visited workers' quarters impromptu to check how they were washing their dishes and how they are feeding their babies (See Picture 47 and 48). [570] These activities were generally associated with the state's health corps, *sepahe behdasht*.

From the 1960s onward, the Company re-engaged systematically with general health issues. Until the 1920s, the engagement was out of necessity and due to the lack of state presence in the region. However, in the 1960s, it was mostly due to the resentment of the workers and the presence and active engagement of the state. Until 1966, sixty thousand workers and their family members were scanned for tuberculosis, which would persist until the late 1970s, and the fight against trachoma was accelerated, causing the illness to be reduced (See Picture 49). [571]

570 Interview with Maryam H. and Lahsaeizadeh 507.

571 Lahseizadeh 507.

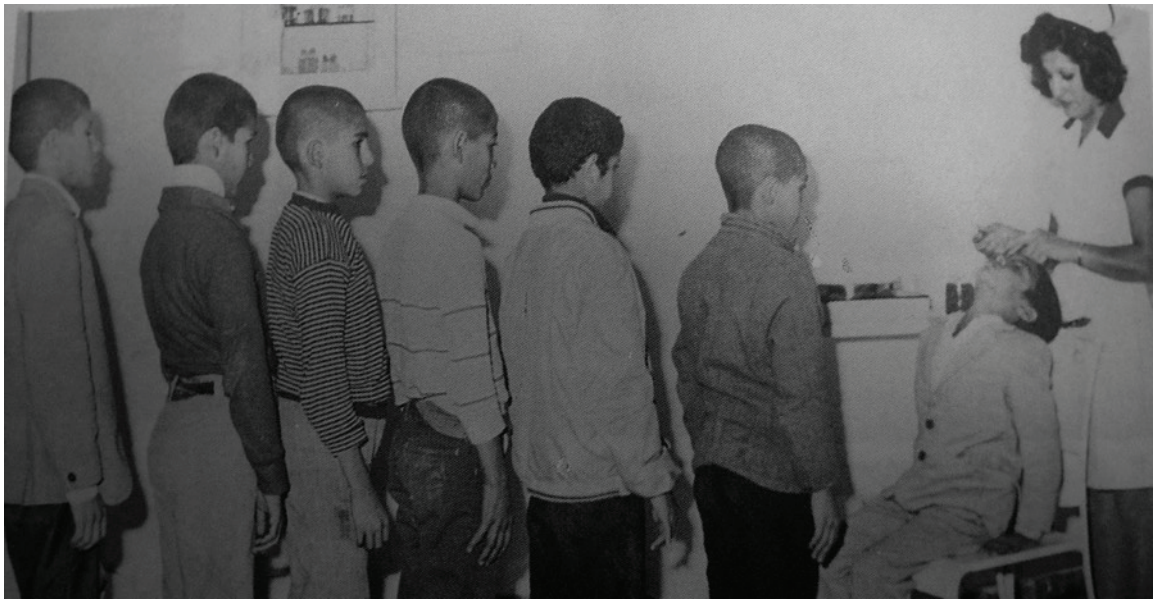
Picture 47

"Sanitary inspection and education to families,"
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1353 (1974), no. 2858, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

Picture 48

"Education at Center for Sanitation and Family Planning,"
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1353 (1974), no. 2858, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

Picture 49



"Trachoma control at the school of oil workers' children in Abadan,"
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1353 (1974), no. 2858, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

The Personnel Policy Manual, issued in 1968, described the Company's public health and sanitation program of the time as such:

- Sanitation with full-scale modern installations provided for the workplaces, residential housing, and recreational areas. It was noted that a "minimum program was maintained by the Company to provide for adequate and sanitary water supply, drainage, refuse disposal, public latrines, and sewage disposal in private living areas wherever a sufficient number of employees are in residence to justify such a contribution to general community welfare."
- Controlling contagious diseases by "inspections and investigations following clinical contacts, school services (such as first-aid, immunisations, and the anti-trachoma campaign), Public Health Nurse visiting and advisory child welfare services, and general health education campaigns."
- Preventive measures by way of a basic sanitation program. Providing free insecticides, "malaria and general insect controls, water supply inspection, anti-rabies measures, rodent control, and inspection and advisory service with regard to food supplies and food hygiene."[572]

While in the former decades development in the health domain was more focused on increasing the capacity, after the nationalisation and prominently with the introduction of the White Revolution, the focus shifted to bridging the gap in access to medical and sanitary amenities between the Company's formal and informal spaces. [573] The completion of the transfer of the non-basic services to the National Iranian Oil Company by 1963 accelerated this process. [574]

572 "The Personnel Policy Manual," BP Archive, ArcRef: 120587.

573 For example, a second sewage system was introduced in Abadan in 1960, a hospital was constructed in Ahmadabad. See Lahsaeizadeh, 507-511.

574 NIOC Newsletter, no. 57, April 1963. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

Picture 50

"Sanitary inspection at Company employees' living areas."
Yaddashtha-ye Rouz, 1353 (1974), no. 2858, Oil Ministry, Tehran.

The transfer of non-basic operations to NIOC

According to the Article 17 of the Oil agreement signed with the Consortium Companies, the NIOC agreed to "perform and carry out non-basic operations with due regard to economy and efficiency and in such manner as to meet the reasonable requirements of the Operating Companies." The non–basic operations were defined as housing, maintanence of roads used by the public, medical and health services, operation of food supply system, canteens, restaurants and clothing stores, industrial and technical training and education, guarding of property, welfare facilities, public transport,

communal water and electricity supplies, and other public services. [575] In 1956 the medical services were handed to the NIOC, but it would take three more years for the NIOC to take the control of the construction of housing, and much longer to undertake the trade oriented education. [576] Taking over the non-basic operations had prominent symbolic and political value. The British labour attaché A.G. Read, in his report after visiting Khuzestan in 1955, stated that the transfer would take time both due to practical reasons and its political significance. While the former involved making a detailed inventory of what the non-basic services consisted of, which was not an easy task to accomplish; the latter emphasized the concern that an early transfer of welfare related services to the NIOC would be presented as to the NIOC's, and nationalisation's, credit. [577]

Read was not the only person who emphasized the symbolic and political value of taking over the non-basic operations, and the concern of not playing into the NIOC's hands while transferring them. Just before the construction of housing was transferred, Chris Dalley, an old British hand in the Iranian oil industry, then the Assistant General Managing Director in Tehran, pointed to the unwillingness of each party, the Operating Companies and the NIOC, to transfer the non-basic operations. Dalley did not think that the NIOC would prove less efficient than the Consortium. Nevertheless, he argued that if the NIOC failed this would make the Consortium's position stronger.[578]

The transfer of non-basic operations was planned in three stages. By 1960, all medical services, housing and construction administration, and half of the training department including Abadan Technical Institute of Technology had been handed to the NIOC. The chairman of the NIOC board of directors, Abdollah Entezam, in a press conference in

575 Ibid.
576 LAB 13/1092.
577 FO 371/114871.
578 FO 371/140859.

1960 stated that the rest of industrial training, social services and property protection made up the second stage of transfers. General transportation, food supply stores, and other non-basic operations were planned to be handed over by 1961. Entezam emphasized that the complete transfer of non-basic operations to the NIOC would bring forty per cent of all operations, involving fifteen thousand employees in the consortium area, under the supervision of the NIOC.[579]

The State's White Revolution

The State was one of the main actors engaged in the social reproduction of the oil industry. As we have seen in the review of the history of three main fields where social reproduction in the oil industry took place, its sphere of influence varied through the decades under study. In the years of initiation, the Company was mainly the only actor engaged in organizing the workers' work and life conditions. With the centralisation initiative of the Iranian State after 1925, the state engaged in forming parallel institutions to those of the Company, and started to take over the institutions that were active in general education and health.

However, until 1962, the Iranian state had not engaged in active welfare measures. After the oil nationalisation movement that brought forth a popular government in conflict with the monarch, and its suppression by an Anglo-American supported coup, engaging in social reform programs was seen necessary for the post-coup regime to gain legitimacy and establish its rule in the country. Named as the White Revolution in the Cold War context, its encroachment in the oil producing South made the cooperation between the Company and the state denser, the borders of where the Company's sphere of activity ended and where the state

579 "Text of the Speech Delivered by Mr. Abdollah Entezam, Chairman of NIOC Board of Directors at a Press Conference held on Sunday 14th February 1960." BP Archive, ArcRef: 18493.

started harder to evaluate, for the observers as well as the people living in the region. In fact, by 1962 when the White Revolution was initiated, the nationalisation of oil, which was interrupted by the 1953 Coup, was only one decade away from being completed. By 1962, all important non-basic operations were transferred to the state-run company, the NIOC.

The post-coup years of Iran are characterized by an authoritarian regime, where freedom of expression and association were restricted. If one aspect of the post-coup authoritarian regime was suppression by the state, the other one was reform by it, and the Iranian regime was in no way unique in this aspect. As Charles Tilly argues in "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," establishing the monopoly of violence, or state-making in a territory, is one among other roles of the state which are war-making, extraction to be able to perform war-making, and protection.[580] The Iranian monarch Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's introduction of the White Revolution of the 1960s, or the "Shah and the People Revolution," as it was named by the ruler himself, should also be taken in this framework of the state's intertwined roles of state making, protection and extraction.

Iran went through transformative years in the 1960s in terms of social and economic change. The Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in 1960 with the participation of Iran, and oil revenues rose from thirty-four million dollars in 1954-1955 to five billion in 1973-1974.[581] The GNP rose from two hundred dollars to one thousand dollars from 1963 until the late 1970s.[582] Industrialisation proliferated by means of five-year development plans, and a rapid wave of urbanisation accompanied industrialisation. While in 1966 only thirty-eight per cent of

580 Charles Tilly, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in *Bringing the State Back In*, ed. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge University Press, 1985).

581 Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24.

582 Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots And Results of Revolution* (Yale University Press, 2006), 158.

the population lived in towns, this percentage reached up to forty-eight in 1976.[583] The rising living standards of a part of the population not only exemplified the state's success in protecting their welfare but also brought forth another kind of protection: protection of the ruling strata from a red revolution from below.[584] These economic developments were soon to be followed by a top-down social reform program. Initiated as a six point reform bill in 1962, the White Revolution involved nationalisation of natural resources, privatisation of state factories, land reform, the introduction of a profit-sharing system, change in the electoral law to include women's suffrage, and the establishment of a literacy corps; which was later going to be complemented with a health corps, development corps, and other reforms as well.

The rapid industrialisation wave and the land reform have been narrated as factors that gave birth to a new working class in the 1960s.[585] However, other aspects of the White Revolution have been left aside as irrelevant to the life of the workers. The possible changes that the health and literacy corps had introduced to the lives of the working people have been left unstudied. Here, I will present two pillars of this reform program relevant for our focus of study in this chapter, the health and literacy corps.

The literacy corps consisted of high school graduated conscripts that were sent to villages to teach in the primary schools instead of being engaged in the conventional practices of the army. The literacy corps was influential in raising the literacy rate in the 1960s. The total rural literacy rate in 1956 was fifteen per cent, but it reached thirty-seven per cent in 1971. The total literacy rate had increased from thirty five percent in 1956

583 Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton University Press, 1982), 431.

584 Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran,* 131.

585 See E. Robert Livernash and Kamal Argheyd, "Iran," in *International Handbook of Industrial Relations, Contemporary Development and Research*, ed. A. Blum (Westport, 1981); Fred Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*; and Assef Bayat, "Capital Accumulation, Political Control, and Labour Organisation in Iran 1965-1975" *Middle Eastern Studies* 25 (1989): 198-207.

to fifty nine percent in 1971. However, the difference was more striking for the rural women's literacy rate, which had grown three fold from eight percent in 1956 to twenty six percent in 1971.[586] The number of educational institutions grew threefold in the 1960s.[587] Between 1963 and 1971 a total of 62,730 people served in the literacy corps, and the health corps established five hundred medical units in the countryside in the first three years.[588] The American consular reports on Khuzestan point to the success of the literacy corps as related to their limited objectives and the fact that people already familiar with the local conditions conduct them.[589]

Accordingly, the pages of *Yaddashtha-ye Rouz,* the weekly journal of the National Iranian Oil Company that was issued from the late 1950s onward, devoted its pages to the literacy and health campaigns in Abadan and the oil fields in the 1960s and early 1970s.[590] Women in traditional clothing or veiled are the main subjects of the pictures in the journal. While literacy campaigns targeted both the oil workers, who would gain points upon getting certificates, and their wives; it was only the wives who were the focus of health care inspections.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the connation that they were secondary to the "basic" services of the production and marketing of the oil, the non-basic services were as essential to the making of the social relations of production as was the actual production of the oil. They constituted the main institutions of social reproduction in the Iranian oil industry. The organisation of the

586 Robert Livernash and Kamal Argheyd, "Iran," 263.

587 Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 134.

588 Halliday, *Iran,* 120.

589 Thomas A. Donovan. November 13, 1963. Central Foreign Policy File, Economic Affairs General E1613A box 3383. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington.

590 *Yaddashtha-ye Rouz,* Library Of Oil Ministry Archives, Tehran.

education, housing and health services composed a network of relations between the Iranian state, the Company, and the oil producing community before and after nationalisation of oil.

Apart from the main agreements, such as concessions and contracts that defined the contours of the relation between the state and the Company, there were many grey areas left to the interaction of the state and the Company in organizing the daily lives of the oil workers. The interests of the Company and the state did not always converge. However, in addition to the variety of the domains where this interaction took place, the time scale, at which those interests converged or diverged, varied as well. The state and the Company relations in the Iranian oil industry can be read through the lense of Poulantzas' theory of the relative autonomy of the state, where the state is not an instrument of the capitalist class and does not at all times serve the interests of individual capitalists, but takes measures that legitimizes and reproduces the capitalist relations of production, therefore serves the sustenance of the system with a claim to represent the unity.[591]

As we will see in the next chapter on labour activism in the oil industry, while on the one hand strategies like containing class struggle brought the state's interests together with the Company, on the other hand, its involvement in the social reproduction and legislation putting checks and balances on the Company's short-term commercial interests, brought the two into conflict. With all its particularities, the codification of the Company's obligation to prepare general plans for the education and housing of the workers, as well as the labour laws on the minimum wage and the codification of the taxonomy of jobs should be read in light with this dynamic between the state and the Company in a capitalist state.

591 See Introduction and Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London: Verso, 1975).