# Oil, labour and revolution in Iran: a social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry, 1973-83

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# 5 | The re-formation of the working class in the oil industry

As argued in the Introduction, classes are not static positions within the economic structure, but dynamic formations in time. Working classes should thus be understood as groups of people in particular places and times, emerging in a process shaped by their relations within the process of production. Thus, working classes are historical formations, and particular groups of workers should be studied within this broader category.[724] When analysing class as a historical formation, it is essential to apply the following three insights. First, class relations are not only produced and reproduced at the point of production (the workplace), but also in the household and the community. Second, they are mediated by and embedded in other relations, most importantly race/ethnic and gender relations. Third, as Göran Therborn advanced, "Classes must be seen, not as veritable geological formations once they have acquired their original shape, but as phenomena in a constant process of formation, reproduction, re-formation and de-formation. We will, therefore, have to distinguish crucial moments or periods of the formative process."[725] These processes of class formation and re-formation can best be analysed looking at the four "theoretical and historical levels" proposed by Ira Katznelson, namely, the structure of capitalist development, ways of life (lived experience), dispositions (consciousness) and collective action.[726] These levels, of course, cannot be separated, but they provide a useful analytical strategy.

In this chapter, I argue that the late 1960s and 1970s formed a crucial moment of class re-formation in the Iranian oil industry, and indeed in the wider society. Given the previous chapters' focus on the structures of capitalist development, we will take a closer look to the oil workers' dispositions and activism. But first, one more theoretical clarification needs to be made. "Class reproduction" and a "self-reproducing social class" are two related but distinct

[724] Camfield, "Re-Orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations."
[725] Therborn, "Why Some Classes Are More Successful Than Others?," 39.
[726] Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons," 14-22.

concepts that are useful when analysing class formation. Class reproduction refers to,

> [T]he persistence over time of positions in a structure of production. A self-reproducing social class is a subcategory of class reproduction and is composed of a single career or variety of careers, all sharing similar positions in a structure of production, and which are transmitted over generations. This distinction between class reproduction and class self-reproduction is crucial to the discussion of class formation, because most of the historical treatment of class formation is really about the formation of a self-reproducing social class.[727]

Self-reproducing working classes tend to produce enduring consciousness and a long collective memory, which makes them particularly inclined to engaging in collective action. "What makes these groups so crucial is that the merging of proletarian production and self-reproduction gave proletarian identity a particularly intensive form. Workers' consciousness was not simply a property of experiences of the workplace, but it was just as keenly forged and retained within working-class neighbourhoods and families."[728] In this sense, the oil workers formed a self-reproducing class. Equipped with this analytical lens, we can now turn our attention to explore the changes in dispositions and activism among oil workers.

The period from 1908 to—and including the oil nationalisation movement of—1951-53 is the formative period of the industrial working class in the oil industry, and in Iran more generally. The working class formed in this period was a product of a specific historical configuration of capitalist development, lived experience, dispositions and activism. Narratives that reduce class formation, class identity to be more specific, to the material and social changes induced by capitalist development have been correctly criticized. E. P. Thompson's famous claim that, "The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed point. It was present at its own making," summarizes the critiques of reductionist notions.[729] But as Thompson pointed out, class experience is "largely determined by the productive relation into which men are born—or enter involuntary," and that "class consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, and institutional forms."[730] Thus the physical oil sites that were built after 1908 and the social relations of production spawn around them were necessary, if not sufficient, impulses for the formation of the

[727] Michael Hagan, "New Perspectives on Class Formation," *Social Science History* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 80-81.
[728] Ibid., 82.
[729] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 8.
[730] Ibid., 10.

working class. It is essential to remember that also on this level, political ideas and struggles, as well as local cultures and social structures (the tribe, for instance), were involved.[731]

The period from the early 1950s to the late 1960s witnessed the consolidation of the working class in the oil industry within a new constellation of capitalist development, social structures, dispositions and forms of labour activism. From the late 1960s to 1978, the year the revolution started, we see the re-formation of the working class.

## 5.1 Class formation and consolidation, 1908-66

In the first two decades after 1908, the APOC recruited its workers from the Bakhtiari, and Arab tribe of the southern region, who had made their living as peasants or pastoral nomads; they brought with them their cultural traditions and social relations. Thus most of the workers had no previous industrial or urban experience when entering the oil industry. While many of the labourers worked temporarily in the oil industry and returned to their tribes or villages parts of the year or after a few years, permanent employment relations had formed by the mid-1920s, and the number of labourers who had worked in the oil industry for several years became a substantial figure. It is in this period that the emergence of a class identity among oil workers can be discerned in the process of representation and recognition. Looking at workers' petitions of this period and the discourse of state and company officials, Touraj Atabaki has shown how the word "kargar" became increasingly used after the mid-1920s.[732]

However, this account, which focuses on the local experience of the oil workers, risks to forget the influence of political ideas forged in other locations. Here I am referring to the socialist ideas brought back to Iran by those who returned from the oil fields of Baku.[733] Other influences came from communist

[731] One example is the fact that the national state in Iran was weak but present nevertheless, preventing the oil company to function as a full colonial entity and forcing it to enter into negotiations with the central government. Similarly, the existence of relatively strong tribal leaders in the region meant that APOC had to enter into negotiations with them for land and the recruitment of labour power. See Ehsani, "The Social History of Labor in the Iranian Oil Industry (1908-1941)."

[732] Atabaki, "From 'Amaleh (Labor) to Kargar (Worker): Recruitment, Work Discipline and Making of the Working Class in the Persian/Iranian Oil Industry."

[733] In 1915, for instance, 13,500 Iranian workers were employed in the Baku oil industry (29.1 percent of the total) and witnessed or participated in protests in which members of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party played an important role. Among the immigrants who returned to Iran were key members of the Edalat Party, which was established in Baku in May 1917 by veteran social democrats sympathetic to the Russian Bolsheviks and Iranian oil workers. Some of them helped to establish the Communist Party of Iran in 1920, which in turn in collaboration with socialists and independent labour activists helped to launch the Central Council of Federated Trade Unions. Some of tis members attempted to unionize oil workers in the early 1920s and again in 1925, but without much

ideas among the British staff, and the nationalist ideas of Indian workers.[734] Class formation was also expressed in the ways of life. As Kaveh Ehsani has shown in detail, the oil industry's physical development was accompanied by its increasing involvement in shaping the reproductive sphere of oil workers, in particular the family. The oil industry's healthcare, educational system and its social engineering created social structures and urban spaces (Masjed-e Soleiman, Abadan and Ahwaz) that shaped oil workers' common lived experiences outside of the workplace.[735]

Finally, the labour struggles of this period both reflected and spurred class formation. AIOC's factory regime or industrial relations of this period (1908-1953) were based on authoritarian managerial techniques that focused on punishment and maltreatment. In addition, and in a similar manner to other international oil companies, it used racial divisions and paternalism to divide the workers and prevent labour activism.[736] As such, Arabs, Bakhtiaris, Indians and Europeans were positioned in this order in the occupational hierarchy and the spatial organisation of oil towns. By paying better wages and providing houses and amenities to parts of the workforce, AIOC tried to buy their loyalty (by early 1951, less than a fifth of AIOC's workforce was accommodated by the company) through exploiting social stratification.[737] Consequently, the struggles that erupted stemmed not only from the managerial practices in the workplace, but were in direct correlation to the wider factory regime.

The Abadan oil workers' protests of May Day, 1929, which developed into a general strike in the city and other places, have an enormous historical significance announcing, as Stephanie Cronin has argued, the arrival of a new factor in Iranian politics, an organised working class, and the potency of a new type of protest, the industrial strike.[738] The strike happened at a moment when Reza Shah's passive revolution was increasing the number of workers in Iran

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success. Another attempt was made by Yusuf Eftekhari in Abadan in late 1927, as part of the national unionisation campaign of the Communist Party of Iran. Eftekhari, with the help of a number of leading oil workers, most importantly Ali Omid, organised a number of underground cells among oil workers. According to an official APOC official, there were around thirty of these cells by 1929, with each 15 to 20 members. Atabaki, "Disgruntled Guests: Iranian Subaltern on the Margins of the Tsarist Empire." Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*.

[734] In the last weeks of 1920, Indian oil workers went on strike and were joined by their Iranian and Arab colleagues. In April 1922, Indian workers wone on strike in protest against the arrest of Mohandas Karmchand (Mahatma) Gandhi in India, and a few weeks later Indian, Iranian and Arab oil workers went on strike to demand a 100 percent wage rise. Mahmudi and Saeedi, *Shoq-e Yek Khize-e Boland. Nokhostin Ettehadiyeha-ye Kargari Dar Iran [the Excitement of a Great Leap. The First Trade Unions in Iran]*, 201-03. On Indian workers in the Iranian oil industry, see Atabaki, "Far from Home, but at Home: Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry."

[735] Ehsani, "The Social History of Labor in the Iranian Oil Industry (1908-1941)."

[736] Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier*, 19.

[737] Crinson, "Abadan: Planning and Architecture under the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company," 347.

[738] Cronin, "Popular Politics, the New State and the Birth of the Iranian Working Class: The 1929 Abadan Oil Refinery Strike."

through industrialisation, whilst introducing repressive measures to undermine the workers' ability to take independent action.[739] Labour activism erupted on an unprecedented scale between 1941 and 1953, yet peaking in 1945-46 and 1951-53 (Figure 64); this was the zenith of oil workers' labour activism.

Following the end of WWII, a number of strikes were organised between late April and late May 1946 against maltreatment by British managers and the state repression of trade unions, along with proclamations for higher wages, better housing, the eight-hour work day and a comprehensive labour law. During the 1946 May Day parade, a female orator "described oil as the jewel of Iran, accused the British of spending more on dog food than on workers' wages, and urged the takeover of the AIOC. This was probably the first time that a public audience in Abadan heard the cry for oil nationalisation."[740] In this period, "resource nationalism" became an important element in oil workers' consciousness. Referring to this, Heshmat Re'isi, who started working in the Aghajari oil industry in the early 1960s, recollects,

> When immigrants came to the oil cities their ideas about oil changed: They did not see oil as merely the thing they put into lamps, but they saw these huge pipelines running from the production sites to the ports. They gradually understood the price of a barrel of oil, the things that could be made from it, the possibilities it provided and the wealth it created. On the one hand they saw the stingy company . . . and on the other hand they [understood that] this was their own country. In this context, the ideas of Tudeh and the demand for oil nationalisation gained ground.[741]

The oil workers' union became a powerful rival to the provincial administration. In terms of size and achievements, the most important general strike among oil workers started on 14 July 1946 and lasted four days before a delegation of the communist Tudeh Party and its allied trade union (Central Council of Federated Trade Unions of Iranian Workers and Toilers, CCFTU, established in 1944) convinced the strike leaders to end the strike; subsequently, the AIOC management and the government accepted, for the first time, to fix the minimum wage.[742] Another achievement of the oil workers' strikes, and the labour movement in general, was the first national Labour Law

[739] The number of modern industrial plants, excluding the oil industry, grew from 20 in 1925 to 346 in 1941. The number of workers employed in large modern industries increased from 1,000 to 50,000 in the same period, again excluding the oil industry. The total number of workers in the major industrial firms, including the oil industry, small modern factories, fisheries, railroads, docks, coalfields and construction exceeded 170,000. Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 146-47.
[740] Ibid., 361-65.
[741] Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 27 April 1995 (Tape 1), Berlin.
[742] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 361-65. For a recent study of the 1946 strike, see Touraj Atabaki, "Chronicles of a Calamitous Strike Foretold: Abadan, July 1946," in *On the Road to Global Labour History: A Festschrift for Marcel Van Der Linden*, ed. Karl Heinz Roth (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

that was drafted and adopted by the government of Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam on 18 May 1946.[743]

Oil workers' resentment against bad social conditions, British control and the authoritarian central government resurfaced in the oil nationalisation movement that emerged in the late 1940s. As political controls were relaxed, inflation increased and the state-controlled Central Syndicate of Iranian Craftsmen, Farmers and Workers (ESKI) disintegrated, the CCFTU made a comeback in 1951-1953, renaming itself the Coalition of the Workers' Syndicates and reorganising its provincial affiliates. After a number of strikes among silo workers and railwaymen in early 1951, once again, the oil industry became the focal point of labour activism. Oil workers staged strikes on 20 March 1951 (New Year's Eve) —shortly after the Iranian parliament passed a bill authorizing the nationalisation of the oil industry—in order to protest AIOC's announced cuts in wages, travel allowances and housing subsidies.

Two days later oil workers in Bandar-e Shapur went on strike. A more large-scale strike occurred on 25 March in the Aghajari oil field and spread to Naft-e Sefid and Masjed-e Soleiman. In Abadan, students took to the streets, and by 1 April, virtually all 30,000 Abadan Refinery workers and a fourth of the workers in the oil fields were on strike. On 10 April, AIOC rescinded all of the cuts, but announced that the workers would not be paid for the three weeks during which they were on strike. The unions reacted by calling a general strike on 12 April in Khuzestan to demand not only payment for the three weeks that they had gone on strike, but also to demand the nationalisation of the oil industry. The general strike involved truck drivers, railwaymen, shopkeepers and tens of thousands of oil workers, including notably contract workers. The

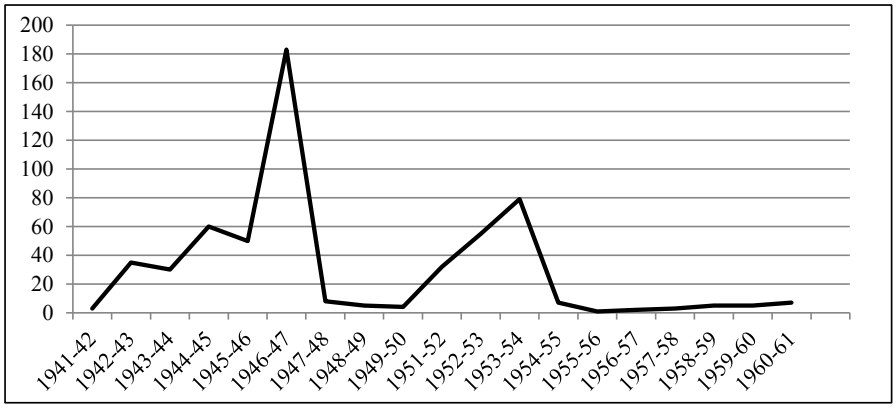
[743] Even then, however, the AIOC refused to follow its regulations and the oil workers in Tehran and Abadan organised a strike that left several strikers dead after the government enforced a curfew and sent troops to crush the strike. The government remained, however, fearful of the workers' movement and approved in 1950 the constitutions of cooperative funds and an insurance program for workers and stipulated the insurance arrangements in a law approved in 1955 and revised in 1960. The precedents of the Labour Law go back to the 1920s. In 1923, pressured by ILO, Reza Khan issued a directive to the governor of Kerman stipulated the labour conditions of carpet weavers (e.g. 8 hour working days). The civil law that was introduced five years later regulated some aspects of labour relations. In 1930, the government approved a law that allowed the establishment of a fund to provide some healthcare for road workers. Two years later the coverage of the fund was extended to construction workers employed by the state. In 1936, the first labour regulations were introduced in Iran's growing industrial sector through the "Regulations for factories and industrial establishments" (*Nezamnameh-ye Karkhaneh-ha va Mo'asesat-e San'ati*), which contained articles about safety, insurance and recruitment. Similar regulations were introduced in the same year for workers in the mining sector and in the railroads. In 1943 the government introduced a law that provided insurance for workers employed by the state. The Ministry of Labour was formed for the first time in 1946, although a "Labour Lepartment" had been created in the Ministry of Industry (*Vezarat-e Pisheh va Honar*) two years earlier. See Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 367. And: *Tarikh Va Sharayet-e Kar Dar Iran 'Ahd-e Bastan Ta Konum [History and Conditions of Labour in Iran from Ancient Times to Today]*, (Tehran: Mo'aseseye Kar Va Ta'min-e Ejtema'i 1350/1971). And: Hossein Kamali, *Eqtesad-e Siyasiye Ravabet-e Kar Dar Iran [the Political Economy of Labour in Iran]* (Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Guidance, 1380/2001).

protests spread to major cities as other workers, including the workers of Isfahan's nine textile mills, organised solidarity strikes while students took to the streets.

The general strike ended on 25 April after union funds dwindled. The oil company made a number of concessions, and Mosaddeq's National Front warned that continuing the general strike could invite a British invasion.[744] Nevertheless, the strikes and demonstrations of oil workers provided essential social clout to the movement for oil nationalisation in the confrontation with AIOC, the British state and the Shah. On May Day 1951, Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq officially cancelled the 1933 concession that was due to expire in 1993 and announced the nationalisation of the oil industry. In order to oversee its implementation, he established a committee of five members which was led by the young engineer Mehdi Bazargan, who played a similar role during the 1979 revolution as we will see later. AIOC reacted furiously, and the CCFTU organised massive parades in July 1951 to commemorate the 1946 general strike. When AIOC tried to sabotage the nationalisation and withdrew its foreign technicians from Iran, and Britain increased its naval presence in the Persian Gulf and imposed an international embargo on the purchase of Iranian oil, CCFTU organised a large demonstration in October outside of parliament to support oil nationalisation, and they demanded the removal of military personal from factories and the lifting of government restrictions on trade unions. The 1952 May Day celebration was a show of the labour movement's, and Tudeh Party's, strength: there were 32 strikes in the last eight months of 1951, 55 in 1952 (excluding the July general strike) and 71 (plus a national strike) in the first months of 1953.[745]

[744] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 368. And: Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, 188-89. While Abrahamian mentions 25 April as the end of the strikes, Ladjevardi speaks of 20 April.
[745] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 369.

**Figure 64 Major industrial strikes, 1941-61.**[746]




We can thus conclude that by the early 1950s, the oil workers' lived experience was increasingly shaped by the industrial conditions in the workplace and their urban communities. Their dispositions were shaped not only by conflicts arising at the workplace, but also by two general conflicts that played out at the national level. On the one hand, there was the permanent conflict with an increasingly authoritarian state, and on the other hand, there was the dissent against foreign—and particularly British – domination. Important sections of this working class were guided by a secular discourse that emphasised social justice and national independence. Trade unions and the Tudeh Party, along with independent socialists and labour activists, played an important role in the formation and dissemination of this political worldview and in organizing collective actions. Very significantly, urban spaces allowed for the forging of social and political alliances between sections of the modern middle class and the industrial working class.

Nevertheless, it is essential to stress the fact that class formation at this stage was still quite fragile. By the early 1950s, there was a considerable minority among the oil workers who had many years of experience working in and living around the oil industry – and experience that itself was mediated by the cultural values and practices of non-industrial communities. Only a small part of the oil workers had been born into an oil workers' family. This point is conveyed by the following figures. The workforce of the oil industry more than doubled in the 1940s as employment in Abadan Refinery grew from 18,304 in 1940 to 38,812 in 1949, and employment increased in the oil fields from 7,819

[746] Compiled from Ervand Abrahamian, "Strenghts and Weaknesses of Labour Movement in Iran, 1941 - 1953," in *Continuity and Change in Modern Iran*, ed. Michael E. Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981). And Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*. Note that there were general strikes in 1946, 1951 and 1952.

to 17,158 in the same decade.[747] To illustrate the consequences of the oil industry's rapid growth in the context of uneven and combined development, it is worth quoting in length from a report of an ILO mission that visited Iran's oil installations in January 1950:

> The dress of a typical worker at Abadan or [oil] Fields is a compromise between European clothes and Arab or Bakhtiari dress, just as his life is a compromise between that of large-scale modern industry and that of the mountain or the desert, between the new ideas of the West and the old traditions of the East. He may wear the coloured headcloth of the Arab with a blue boiler suit, or the wide black trousers of the Bakhtiari with a European jacket. He may have leather shoes or rubber boots, but he is more likely to walk about in "givehs"— white canvas-topped shoes which slip on without straps or laces. It is evident that his habits of thought and behaviour are those of the pastoral tribe rather than of the industrial proletariat. The man whose forbears were nomads, whose needs were easily satisfied and who paid little regard to the passage of time, does not take easily to factory hours, methods or discipline. If he was an artisan in the town bazaar he did his work sitting or kneeling on the ground and not standing at a bench. He did not work to exact measurements but made his copper pots, his brass trays or his wrought iron articles in traditional shapes and sizes by rule of thumb. He could not read a blueprint because he could not read at all. As a consequence of this, practically all the skilled workers and artisans have to be trained by the Company, and training has also to be given even for some of the simpler jobs.
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> In view of the circumstances outlined above, it is not surprising to find that there is a relatively high turnover of labour in the industry. It is true that large numbers of men have settled down in Abadan and Fields, and that many have been with the Company for periods of 10, 15 and 20 years; but the majority do not yet regard themselves as oil workers or consider the area as their permanent home. The influence of tradition and the call of the tribe are strong; it is therefore quite usual for men to migrate to the hills or to the Gulf from time to time and to return to the industry after an interval. Many of the men, indeed, regard their work in the industry as temporary, since they eventually expect to go back to their native villages and to resume their pastoral way of fife. Another aspect of this problem is that, because of the shortage of skilled labour throughout Iran and of the unpleasant climatic conditions in the south, men who have been trained, or even only partially trained, by the Company as mechanics and motor drivers are easily attracted to other jobs in the area or to other parts of the country.[748]

After the coup d'état of 1953 against Mosaddeq and the creation of the Consortium, a new chapter opened in the history of the oil workers, which can be described as consolidation and deformation of class identity. The industrial relations of the oil industry which were predominately based on racism and paternalism gave way to control mechanisms associated with the Fordist

[747] International Labour Office, *Labour Conditions in the Oil Industry in Iran*, 9.
[748] Ibid., 13-14.

regime of capital accumulation.[749] The development of Fordism as a system of mass production and consumption was itself, of course, predicated on the availability of oil.[750] Developed in the US from 1913-14 by Henry Ford and his team of engineers, Fordism served to increase managerial control in the labour process by means of intervening in the reproduction of labour power in order to craft a compliant work force.

First, Fordism integrated the methods of "scientific management," or Taylorism, which broke down the production process into distinct tasks and rigidly separated skilled from unskilled labour. The job of each worker was further subdivided into smaller tasks, and the management organised the order and the defined time frame within which these tasks were to be performed. Fordism borrowed from Taylorism this decomposition of tasks, but it also recomposed them into a collective force:

> The industrial labour force no longer comprised a more or less co-ordinated mass of discrete individual workers and work-groups, each of which was under the direction of a skilled or supervisory worker. Fordism sought to fuse the labour force into an organic whole, a genuinely collective labourer, in which the productive contribution of each individual and group was dependent on the contribution of every other.[751]

Continuing Taylorism's strict differentiation between skilled and unskilled labour, Fordism was also "both conditioned and reinforced by the existence of a 'dual labour market' composed of a small stratum of skilled workers and a mass of unskilled immigrant workers."[752] Furthermore, Fordism was based on specialised (electrical) machinery that allowed the mass production of standardized products, and which could be operated by semi-skilled or unskilled workers. These machines were sequenced so that a product was gradually completed in the most efficient way as it moved along the line of production.

Writing in the 1930s, Antonio Gramsci perceptively recognised the rationale behind the Fordist transformation of the labour process, which he describes as "developing in the worker the highest degree of automatic and mechanical attitudes, breaking up the old psycho-physical nexus of qualified professional work, which demands a certain active participation of intelligence,

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[749] In this sense, Fordism was developed by the French "regulation school." See Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The Us Experience* (London: NLB, 1979).
[750] "A condition of its [Fordism] success was a revolution in energy which generalised the industrial use of electricity and made possible the construction of high capacity motors which enormously increased the power available to industry." Ibid., 18.
[751] Simon Clarke, "What in the F---' Name Is Fordism?," in *Fordism and Flexibility: Divisions and Change*, ed. G. Nigel Gilbert, Roger Burrows, and Anna Pollert (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 19.
[752] Ibid.

fantasy, and initiative on the part o of the work."[753] Most significantly, Gramsci connected Fordism to the second aspect of Fordism: the socio-political interventions in the sphere of social reproduction. Referring to "high wages," "the struggle against alcohol" and "the sexual question," Gramsci describes them as attempts "to intervene in the private lives of . . . employees and to control how they spent their wages and how they lived. . . ."[754]

As Kaveh Ehsani has pointed out, the transition to Fordism in the Iranian oil industry started in the 1920s-1930s, although the labour regime in this period is best described as authoritarian paternalism.[755] The Fordist accumulation regime became only operative in the 1950s-1960s. In terms of control mechanisms in the production process, this shift was partly a response to the increasing Iranianisation of the workforce that diminished the management's ability to exploit racial divisions as a control mechanism. The increasing involvement of American managers could have played a role, as well. New forms of differentiation replaced the sharp differentiation of the workforce based on nationality. The managerial and technical apex of the oil industry was European and American, but its share in the workforce diminished. The differences between unskilled and skilled labour persisted, but they were transcended by a sharp division between white-collar and blue-collar labour as Fordism created new forms of skilled labour and expanded the ranks of the new middle class, as discussed in Chapter 2.

These changes were also driven by technological innovations that had started in the 1940s and accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s. This was, of course, the second phase of the passive revolution under the Pahlavis, marked by statist industrialisation. In Abadan Refinery, for instance, the construction of the catcracker that started in the late 1940s was finished in the mid-1950s, and the oil industry increasingly adopted labour-saving technologies that made large parts of its workforce redundant. While technological know-how remained in the hands of foreign oil companies (the Consortium), the establishment of NIOC was an important step that gradually increased Iranian technological competence. This was partly the result of the creation of joint ventures in oil, gas and petrochemical production outside of the Consortium area, and the expansion of the Abadan Technical Institute and other educational and research institutions in the 1950s-1960s by NIOC, which also sent hundreds of Iranian students to technical universities in the US and Europe. The establishment of the Iran Oil Society (Anjoman-e Naft-e Iran), which brought together Iranian oil engineers and published a scientific journal, is an

[753] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 302.
[754] Ibid., 303-04.
[755] Ehsani, "The Social History of Labor in the Iranian Oil Industry (1908-1941)," Chapter 4.

expression of the increasing Iranian technological know-how within the oil industry. The progress in this field allowed the Shah, as we saw in Chapter 1, in 1973 to renegotiate from a strengthened position a new deal with the foreign oil companies.[756]

While the position of the Iranian staff was improving within the oil industry, its overall employment decreased. Through a recruitment-stop and the *sali-do-mah* lay-off program, employment in the oil industry dropped from around 60,000 in the mid-1950s and stagnated around 40,000 in the 1960s. Significantly, the oil industry's "market despotic" factory regime was gradually displaced by what I would call a hegemonic-bureaucratic factory regime, as the state increased its intervention in the workplace through laws and regulations. In 1959, the cabinet of Prime Minister Manouchehr Iqbal, who later became the director of NIOC, adopted a new Labour Law that superseded that of 1949.[757] In early 1960, the conditions for the formation and registration of "syndicates" were added to the Labour Law, and 60 syndicates were registered by the end of that year, although many of them were in fact guilds.[758] This was also the period in which the oil company's and the state's interventions in the social reproduction of labour power increased, as we saw in the previous chapter. Having taken over the non-basic operation, NIOC became exposed to social and political pressures to provide better housing and healthcare to its workforce. The drive to Iranianisation, coupled with the modernisation of the oil industry, necessitated better-educated workers, which in turn demanded the expansion of NIOC's training and educational institutions.

In this period, the lived experience of oil workers became increasingly embedded in the social structures of a modern industry and urban spaces. The extended family was replaced by the nuclear family, and the educational system, both of the company and of the public institutions, started to play an increasingly significant role in socialisation. The cinemas, clubs and shops of the oil company began to espouse a central role within oil workers' leisure time.

Oil workers' dispositions were also changing. The 1953 coup d'état was a major defeat to many oil workers, invoking Marx' famous observation that "the tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living."[759] In March 1955, the regime arrested 53 members of the Tehran Provincial Council of the CCFTU and banned all independent trade unions in

[756] For a review of the technological developments in the oil industry, see Tavakkol and Mehdizadeh, "Barresi-ye Towse'e-ye Teknolozhi Va San'at-e Naft-e Iran 1287-1357 [Exploration of the Technoligical Development and the Iranian Oil Industry, 1908-1979]."
[757] This Labour Law was in place until a new one was adopted in 1990.
[758] Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, 219.
[759] Karl Marx, "18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," in *Marx/Engels Collected Works* (New York: International, 1966 [1852]), 103.

1957.[760] SAVAK was formed in the same year and rapidly extended its surveillance capacities throughout society. It controlled a series of "yellow" trade unions and scrutinized anyone recruited into large industries, resulting in a dramatic decrease of strikes.[761] Military presence increased in the oil producing areas, and a considerable number of militant workers were arrested, sacked or sent into retirement after the coup d'état. With the repression of the Nationalist Front and the Tudeh Party, the two ideologies that had both expressed and shaped oil workers' dispositions weakened dramatically. At the same time, religion remained an important factor in the lives of many oil workers and assisted in cultivating their moral ideas and worldview. As discussed in the previous chapter, the growth of the number of religious centres (mosques and *hosseiniyehs*) in cities like Abadan during the 1960s suggests that religion played an important role among some oil workers. Finally, the official ideology of the state that promoted patriotism, loyalty and obedience to the Shah in return for workers' rights was adopted by the NIOC management.

From a more political angle, the Shah installed an authoritarian regime, but also attempted to create restricted channels for popular participation and mobilisation. In April 1957, the Shah decided to embed his dictatorship in tightly controlled electoral politics. He created a two-party system by instructing Manouchehr Iqbal, who served as the Prime Minister from 1957 to 1960 and as the general director of NIOC from 1963 to 1977, to form the Hezb-e Melliyun (Nationalists' Party) and asked another of his trustees, Assadollah 'Alam, to form the Hezb-e Mardom (People's Party). While the former was to rule, the latter was assigned the role of the loyal opposition, claiming to champion the interests of workers. But when this electoral opening in combination with worsening economic conditions led to a revival of political protests and strikes in 1959-61, the Shah reacted immediately by increasing repression.[762] He also introduced a number of measures to hasten the pace of industrialisation while broadening the social base of the regime, not so much through political participation as through economic benefits and authoritarian corporatism. Thus, the Shah became not only increasingly autocratic, but also "revolutionary," overseeing the acceleration of the passive revolution that his father had initiated in the 1930s through the introduction of the White Revolution.

The reforms of the White Revolution and the return to increasing authoritarian rule after the thaw of 1960-61 elicited a short but intense period of political protest. In June 1963, thousands of shopkeepers, clergymen, office

[760] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 325.
[761] Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, 201.
[762] Ibid., 221-22.

employees, teachers, students, wage earners and unemployed workers demonstrated against the Shah. The call was made by the bazaar merchants, the National Front and most significantly Ayatollah Khomeini, who for the first time entered the political scene as a main oppositional figure against the Shah. Having steered through the storm of 1963, the Shah confidentially continued the White Revolution, which played a significant role in accelerating state-led capital accumulation by moving landlord capital into industry and urban projects, and by undercutting the political power of the landlords to the benefit of the central government.[763] Economic state intervention was organised through consecutive five-year development plans. The various elements of these plans were heavy investments made possible by oil revenues that increased from $555 million in 1963-64 to $5 billion in 1973-74, import-substitution, cheap credit and American aid.[764] Oil provided the largest share of the government development expenditures, and thus capital formation. The share of the oil resources in the gross investment grew from 36.6 percent in 1959 to 62 percent in 1972.[765]

The land reforms and the growth of industry led to rapid urbanisation, migration and proletarianisation as we saw in Chapter 1. By increasing the literacy rate, urbanisation and creating employment in modern economic sectors, the White Revolution also had a large cultural impact on the lives of working people.[766] The total rural literacy rate increased from 15 percent in 1956 to 37 percent in 1971. During the same period, the total literacy rate increased from 35 percent to 59 percent.[767] The number of educational institutions also grew threefold in the 1960s.[768] Between 1963 and 1971, a total of 62,730 people served in the literacy corps; the health corps, meanwhile, established 500 medical units in the countryside during its first three years.[769]

In short, accelerating capital accumulation in the 1960s led to rapid industrial expansion and re-formation of the working class. More specifically, this involved the re-composition of the working class, which had two aspects. Within the working class, the relative concentration and number of workers in modern sectors such as manufacturing, railways, telecommunications, oil, mining and so on increased in the urban centres. The result was a strongly

[763] Nikki R. Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran : Roots and Results of Revolution*, Updated ed. (New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006), 145.
[764] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 427.
[765] Karshenas, *Oil, State, and Industrialization in Iran*, 213.
[766] Maral Jefroudi, "Revisiting “the Long Night” of Iranian Workers: Labor Activism in the Iranian Oil Industry in the 1960s," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84, no. Special Issue -1 (2013).
[767] Kamal Argheyd and Edward Robert Livernash, "Iran," in *International Handbook of Industrial Relations, Contemporary Development and Research*, ed. Albert Blum (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1981), 263.
[768] Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 145.
[769] Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, 120.

bifurcated economy with on the one hand a modern sector that employed mainly skilled workers, and on the other hand, a more traditional sector with petty production that mainly employed unskilled workers.

As the economic and political context changed drastically during the 1960s, so did the occurrence and form of labour activism. Most notably, the number of strikes was quite low, and independent collective organisation was very weak. Nevertheless, there were a few instances of activism within the oil industry. A slow-down protest in the metal drum plant of Abadan Refinery in October 1965 was quickly settled when the Consortium of the major international oil companies agreed to pay a "difficult work" allowance demanded by the workers.[770] In March 1969, construction workers at the Abadan Petrochemical Plant walked off the job in protest against the restriction of New Year bonus payments to new workers. They returned to their work after the measure was rescinded.[771] While major collective actions like strikes were absent during this period, workers used other means in order to allow for their voices to be heard. Most importantly, oil workers wrote letters to the Complaint Commission of the Majles (the Iranian parliament), the Senate or even the Shah directly, often adopting the Shah's ideological discourse of "progress" and "modernisation" in order to demand their fair share. The archives of the Iranian parliament provide a rich source of petitions of oil workers. Many of these letters start with typical references to the achievements or promises of the Shah to justify their demands. In a letter to the Senate, for example, a dozen Abadan Refinery workers write:

> Thanks to the initiative and leadership of our great king, every day a new industrial establishment is erected in every corner of our nation. . . .This [progress] makes our hearts, that are filled with love for our king and our nation, hopeful of the future. . . . However . . . the administrative revolution that was initiated by the will of Shahanshah Aryamehr [one of the Shah's titles] is ignored by the oil company and we graduated workers of Abadan Refinery remain displaced.[772]

There must have been, of course, other forms of resistance such as those that James C. Scott calls forms of "every day resistance," e.g., foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotage.[773] Unfortunately, these forms of resistance are less well-documented and deserve better historical scrutiny. Moreover, what these petitions denote

[770] Chaquèri, *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran: A Documentary History*, 3, 210.
[771] Ibid., 225.
[772] Letter by graduated workers of Abadan Refinery to the Senate, document 1968 (27 March 1968), LMDCIR, Tehran.
[773] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). And: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

and what also can be concluded contrary to the official declarations in the 1960s and 1970s is that there was a well-established class identity among oil workers. The word "worker" was used both by workers and the authorities, as we will see below.

How should we interpret the low number of strikes in general and in the oil industry in particular during the 1960s? This is the question Asef Bayat poses in "Capital Accumulation, Political Control and Labour Organisation in Iran 1965-1975."[774] A number of authors such as Ervand Abrahamian, Habib Ladjevardi and Fred Halliday have pointed out that whenever state repression relaxed, there was a growth in labour activism and organisation, and vice versa.[775] Although repression plays an important role in conditioning labour activism, the relationship between the two is more complex, as pointed out by Asef Bayat.[776] This is illustrated by the fact that sometimes workers have been able to create (underground) organisations in repressive settings. This was the case, for instance, in Iran in the 1920s, 1930s and the second half of the 1940s, and it has been the case in various other countries. The reason, as explained by Göran Therborn, is that we should regard "the power base of a class [and its institutions] as a class-specific resource. . .," from which follows that "the power of one class is not necessarily the weakness of its opposite."[777]

Alternatively, Bayat has stressed the importance of the changes in capital accumulation and its impact on culture and consciousness among workers, mediated by mass migration from the countryside to urban centres in the 1960s.[778] The rapid growth of the working class in the 1960s entailed two aspects. Rapid industrialisation resulted in a strongly bifurcated economy which had both a modern sector that employed mainly skilled workers and a more traditional sector of petty production, which mainly employed unskilled workers. Moreover, the expanding modern sectors recruited their workers from the new immigrants coming from the countryside, often after they had gained some working experience in the informal petty production sector.

As a result of mass migration to the cities, the recruits in new or expanding enterprises did not have extensive experience in industrial work or

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[774] Bayat, "Capital Accumulation." Maral Jefroudi has criticized Bayat for attempting to explain "the lack of a certain type of labour activism," i.e. strikes, which would imply "[h]olding labour activism to an ideal standard of transformative, revolutionary action…" Explaining the shift in forms of labour activism, however, doesn't necessarily imply the reduction of working class experience to labour activism, nor the reduction of labour activism to strikes. It is a legitimate question to pose, given the prevalence of strikes in the 1940s, and their relative revival in the 1970s. Jefroudi, "Revisiting "the Long Night" of Iranian Workers: Labor Activism in the Iranian Oil Industry in the 1960s," 89.
[775] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*; Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*; Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*.
[776] Bayat, "Capital Accumulation."
[777] Therborn, "Why Some Classes Are More Successful Than Others?," 43.
[778] See also Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran*.

any tradition of labour activism.[779] According to a survey carried out in 1963, 68.3 percent of all Tehran factory workers had been born in villages.[780] Based on his own observations, Bayat writes,

> Most of the factories I visited in 1980-81 had been set up in the mid- or late 1960s. This means that the new recruits did not have a long experience of industrial work, or for that matter, any tradition of labour activism in industry. In my sample of the Tehran factory workers, 80 percent of the workers had come directly from the villages. In one factory established in 1966, for instance, over 90 percent of the workers had less than five years of industrial work in 1975. This finding was supported by the sample which showed that the fathers of only 7 percent of the Tehran factory workers in 1980 were working in industry, although 25 per cent of their fathers were involved in wage-labouring in one form or another. . . .

These workers "had in these years little motivation to get involved in secret activities or organise underground independent labour unions which would involve a high degree of political risk. Here, one could even detect among these workers a certain degree of 'rationality' rather than 'false consciousness.'" By the early 1970s, however, "the manufacturing workers started to acquire a new 'subjectivity' a major component of which was an 'industrial consciousness,'" deriving its elements from an industrial setting, an urban life and industrial work. "The workers transcended the misery of village life and the security of the factory employment with all its advantages. They were now concerned with the misery of factory life: factory discipline, wages, conditions of work, housing problems, inflation, authoritarianism, discrimination, and so on."[781]

Immigration cannot, however, explain the low number of strikes in the oil industry. As discussed above, employment in the oil industry in fact

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[779] The massive rural emigration of those years was caused not only by this pull factor, but also by a number of push factors such as loss of land, unemployment, low income and the growth of market relations accompanied by the need of cash, which were the immediate result of the land reform program (White Revolution). Although land reform began with ambitious goals, the plans were moderated and the results of land redistribution were modest. To begin with, the *khoshneshins*, those without cultivation rights (*haq-e nessaq*) were excluded; they formed 40 to 50 percent of the rural population. Moreover, large portions of land were exempted from redistribution. Finally, "the majority of peasant proprietors remained subsistence farmers who, increasingly in the 1970s, experienced difficulty eking out a livelihood from their earnings." Eric J. Hooglund, "Rural Socioeconomic Organization in Transition: The Case of Iran's Bonehs," in *Continuity and Change in Modern Iran*, ed. Michael E. Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 192. The reason the peasant's could barely survive was that the majority of them, 75 percent, received less than six hectares of land, less than enough for subsistence living. Consequently, many peasants left their villages to find jobs in the thriving urban economies. Between 1967 and 1976, about 300,000 people migrated into the cities each year. Eric J. Hooglund, *Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 191. Bayat, "Capital Accumulation," 200.

[780] The survey was conducted by Tehran University's Social Studies and Research Institute, cited in William H. Bartsch, "The Industrial Labor Force of Iran: Problems of Recruitment, Training and Productivity," *Middle East Journal* 25, no. 1 (1971): 27.

[781] Bayat, "Capital Accumulation," 200-02.

declined in the 1960s, but as we will see later, immigrant labour started to play a role when the oil industry began recruiting new workers in the late 1960s, and particularly after 1972. A number of other factors are involved here. First, as the working class was rapidly growing and changing in composition, the oil workers' communities remained relatively stable, given that the oil industry often recruited its workforce from the children of oil workers. Moreover, class consciousness among oil workers had more continuity due to the particularities of the oil industry: the older oil workers from mainly Abadan were often transferred to new locations like the Tehran Refinery to work, to conduct the overhaul projects, or to train the new recruits. In this sense, the oil workers formed a self-reproducing class. Thus, oil workers tended to transfer not only ideas, but memories of struggles and defeats to their children, while the memory of the 1953 coup d'état and the ensuing repression weighed heavily on them and resonated with their children. Second, the lay-offs of the 1960s added to their fears. Third, strikes carried a big risk of developing into a political confrontation, even if they were carried out with economic intentions, due to state-ownership of the oil industry and the presence of SAVAK. Therefore, oil workers resorted to other forms of protest. Most importantly, there were serious improvements in the living conditions of the oil workers in the 1960s. Finally, the interventions of the company in the oil workers' lives outside of the workplace did not only bring improvements; these interventions also functioned as a disciplining force.

One factor that is underestimated in the accounts of Bayat and the repression-thesis of Abrahamian and Ladjevardi is the fact that industrialisation entailed the general improvement in the social and economic conditions of workers, such as the provision of relatively high wages, pensions schemes, insurances and health care. Between 1962 and 1973, the mean net earnings of all industrial employees improved by more than 37 percent – a rate of about 2.9 per annum. Unskilled construction workers saw their wages improve by nearly 71 percent.[782] The state also initiated a number of policies in favour of workers. In 1962 the government introduced, as part of the White Revolution, a profit-sharing law that allocated a portion of industrial establishments' profits to their workers, the amount of which was to be arranged in a collective agreement between the employer and the employees (this law was altered in 1964 and 1969). Notably, this law did not apply to oil workers. In 1964 another law was introduced to "protect industry and prevent closure of the country's companies," allowing the government to intervene and take over management when an industrial establishment was facing closure.[783] Overall, the economic

[782] Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, 206.
[783] The text of this law is retrievable at http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/95544.

growth of the 1960s invoked the expectation among workers that their living conditions would improve without taking collective action. Rising expectations were, however, the other side of the coin, as we will see below.

To conclude, by the late 1960s, the working class in the oil industry had consolidated in the sense that most workers were no longer recent immigrants, but had been embedded for a considerable period in the industrial and urban social structures, which hardly expanded in this decade. In fact, some of the oil workers had been born into oil workers' families who had lived in the same places like Abadan for at least a decade. At the same time, however, a process of de-formation was visible. The lay-offs of the 1960s removed mainly those who had worked for a long time in the oil industry. This, in combination with the politically motivated purges after 1953 and natural retirement, meant that the stratum of workers in the oil industry who had some experience with labour activism and whose dispositions were shaped by secular ideologies like nationalism and communism, considerably diminished in size.

## 5.2 Class re-formation in the 1970s

The significance of the late 1960s and the 1970s lies in the process of class re-formation among oil workers, and in the working class more generally. This is probably the most overlooked aspect of the 1970s, as most scholars have focused on the macro-level contradictions within and between the economy and the political system. As I argued in the Introduction, however, social transformations do not always arrive as sudden ruptures; sometimes, they are produced by the accumulated affect of "molecular changes, which in fact progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes." [784] These molecular changes constitute what Gramsci called a "passive revolution," as discussed in the Introduction.

In the 1970s, I argue, the working class in the oil industry was transformed, remade or re-formed in ways that were not immediately visible, but quite real, as a part of the Shah's passive revolution. This re-formation concerned the composition, social relations and mentalities of the working class, and became only fully visible during the Iranian Revolution, as we will see in the next three chapters.

Migration, which I have discussed above and in Chapters 1 and 2 in relation to labour in the oil industry, was one of the main drivers of molecular changes in the composition and mentalities of oil workers. The role of

[784] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 109.

migration in this period is of particular importance, as it was also a mechanism through which uneven and combined development took place. As Farhad Kazemi has pointed out, "The pace of rural to urban migration did not slacken for the 1966-76 period. During this decade, 2,111,000 individuals migrated from the rural areas to the cities."[785] The rural to urban migration was, however, much stronger in the Central province, including Tehran, than in Khuzestan. The share of the rural to urban migration in the total migration was merely 11.9 percent in Khuzestan in 1972, the second lowest rate in the whole country.[786]

Kazemi also researched what migration meant to migrant workers' disposition. He looked at a sample of migrant workers in two different industrial establishments and divided them into two groups, those with less than 10 months of experience in the factory, and those with two years or more of experience. He concluded that the latter group had the most knowledge of politics and the political system. Those with the longer stay at the factory were all members of a labour union, had participated in electoral politics and were more exposed to mass media. The questions related to social class awareness did not yield a satisfactory result, as most workers didn't understand the questions. This group was also more prone to making political demands, while female workers demonstrated the greatest will to make political demands (probably due to the fact that they were mostly second generation migrants). These differences, given the similar socio-economic background of the workers, can be attributed to the socialisation process in the workplace.[787]

Other changes resulted from the organisational-technical development of the oil industry – which manifested itself in parallel to the physical and geographic expansion of the oil industry (see Chapter 1) – and the introduction of new technologies and divisions of labour. The first aspect included the expansion of drilling and production activities in the oil fields, the construction of the Tehran Refinery in 1966-68 and its subsequent expansion in 1975; the building of six fluid gas factories between 1969 and 1974; the construction of the refineries in Shiraz (1973), Tabriz (1978) and Isfahan (1979); the construction of the gas pipeline network in the 1970s; the increase in the number of distribution locations as the consumption of oil products increased domestically; and the enlargement of the export terminals.

As we saw in Chapter 2, this industrial expansion in combination with the renegotiated 1973 oil agreement that increased Iran's control over oil resources and the oil industry led to a significant increase in the number of oil

[785] Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran*, 28.
[786] In the Central province, an industrial heartland, the rate was 46.6 percent; in Gilan and Zanjan it was 63.6 percent and in West Azerbaijan it was 71.3 percent. Ibid., 31.
[787] Ibid., 97-105.

workers. This trend altered the composition of the workforce in a number of ways. First of all, in places like Tehran where the oil industry was built in the late 1960s and 1970s, many blue-collar workers were recruited from the small workshops where they had started working as new immigrants. In the Tehran Refinery, the core of the approximately 500 workers (700 in the mid-1970s) were the skilled workers who had been transferred from Abadan Refinery in the late 1960s, but the rest were recruited from Kermanshah and the small factory shops in south Tehran. An important implication of this was that religious ideas were much stronger among the Tehran oil workers than among the Abadanis, and there were visible divisions between the Khuzestanis, Tehranis and Kermanshahi within the Tehran Refinery.[788]

The second element was visible in the introduction of new technologies and divisions of labour, which, in combination with the availability of more educated Iranians, meant that more white-collar positions were created in the oil industry. Most of these positions, however, were not in managerial or "contradictory" locations in the labour process, but in working-class locations, as we saw in Chapter 4. Thus, the expansion and modernisation of the oil industry increased the demand for technical and non-technical (administration, education, healthcare) white-collar workers who were increasingly recruited not only from the NIOC's educational system, but also increasingly from regular educational institutions. As a consequence of these developments, a new generation of young white-collar and blue-collar workers entered the oil industry.[789]

The sudden increase in the number of oil employees, particularly white-collar workers, created a third transformative factor: a generational shift in the oil industry. Generational differences are not only based on the effects of ageing, but also include the effect of belonging to different "cohorts," which

[788] Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 4 May 1995 (Tape 3), Berlin. Yadollah Khosrowshahi also refers to the recruitment of Tehrani workers from "metal and piping workshops," Mohammad Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]* (N.N.: Komiteh Entesharat-e Bonyad-e Padzu, 1392/2013), 11.

[789] Judith Burnett, *Generations: The Time Machine in Theory and Practice* (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).For the classical discussion on the importance of generations, see Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952 [1928]). Mannheim's interest in generations stemmed from his wider critique of Marxism. Although this was a welcome correction to deterministic notions of class, Mannheim went further by presenting generations as an alternative to class in order to understand the development of ideologies, resistance and social structures, and his approach was taken further by those who influenced by the "cultural turn" argued that after WII, the importance of class was taken over by generations. See for instance M. Corsten, "The Time of Generations," *Time & Society* 8, no. 2 (1999). Mannheim argued that a generations experience historical events from the same perspective, referring to this as process as the "stratification of experience." This notion, of course, overlooks the social divisions within generations. Therefore, E. P. Thompson's approach to "experience" is more useful as it maintains the centrality of class is maintained while involving the role of cultural values.

Noble and Schewe have defined as a group of "individuals who are born during the same time period and who experienced similar external events during their formative or coming-of-age years." These external events include "economic changes, wars, political ideologies, technological innovations, and social upheavals, are thought to define . . . values, attitudes, and preferences."[790] Such salient events are important as far as they shape a generation's collective memories, particularly when the events are traumatic.[791] In this regard, the struggles of the 1940s and their defeat during the 1953 coup d'état were traumatic memories for the generation of oil workers who had worked in the oil industry for one or two decades when a younger generation entered the oil industry in the 1970s. For them, the coup d'état was a part of their collective memory; it was more so a factor that undermined the legitimacy of the Shah's regime as compared to something that undermined their own activity.[792]

On the contrary, among a considerable layer of the educated members of this generation, it was proof of the need for more radical struggles, as they further drew inspiration from the armed struggles in Latin America and elsewhere. As these examples demonstrate, it is therefore important to scrutinise the political, social and economic developments that shaped the oil workers' consciousness (dispositions) in and outside of the workplace, a topic to which I will return shortly.

The generational shift was visible among the industrial working class as a whole, of course, and it had a significance that should not be underestimated. On the one hand, the combined effects of political repression, the lay-offs of the 1960s and the rapid entrance of new workers with an immigrant background led to the partial discontinuity of the experiences and dispositions of the past, including the influence of communism.[793] On the other hand, it

[790] Stephanie M. Noble and Charles D. Schewe, "Cohort Segmentation: An Exploration of Its Validity," *Journal of Business Research* 56, no. 12 (2003): 279.
[791] John C. Dencker, Aparna Joshi, and Joseph J. Martocchio, "Towards a Theoretical Framework Linking Generational Memories to Workplace Attitudes and Behaviors," *Human Resource Management Review* 18, no. 3 (2008).
[792] The significant place of 1953 in Iranian's collective memory is above all visible in the fact that it is one of the main political stories that is told and retold from generation to generation. It is also reflected in literature, above all in poems by Akhavan Sales (e.g. "zemestan ast") and in Ahmad Mahmoud's novel *Hamsayeha (Neighbours)*, which was writing in 1966 but fully published in 1974. This novel centred on the oil nationalisation in the southern oil region is one of the most popular novels, republished and sold despite being censored both under the Shah and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In a recent study 384 Iranians from Gilaki, Azeri and Kurdish backgrounds were asked to name the most important historical events in the last hundred years. The 1979 revolution was named by 40.2 percent, while the oil nationalisation and the 1953 coup d'état came on the second place (before the Iran-Iraq War!), Hamid Ebdollahi Chanzanagh, "National Historical Events in Iranian Collective Memory," *International Journal of Social Sciences and humanity studies* 5, no. 1 (2013).
[793] "Partial" because experiences and collective memories were passed on. One oil worker, for instance, referred to the fact that before 1951, there were only three shift teams in the refinery, but that thanks to the 1951-53 strikes four teams were introduced to allow shift workers to take rest. Interview with Mirza 'i, 18 January 2013, Abadan,

fostered the conditions that enabled the emergence of a new radicalism among young workers. This was correctly recognised, although somewhat exaggerated, in the early 1970s by Bizhan Jazani, one of the brightest theoreticians of the new Left:

> Although both are engaged in the same workshops and other centres of production they are divided, as it were, by clearly defined borders. The old workers are distinguishable by their age, skill, level of income and extent of family responsibilities. They have been through one or two periods of economic and political movement and, despite their relative conservatism and lack of recent political activity (for reasons of age and established status), they possess a working class culture and consciousness. Nevertheless, because of their aloofness from the new generation of workers and particularly because of the unredeemed effects of the defeats suffered during the past two decades, which have created in them a sense of despair, pessimism, and selfishness, they refuse to enlighten the younger workers. Such ambivalence is especially acute in the most important section of the working class, i.e. the industrial workers. They receive better wages and regard the new breed of workers, who lack any working class consciousness and culture, with complete contempt and detachment. Compared with the previous generation of industrial workers, the new generation enjoys a higher level of education, i.e. literacy. The bulk of them have urban working-class and petty-bourgeois backgrounds, whereas the previous generation were [sic] of peasant stock. While the new workers lack any form of working-class culture, they have clear socio-economic demands which stem from their urbanised situation and are based on the tendencies which have their origin in the recent Land Reforms. [794]

The fourth transformation is related to the social structures within which oil workers lived and worked. The oil company's social structure expanded and improved as we saw in the previous chapter, consequently shaping workplace conflicts and oil workers' everyday lives by providing housing, education, healthcare and leisure time facilities. In the workplace, oil workers' syndicates and collective bargaining became more institutionalised – among the regular workers at least, but not for the thousands of contract workers. However, oil workers also became less dependent on these social structures. While the official syndicates engaged some of the older generation oil workers, the younger workers only participated half-heartedly or ignored them.

Moreover, education was not only provided by the oil company, but also by the expanding educational system external to the company's domain, which meant that the oil workers who entered the oil industry in the 1970s were less

[794] Note that Jazani is completely ignoring the immigrant background of the "new" generation of industrial workers. The quote is from Jazani's *Tahlil-e moqe'iyat-e niruha-ye enqelabi dar Iran*, parts of which were translated in Jazani, *Capitalism and Revolution in Iran : Selected Writings of Bizhan Jazani*, 126. The original text can be retrieved from http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/tahlile-mogheiiat-jazani.pdf

socialised in the oil company's educational system. Cinemas provide another example: as the number of cinemas increased rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, oil workers became less dependent on the company cinemas. This was a part of a more general trend in which the social barriers that had been in place between oil workers' communities and the other subaltern groups became more porous. This was particularly the case in Ahwaz, Tehran, Shiraz and Tabriz where the oil workers' communities developed within a pre-existing urban milieu, in contrast to Abadan, where the urban milieu developed around the refinery and the oil company quarters.

These "molecular changes" led to the re-composition of the working class in the oil industry, but they also transformed the dispositions and activism of oil workers in the 1970s. Oil workers were, of course, not isolated from the wider developments in society. Their dispositions changed also in the interaction with the political and ideological strands felt across society as a whole. Therefore, the following section looks at the political and ideological developments that influenced oil workers and the networks in which they were embedded. In the subsequent section, I explore the political activities and the ideologies of oil workers, and the networks in which they were embedded. The final three sections will look at the developments in labour activism in general, and among oil workers, in particular.

## 5.3 Politics and ideologies

Writing of the 1970s, Michael Axworthy notes, "Despite the successful, rapid development, or perhaps in part because of it, the contradictions and the unease were in no place more concentrated than in Iran. . . ."[795] As the economy modernised in the 1960s, expanding the ranks of the working class and the new middle class, the Shah's regime became increasingly autocratic, basing its power on the military, which increased its size from 200,000 in 1963 to 410,00 in 1977, a bureaucracy that increased from 150,000 civil servants in 1963 to 304,000 in 1977, a network of court patronage and of course, the SAVAK. At same time, however, the Shah tried to create tightly controlled and very limited mechanisms of popular participation.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the electoral process had been organised through the Hezb-e Mardom (People's Party) and Hezb-e Melliyun (the Nationalists Party) since 1958. Hezb-e Iran-e Novin (Party of New Iran)

[795] Michael Axworthy, *Revolutionary Iran: A History of the Islamic Republic* (London: Penguin Books, 2014), 76.

was established in December 1963 to replace the Melliyun Party and only functioned as a machine to distribute political positions. Confronted with the permanent crisis within the Mardom Party and the corruption of the Iran-e Novin Party, the Shah moved his regime to bring the electoral process even more under his control and shifted the country into an even more authoritarian direction by establishing in 1975 a unified strong party, the Rastakhiz (Resurrection) Party, and declaring that all Iranians had to become members or leave the country if they did not like the idea. In November of the same year, the party launched a journal for workers (*Rastakhiz-e kargaran*). In 1976, all white-collar employees of the oil industry were obliged to join Rastakhiz.[796]

As the party's deputy leader Daryoush Homayoun later acknowledged, all the important decisions of the government had to be approved by the Shah and often were initiated by him. The Shah's intervention was substantial. For instance, when Homayoun wrote an article about the relationship between the party and the government for the theoretical magazine of the Rastakhiz party, he received it back with comments from the Shah, who was upset by the article. In Homayoun's own words:

> The Shah had drawn a red line below those sentences. . . .[that] referred to the role of the party in decision making, not [meaning] that the party or the people should make the decisions, but [it referred to] the assistance that the party could provide to the political leader in taking decisions. However, the Shah was so sensitive about this matter that he didn't understand that it wasn't as he had interpreted [the text].

He sums up the contradiction that lied at the heart of the Shah's approach: "the Shah both wanted to involve the people, and he wanted to take the decisions himself."[797] The Shah was particularly interested in the military, foreign affairs and naturally, oil, as we will see in the next chapter. He had regular and frequent audiences with more than 20 of his top aides who held positions in these and other key areas.[798] As power became more concentrated, the level of repression and SAVAK surveillance increased notably until the relative relaxation from early 1977.

Three elements stood at the core of the political ideology with which the Shah, the bureaucratic and the technocratic elite legitimized the state. First, there was the idea that Iran needed an enlightened autocrat to modernize the country from above in order to join the modern nations. This ambition included the cultural Westernisation of everyday life, and the Shah was eager to be seen

[796] Interview with Foroozandeh, 6 February 2013, Abadan.
[797] Daryoush Homayoun. Interviewed by John Mojdehi, 21 November 1982, Washington, DC. Tape No. 3. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University.
[798] Fatemi, "Leadership by Distrust: The Shah's Modus Operandi," 49.

as part of the Western elites and to invoke the image of Iran as being Western rather than Middle Eastern.[799]

Second, he presented this modernisation as the continuation of Iran's idealized pre-Islamic past, and he casted Iranian identity as "Aryan."[800] In the Shah's official conception, often mimicked by pro-court intellectuals, foreign officials and companies, the modern industry in general and the oil industry, in particular, were tied to the ancient heritage of Iran. The text of the ad of an oil company is exemplary (Figure 65): Ancient Persia, Modern Iran. The two meet and blend throughout the land first united 2500 years ago by Cyrus the Great. . . . Today the stone columns of Persepolis and the steel towers of refineries pierce the sky. While archaeologists unearth cities, oil helps bring a new life to the people. . . ."

Thirdly, the Shah dressed up his ambitions in a pro-worker, anti-imperialist and even revolutionary rhetoric, hence the White Revolution. He announced the eradication of class and class conflict, and he tried to create a pro-worker image of himself. NIOC's monthly magazine, for instance, was used to propagate these ideas among the oil employees.

> The repressive traditions, which hurt the toiling and wealth producing classes, have disappeared due to the will of the Shah and the approval of the people. . . . The ideal of justice has always guided the activities of the great kings of Iran, and has become manifest in the White Revolution of the Shah and the people and challenged traditions that created the chaos of the previous dynasty [Qajar] and the intrusion of colonialism.[801]

In short, the dominant ideology propounded by the state was Persian nationalism, which contained the promise of rapid industrial progress and was to be delivered by an authoritarian, yet enlightened, revolutionary monarch. This rhetoric in a way reflects the strong presence of popular sentiments based on social justice, class and anti-imperialism, which the monarchy tried to incorporate within its official discourse.

This ideology, however, exposed the regime to a number of risks. By stressing Persian and Western influences as the sole sources of Iranian identity, he additionally alienated those for whom Islamic and local cultures were important guides. Second, by promising rapid progress to hubristic extents, the Shah raised expectations to unachievable levels. He declared that the "Great

[799] The Shah's personal brings home this point very well. The Shah invited dozens of American and European dignitaries to Iran, and he and Empress Farah remained every year since 1965 in the luxurious winter resort St. Moritz, where they attended the nightly parties of other state officials.
[800] The Shah even titled himself *Aryamehr* (the Light of the Aryans). For a critical discussion of this ideology see Reza Zia-ebrahimi, "Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the "Aryan" Discourse in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 44, no. 4 (2011).
[801] *Nameh-ye San'at-e Naft-e Iran*, Khordad 1350/May-June 1971, 2.

Civilisation" was just around the corner. On 2 March 1975, the Shah stated: "At any rate, by the end of the Fifth Plan [March 1978], there will not be a single working Iranian with a monthly salary of less than 12,000 Rials a month ($170), no matter what his job. . . . As far as the welfare of the workers is concerned, we will always be a few steps ahead of them, giving them benefits they never thought of."[802] He promised to distribute the increasing oil wealth among all Iranians, promising the increase of the average per capita income to $2,069 before the end of the decade. He claimed that, "In the next 25 years . . . we shall rank among the five biggest powers," and seizing upon the British departure from the Persian Gulf in 1968, the Shah attempted to turn Iran into a regional power. By promising too much and failing to deliver, the Shah created a sense of relative deprivation.[803] This was exacerbated by the Shah's revolutionary rhetoric, partly designed to undercut the Left, which while inducing passivity by stressing the role of the Shah as a revolutionary substitute for the people, also invoked the idea of the possibility for revolutionary change.

[802] Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, 241.
[803] Milani, *The Making of Iran's Islamic Revolution : From Monarchy to Islamic Republic*, 95; Hetherington, "Industrialization and Revolution in Iran: Forced Progress or Unmet Expectation?."

**Figure 65 Advertisement by Fluor Company, which was active in the construction of Tehran and Isfahan refineries, and in the expansion of Abadan Refinery.[804]**


[804] *Kayhan International*, 15 October 1971.

### *5.3.1 The oppositional groups*

As the Shah was becoming more authoritarian, the opposition, which had been repressed after a brief resurgence in 1959-63, started to resurface from the early 1970s. The Tudeh Party was extremely weakened after the 1953 coup d'état, which led to the "decimation of communist networks throughout Iran and the loss of many lives," not only due to repression, but also due its own shortcomings in reacting to the coup and its immediate aftermath.[805] The leadership of the party ended up in exile. During the 1960s, the remnants of Tudeh in Iran suffered from two devastating SAVAK infiltrations, which brought the party's activities under its control. Moreover, Tudeh was confronted, like the Left as a whole, with new domestic and international conditions in the 1960s. These included the defeat of 1963 and intensified repression; the interpretation of the social changes caused by the White Revolution and the nature of the Shah's rule; the role of foreign powers in Iran; the Sino-Soviet split in the communist left; and the emergence of Castroism and Maoism.[806] Both strands were sympathetic to Chinese communism and established their separate organisations.[807]

The same domestic and international changes, particularly the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, oriented a number of Marxist cells that had survived into the late 1960s towards guerrilla strategy. This reorientation was also a reaction to the failure of the Tudeh Party in 1951-53, its dependence on the Soviet Union and its method of cautious activism. The new generation opted for radicalism, equating it with armed struggle. Two groups, the Jazani-Zarif group and the Ahmadzadeh-Pouyan group, were the main developers and advocates of the theory and strategy of armed struggle against the Shah.[808] The first group's members came out of the Tudeh Party's youth organisation, while the second group's members originated in the National Front and religious networks. Unlike the Maoists, these groups were looking for urban armed struggle and were inspired more so by Latin America than by China. The survivors of both groups merged to form the People's Fada'is in 1971, which

[805] Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris 1999), 3-16.
[806] Ibid., 36.
[807] The first split came in 1964, when a group sympathetic to the Cuban Revolution formed the Revolutionary Organisation of the Tudeh Party of Iran (sazman-e enqelabi-ye hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran) but quickly moved towards Maoism. It carried away a large section of the party's supporters in the West. Three Central Committee members of Tudeh who had joind the split were expelled in 1965 due to various differences and formed the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Tufan (sazman-e Marxist-Leninisti-ye Tufan). For an insider account, see Hamid Shokati and Mehdi Khanbaba-Tehrani, *Negahi Az Darun Be Jonbesh-e Chap-e Iran [a Look from within to the Leftist Movement of Iran]* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami Enteshar, 1380[1368]/2001[1989]).
[808] Bizhan Jazani (1937-75), Hassan Zia' Zarif (1937-75); Mas'ud Ahmadzadeh-heravi (1947-72), Amir Parviz Pooyan (1947-71).

attracted mainly students and members of the new middle class.[809] Two other groups that advocated urban warfare were the Palestine Group (Goruh-e Felestin), consisting mainly of students, and Ideal of the Masses (Arman-e Khalq), which was mostly made up of young workers. The most prominent organisation outside of Iran in the 1960s was the Confederation of Iranian Students Abroad.

Next to these secular-leftist organisations, there also emerged an organisation that blended a radical non-clerical version of Islam with Marxist ideas: the People's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI, Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran).[810] It was established in 1965 by former members of the Freedom Movement of Iran (FMI, Nehzat-e Azadi), who like their secular-leftist counterparts, criticized the cautious tactics of their parent organisation and opted for armed struggle.[811] Similar to the Fada'is, this organisation was made up of students and the intelligentsia, with the difference being that their parents were often from the tradition middle class (clerics, merchants and shop-owners) while the Fada'is' parents belonged mostly to the new middle class of professionals. The guerrilla organisations benefitted from the expansion of the education system, as the number of secondary school students increased from about 1 million in 1970-71 to about 2.5 million in 1977-78, and the number of students in higher education increased from less than 100,000 to 154,215 in the same period. "While expanding the numbers of the politically aware and articulate, the growing education system generated competition and frustrated expectations. Whereas over one-third of the high school graduates competing for university places in 1961-62 were successful, by the mid-1970s this had fallen to a mere 12 or 14 percent."[812]

These guerrilla organisations spent the most part of the second half of the 1960s engaging in theoretical debates on the necessity of armed struggle, training and organisational and financial preparation. On 8 February 1971, the Fada'is attacked a gendarmerie post near Siahkal in Northern Iran, marking the beginning of guerrilla warfare. This development meant that the new generation was turning away from the strategy of workplace and community-based struggles and towards armed struggle. While some of the leaders of the Fada'is such as Jazani had sophisticated ideas about the condition of the

[809] On the Fada'is see Peyman Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey : Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fadai Period of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979*, 1st ed., Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2010).
[810] Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahedin* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989). For an insider's perspective, see: Mohsen Nejat-Hosseini, *Bar Faraz-e Khalidj-e Fars [above the Persian Gulf]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 1380/2001).
[811] The prominent founders are Mohammad Hanifnezhad, Sa 'id Mohsen, Mohammad 'Asgharizadeh, Rasoul Moshkinfam, 'Ali Asghar Badi'zadgenan.
[812] De Groot, *Religion, Culture and Politics in Iran : From the Qajars to Khomeini*, 236.

working class and the labour movement, the dominant view among the Fada'is in the early 1970s was to largely discard past experiences.[813] This was, for instance, expressed in the prison memoirs of Ashraf Dehqani. The introduction, written by the Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrilla Organisation, states: "This heroic generation [the guerrillas] started without any support, practical know-how, and without benefiting from past experience, because the previous generations hadn't left behind any positive or creative experience that was useful for the present. Thus the young generation started its activities without any reliance on achievements of the past, and started from zero."[814]

Although Jazani theorized armed struggle as the first preparatory stage of a popular uprising, in practice, the nature of armed struggle socially cut off the new generation of leftist activists from working class communities and their day-to-day struggles. Armed struggle was theoretically legitimized in the most influential treatise of the 1970s among young leftists. In *Armed Struggle: Both Strategy and Tactic* (Summer 1970), Mas'ud Ahmadzadeh argued that a "real workers' movement" was impossible in Iran due to both severe state repression and the fact that the main contradiction in society was not between "labour and capital," but between "the people [*khalq*] and imperialism." Therefore, "political struggle in society must be inevitably armed struggle. Thus the working class will be organised and gain consciousness not in a workers' movement but in a mass armed struggle. . . . The groups that start the armed struggle today, must not aim to mobilize the working class, but the people as a whole."[815] The goal of the guerrilla warfare, however, was not to be militant, but to be political, because the conditions of repression had forced "the people" into absolute passivity. Amir-Parviz Pooyan, one of the Fada'is' main theoreticians, legitimized armed struggle in another key treatise of the group by developing the thesis of "two absolutes" (*do motlaq*). He argued that the workers "presume the power of their enemy to be absolute and their inability to

[813] Jazani, for instance, wrote, " Although working-class vanguard organisations are well aware of the potentials force of the working class, they ought not to be deceived by its numerical size, and place too much emphasis on its actual power. On the other hand, pessimism towards, and a lack of faith in, the working class, as well as a denial of its potentialities, is tantamount to breaking contact with it." He was also much more nuanced on the role of official trade unions: "these same controlled trade union will develop some sense of solidarity and unity amongst the workers. For the mass of young workers, the existence of such union at least inculcates the idea of organisation and struggle. Conscious elements among the workers, as well as working class political organisations, should cautiously exploit the facilities offered by these unions to spread and strengthen proletarian culture and consciousness. Jazani, *Capitalism and Revolution in Iran : Selected Writings of Bizhan Jazani*, 129-30.

[814] Ashraf Dehqani, *Hamaseh-ye Moqavemat [the Legend of Resistance]* (Tehran: Nashr-e Mardom, N.N.), 12.

[815] Mas'ud Ahmadzadeh, *Mobarezeh-ye Mossalahane: Ham Strategy Ham Taktik [Armed Struggle: Both Strategy and Tactics]* (Sweden: Organization of Iranian Students, 1976 [1970]).

emancipate themselves as absolute."[816] In this condition of "total control" by the state, it was up to the guerrillas to demonstrate the vulnerability of the state through their armed struggle.

While repressive, the state's control over workplaces and communities was not "total" in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the Fada'is claimed. Surveillance made activities very difficult, but not impossible. As we will see shortly, even in the oil industry workers managed to organise activities and protests, both within and outside of formal organisations. Armed struggle was a strategic choice rather than an inevitable option.

This is firstly illustrated by the fact that the Fada'is, despite working underground, were capable of recruiting dozens of workers. These included in the early 1970s Eskandar Sadeqinejad and Jalil Enfereradi (leaders of the metal workers' union), Hassan Noruzi (factory worker), Yusef Zarkar (rail worker), Ja'far Ardabilchi and Asghar 'Arab-Harisi (metal workers), Monaf Falaki (carpet weaver), Mohammad Chupanzadeh (construction worker), Kazem Shahid-Sales (oil worker at RemainCo subcontractor) and Ali Reza Kiani (Tehran Refinery worker).[817] What the article mentioning these names makes clear is that all of these workers joined the Fada'is underground activities, or did so after unsuccessfully trying to mobilize their colleagues into a political confrontation.

A second example is provided by the alternative path taken by the Revolutionary Workers' Organisation of Iran (Sazman-e Enqelabi-ye Kargaran-e Iran, SAKA), which was established in 1967 when two organisations of former Tudeh Party members merged. For a number of years, SAKA managed to maintain an organisation with more than 130 members and a number of chapters outside of Tehran (Isfahan, Arak, Tabriz, Mashhad, Qazvin, Shahr-e Kord and Bojnurd), publish a journal and establish workers' circles in a number of small factories and a number of large workplaces such as the carmaker Iran National, the Railroads, the Isfahan Steel Company and in the print shops of the dailies *Ettela'at* and *Keyhan*.[818] The pull of guerrilla warfare, however, had become so strong by 1970 that the members of the Isfahan branch of SAKA planned and executed a bank robbery, which was against the organisation's strategy and without the knowledge of its leadership.

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[816] Amir-Parviz Pouyan, *Zarurat-e Mobarezeh-ye Mosalahane Va Radde Teoriye Baqa' [the Necessity of Armed Struggle and the Refutation of the Survival Theory]* (N.N.: The People's Fada'iyan Organization, 1971).

[817] "Siyahkal Va Jonbesh-e Kargari [Siyahkal and the Workers' Movement]," https://pishgaam13.wordpress.com/2011/02/04/kar590-karegari/. (accessed 30 July 2016)

[818] On SAKA see Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Saka: Iran's Grassroots Revolutionary Workers' Organisation," *Revolutionary History* 10, no. 3 (2011); Albert Sohrabian, *Khaterat-e Albert Sohrabian: Bargi Az Jonbesh-e Kargari-ye Kommonisti-ye Iran [Memories of Albert Sohrabian: A Page from the History of Iran's Communist Workers' Movement]* (Hannover: Bidar, 1379/2000).

This robbery, during which three SAKA members were arrested, drew the attention of SAVAK, which arrested its members in 1971.[819]

In the period 1971-75, the Fada'is lacked a clear organisational structure while focusing on guerrilla warfare, which they had theorized as a "small motor" to put in motion the "big motor," i.e. the masses. For the few Fada'i members in workplaces, this meant that they were focused on igniting a revolutionary fire rather than building upon the struggles that emerged at the point of production and in the workers' communities. Tahmaseb Vaziri, for example, who worked from 1971-74 in the Isfahan Steel Company, remembers that he and other Fada'is did not organise among the workers, but tried to "trigger workers into a revolutionary uprising through our struggles against the regime. We were, for instance, planning to do this by shooting the general [whose troops guarded the company and regularly beat up the workers]."[820]

When the guerrilla strategy led to the arrest and killing of dozens of Fada'is and failed to mobilize the masses, a process of re-evaluation was initiated in early 1975. This resulted in the adaptation of an ethos that, while pleading for continuing the armed struggle to different degrees, stressed the importance of political propaganda and agitation, especially among workers.[821] The possibility to combine secretive guerrilla activity and propaganda work in society was of course unattainable, and the new course did not successfully materialize. Dissatisfaction grew, and a minority of the Fada'is became altogether disillusioned with guerrilla strategy and split in October 1976. They joined a Tudeh Party branch established a year before, which became the only functioning Tudeh branch within Iran between 1976 and 1979, and published a journal, *Navid*.[822]

Until 1975, the Tudeh Party's policies were geared towards reform of the regime, reinstatement of democratic rights, a return to constitutional rights and closer ties with the Soviet Union, which had good relations with the Shah. After the more radical faction in the party became dominant at its 15th plenum in 1975, it adopted the slogan "Down with the Shah's despotic rule"; the party

[819] This was part of the crackdown that followed the guerrilla attack on the Siahkal police station in February 1971. SAVAK managed to round up the SAKA network after the arrest of a member of the Maoist guerrilla organisation "Palestine Group," with which the organisation had developed contacts.
[820] Interview with Tahmaseb Vaziri, 17 February 2017, Amsterdam.
[821] After 1975, a significant section of the Fada'is turned away from Ahmadzadeh's writings and reoriented towards Jazani's "line," which was then criticized by others, most significantly, Mohammad Hormatipour and Ashraf Dehqani, *Dar Bareh-ye Sharayet-e 'Eyni-ye Enqelab [About the Objective Conditions of the Revolution]* (N.N.: People's Fada'i Guerrilla Organizations, 1978). See also Touraj Atabaki, "Ravayati Az Jonbeshe Kargaran Dar Goftar Va Kerdar-e Cherikha-ye Fada'iye Khalq [a History of the Workers' Movment in the Discourse and Practice of the People's Fada'iyan]," in *Rahi Digar: Ravayat-Ha'i Dar Bud Va Bash-e Cherikha-ye Fada'i-ye Khalq-e Iran. Daftar-e Nokhost [Another Road: Narratives Abou the Everyday Life of the People's Fada'i Guerrilla Organisation. First Volume]*, ed. Touraj Atabaki and Nasser Mohajer (Paris: Noghteh, 2017).
[822] Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran*, 67.

nonetheless followed contradictory policies in the following years. On the one hand, it demanded the overthrow of the monarchy, but on the other hand, it demanded to be allowed to function within Iran's constitutional boundaries, even making direct overtures to the regime.[823]

In conclusion, on the eve of the revolution, the Tudeh Party barely had a presence in Iran, while the secretive nature of armed struggle had cut the new generation of leftist activists off from the working class. More tragically, between 1971 and 1979, a total of 237 Fada'i cadres and activists lost their lives in clashes with the state forces or were executed.[824] While the sacrifices of the Fada'is and the Mojahedin made them popular among vast layers of the population when the first signs of the revolution emerged in 1977, this popularity was based mainly on a mythical image rather than organic relations developed by organisational, ideological, and cultural activities within working class communities. The oppositional image of the Fada'is was large enough, ironically thanks to the regime's propaganda, to draw sympathy from some oil workers, a number of whom also became active members, but the guerrilla strategy put these sympathizers and members at a distance from their co-workers, as we will see later.

The turn towards guerrilla struggle diverted the time, energy and resources of hundreds of dedicated young radicals, among them a number of workers, away from class struggle in workplaces and communities and into hideouts (*khune-ye timi*). The strategic development in the religious opposition differed from that of the leftists, although the repressive wave following the 1963 protests and the global rise of guerrilla struggles launched similar debates about strategy among them as it did among the left.

In the 1960s, Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters forged the activist networks that they called the Islamic Movement (*Nehzat-e Islami*), and which later mobilised millions during the revolution.[825] This network helped to distribute thousands of cassettes and leaflets that carried Khomeini's message into large sections of society. The forging of this network had two elements. First, Khomeini and his supporters among the young radical clerics had been active after the revolt of 1963 to diminish the influence of the traditional a-political (quietist) ulama and to win over to their side the new and established clerics in the mosques, the *howzehs* (seminaries) and other religious centres. They recruited and trained the cadre that would play an important role in the

[823] Ibid., 80-81.
[824] For statistics on deaths of Fada'i militants see Vahabzadeh, *A Guerrilla Odyssey : Modernization, Secularism, Democracy, and the Fadai Period of National Liberation in Iran, 1971-1979*, 16-77; 257-59.
[825] On the development of this network, see Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985), 40-44.

revolutionary mobilisation. The second element was the development of links between radical pro-Khomeini clerics and a generation of young religious students, alumni and professionals—the new middle class. Both groups, clerics and middle class radicals, were also able to connect to a number of workers through mosques, *hey'ats*, charity organisations and political activities.

The Societies (*Hey'at-ha-ye Mo'talefeh-ye Islami*) of bazaari supporters of Khomeini formed along its regular activities a military wing in reaction to the repression of the 1963 protests. This wing was responsible for the assassination of Prime Minister Hassan Ali Mansur in 1965, which ensued in a crackdown, forcing the Coalition into underground activities and weakening its potency severely; its remnants became active a decade later. This development shifted the debate among Khomeini's supporters towards those who opposed armed struggle, including Khomeini himself. The leaders of the movement focused instead on political and social methods of building up support among the population and challenging the regime. After Khomeini was sent into exile in November 1964, his students established an organisation with eleven people at its centre, including Ali Khamenei, Hossein Ali Montazeri, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Ali Meshkini. They published a secret journal, entitled *Mission and Retribution*, and helped to spread Khomeini's message through tapes. Khomeini's supporters also created cultural and educational programmes, and an Islamic Cultural Institute. In order to create a stronger organisation, a number of pro-Khomeini clerics established an informal network in the early 1970s, which came to involve about 30,000 clerics and seminary students by 1978. This network tried to connect to the larger population through traditional organisations such as mosques and religious societies, new organisations such as educational and welfare societies and political organisation copied from the leftists. As succinctly summarised by Vanessa Martin, "In 1963 the movement acquired its Long March in the 15 Khordad uprising [1963], which gave it symbols, heroes and martyrs, as well as a cohesion and identity which had not previously existed."[826]

At the same time as Khomeini's supporters were creating a base of support in the bazaar and in the mosque network in the 1960s and 1970s, they were establishing an organisation that was all but in name a party. The young clerics in Khomeini's network held regular weekly sessions in the mosques and travelled around to spread Khomeini's message. In 1977, they established the nucleus of the Society of the Combatant Clergy (*Jame'eh-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez*). Significantly, the Khomeinists were also establishing connections to another social milieu, i.e. the new, educated middle class. The Society for the

[826] Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State : Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 73.

Propagation of Islam (*Anjoman-e Tabliqat-e Islami*), which had been established in 1943, became an important place where clerical and lay activists met. Despite their differences,

> Their primary objective was to undercut the spread of Marxism among the youth, and to offer instead a reinterpreted Islam more 'contemporary' than the traditional one as an equally viable but more authentic ideology. It was this objective that ensured the existence and governmental protection of various Muslim organisations that penetrated camuses, high schools, factories, and social clubs, and allowed freedom of action to Bazargan, Taleqani, Mottaheri, and Shariati.[827]

Mahmud Taleqani's criticism of Marxism and commitment to an Islamic reading of social and economic justice drove him close to the People's Mojahedin Organisation and further from Khomeini. Mottahari, who was probably Khomeini's closest associate in the 1950s and 1960s, played a major role as the bulwark against Marxism.[828] His interest in philosophy and Marxism and his teaching at the theology faculty of Tehran University brought him into close contact with the educated middle class and their organisations, such as the Islamic student associations initiated by Bazargan and Taleqani, and the professional associations such as the Islamic Society of Engineers. His intellectual endeavour was centered on demonstrating the relevance of Islam to contemporary issues. He focused, in particular, in providing an intellectual alternative to Marxism, which was popular among the educated youth in winning them over to an Islamic worldview. In his polemical refutation of Marxist ideas and *iltiqat* (mixing non-religious ideas such as Marxism with Islam, as the Mojahedin did), he developed a reformed Islamic conception of philosophy, society and politics that could serve his mission as "Khomeini's emissary among the middle-class young, whom he sought to win away from Western ideologies."[829]

Paradoxically, Mottahari was one of the founders of the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in 1965, which became a podium for his lay rivals, most importantly Ali Shariati. Hosseiniyeh Ershad was established with the idea to reach a different audience, the educated youth, which was not frequenting the mosques and sermons due to the ossified image of Islam under the clerical establishment. In 1968, Mottahari invited Ali Shariati, whose star was rising among the youth, to join the Hosseiniyeh Ershad. His lectures in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Hosseiniyeh Ershad were immensely popular and had a

[827] Mangol Bayat, "Mahumud Taleqani and the Iranian Revolution," in *Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution*, ed. Martin S. Kramer (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), 69.
[828] For an excellent review of his Mottahari's ideas see Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*.
[829] Martin, *Creating an Islamic State : Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran*, 98.

huge intellectual influence on the ideological formation of the young Islamic radicals. Shariati's radical ideas that mixed Islam with Marxist notions such as class struggle and undermined the role of clerics, however, turned Mottahari against him; both men were vying for the leadership of radical Islam among the youth. Nevertheless, Shariati played an important role in influencing a number of workers, attracting them to an Islamic version of class struggle and bringing them into the orbit of the Islamist networks.[830]

Taleqani's talks in the Hedayat Mosque and Bazargan's talks at the Islamic Society of Engineer in the Al-Javad Mosque were part of the ideological education of the radical Islamic intelligentsia. Other places like the Ghoba Mosque, the Towhid Society and the Al-Hadi Society in Tehran, and similar places in other cities, became meeting points for the radical intelligentsia and clerics. The alliance between the two groups was further reinforced by a split in the Peoples's Mojahedin Organisation of Iran. The Mojahedin drew closer to Marxism in the early 1970s, losing the support of some religious activists. Those who remained committed to a pure Islamic-inspired ideology received a harsh treatment. Majid Sharif Vaghefi, a member of the Mojahedin's central committee who resisted the Marxist turn, was assassinated. This provided the clerics ammunition to denounce leftists and *iltiqatis*. Thus, for young, religious activists, the Islamist clerics who were students or stood close to Khomeini became increasingly an alternative pole of attraction.

Although these Islamist pro-Khomeini networks were not very strong in workplaces before the revolution, they still existed. More importantly, their influence within some working class communities was considerable, as we will see in the next chapter. The political and ideological developments of the 1960s and early 1970s are important, because "industrial consciousness" did not simply revive gradually in the 1970s at the point of production; it did so within a different ideological and political context compared to the 1930s and 1940s. In the new context, the influence of the Left among workers had diminished both due to repression and the guerrilla strategy of the new Left, and Islamist forces had become more influential.

[830] On Shariati see Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian : A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

## 5.4 Political ideologies and networks among oil workers

Having looked at the political organisations and ideologies in the 1970s, we can now look at the extent to which oil workers were involved in or were directly influenced by them. I will first look at the official politics, and then discuss the oppositional organisation. I am particularly interested to revisit the networks that emerged in the 1970s, connecting militant oil workers and political activists. The focus on labour militants is justified here, because as Bourdieu notes, random sampling can "mutilate the very object you have set out to construct," which is particularly relevant when studying contending groups and organisations where there may very well be "positions in a field that admit only one occupant but command the whole structure."[831] Looking at these key players is also important in order to disclose the role of what Charles Tilly calls "brokerage," i.e. the production of a new connection between previously unconnected sites, groups and individuals.[832]

### *5.4.1 Official politics and Rastakhiz*

Not surprisingly, given the autocratic nature of the regime, the highest echelons of NIOC were closely linked to the Shah. In the case of Manuchehr Iqbal, the director of NIOC, the links were obvious and very clear. Dr. Manouchehr Iqbal, who had been prime minister from 1957 to 1960 and served as Iran's envoy to UNESCO in the 1960s, was as NIOC's director one of the closest advisers of the Shah.[833] On a lower level, the managers and high ranking engineers of the oil industry met through various networks, most importantly the Oil Association of Iran. The Lions Club was another important meeting point. Lions Clubs were established in 1917 in the US on the initiative of the Chicago business leader Melvin Jones and became international in 1920. The Lions Clubs in Iran, operating under the international number, 354, had 3518 members in 1948. The Chair of the Lions Clubs in Iran was Jafar Sharif-emami, who had served as the minister of industries and mines in Iqbal's cabinet, and as prime minister in 1960-61 and again in 1978. The Lions Clubs brought together members of Iran's business and bureaucratic elite, including

[831] Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 243.
[832] Charles Tilly and Sidney G. Tarrow, *Contentious Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2007).
[833] CIA, *Centers of Power in Iran: Intelligence Report* (Washington D.C.: CIA, 1972). Retrieved from https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organisation/70712.pdf (accessed 3 June 2015).

high officials of NIOC, as reported in various SAVAK reports.[834] Membership was based on nomination by the board. Therefore, ordinary workers distrusted members, assuming them to be agents of SAVAK.[835] In the oil industry, too, the Lions Club in Abadan served as a place where members of the elite were recruited and their social relations were forged. High-ranking staff members were invited by the management of the refinery to join. As one oil worker explained: "We thought that everybody who was in the Lions club worked for SAVAK, but later we understood this wasn't the case."[836]

Among the high-level staff of NIOC, the official ideology of the state resonated strongly. "My father firmly believed that the Shah would educate and modernize Iran. After his graduate years in Texas, my father had returned to Iran full of American optimism. With its vast oil reserves and abundance of smart people, Iran, according to my father, could really go places."[837]

Following the founding of Rastakhiz Party in March 1975, all white-collar employees were obliged to join the party. In similar manner to other aspects of the Shah's policy, this was a highly contradictory move that both mobilized society, such as for the oil workers, but also made them realize more than ever the repressive nature of the Shah's regime by setting limits to political participation. As SAVAK reports of the Rastakhiz Party's Abadan branch meetings make clear, the Party brought together a number of active NIOC staff members and developed an internal life of its own, including factional rivalries.[838]

The following description of one of the first meetings of the oil workers' branch of Rastakhiz Party illuminates, however, the oil workers' unease with the limits imposed on their effective participation. At the meeting, an oil worker stands up and says: "Given the current period in which all members of society live under the just mantle of Shahanshah Aryamehr and benefit from His kindness, it is regrettable that where ever we go, we oil workers have to see the grim faces of our bosses. It is important that they no longer view us as workers; we are all members of the same party and travel the same path now."

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[834] One report from 7 April 1968 mentions Khosrow Hedayat, the vice-director of NIOC, as the chair of Lions Club in the region that included Shiraz and Ahwaz. Another report, from 13 May 1973, mentions the director of the human resources department in Gachsaran and one staff member as members of the Gachsaran Lions Club who travelled to Tehran for the general assembly. Markaz-e Barresi-ye Asnad-e Tarikhi-ye Vezarat-e Ettela'at, *Klup Lions Be Revayat-e Asnad-e Savak [Lions Clubs According to Savak Documents]*, vol. 1 (Tehran: Markaz-e barresi-ye asnad-e tarikhi-ye vezarat-e ettela'at, 1390/2011), 126 and 53. A report from 8 February 1972 states that three of the six elected board members of the Gachsaran Lions Club had high positions in NIOC. Ibid., 2: 293. Moreover, in Tehran, Ahwaz and Abadan, the meetings of the clubs were held in the NIOC club.

[835] Interview with Izadi, 6 February 2013, Abadan.

[836] Interview with Foroozandeh, 13 February 2013, Abadan.

[837] Dumas, *Funny in Farsi: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America*, 82-83.

[838] SAVAK, Document 00027228 (18 July 1977), IRDC archives, Tehran. SAVAK, Document 00027249 and 00027250 (1 March 1978), IRDC archives, Tehran.

Another oil worker added: "In the time that the British controlled the oil industry, the workers suffered a lot, but they now benefit from many advantages they didn't think was possible. But it is not correct that the bosses determine the workers' faith behind closed doors and don't respond to their rational demands."[839] This example also suggests that even those workers, who attended events directly connected to the state, were aware of their class position and conflicts.

Another SAVAK report shows that Rastakhiz had initially mobilized at least some into its ranks, but it also had raised expectations without meeting them. It quotes the head of the NIOC publishing house, who in a talk with his friends tells, them that the party has received 60 minutes from different branches. In these minutes, various questions have been posed without being answered due to a lack of information. He further states that people, barely a year after the party was established, are not supporting it anymore like they did in its initial days. The SAVAK agents, commenting on his words, confirm the unpopularity of the party, stating that the party has created expectations of fighting everyday problems like inflation, but without doing anything about them, therefore leading to disappointment.[840]

### *5.4.2 The Left*

The Left in the oil industry had become extremely weak by the early 1970s, but a number of workers who sympathized with or were members of leftist organisations played a significant role. Most important among them was Yadollah Khosrowshahi, who was born on 28 October 1942 in the Hafshejan village near Isfahan in a family with three sisters and two brothers. After his father died when he was one-year-old, the family moved to Abadan, where his brother-in-law worked in the oil industry. [841] In 1957 and at the age of fifteen, he started working as an apprentice in the maintenance department of the Abadan Refinery. In 1968 he was transferred without his consent to Tehran Refinery, where he finished high school through evening classes. [842]

[839] SAVAK, Document 00074253, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[840] SAVAK, Document 000610078 and 000610079 (20 February 1978), IRDC archives, Tehran.
[841] In the 1940s and 1950s, the Tudeh Party had been quite influential in Hafshejan. Yadollahi's brother-in-law was one of the prominent Tudeh Party members from Hafshejan who worked in the oil industry and influenced the youth (his daughter Pouran became a Fada'i and was executed in 1972). He helped quite a few Hafshejani men finding a job in the oil industry and influenced them politically. Interview with Tahmaseb Vaziri, 19 February 2017, Amsterdam. It is very well possible that Khosrowshahi's political ideas were shaped by this pro-Tudeh group of workers from his birthplace Hafshejan working in the oil industry in Abadan.
[842] Yadollah Khosrowshahi, "Bar Ma Cheh Gozasht [What Happened to Us]," in *Goriz-e Nagozir. Si Ravayat-e Goriz Az Jomhuri-ye Islami.*, ed. Mihan Roosta, et al. (Germany: Noqteh, 1387/2008).

Khosrowshahi sympathized with the revolutionary left, and as we will see below, played a central role in oil workers' labour activism before and during the revolution.[843]

Hesmat Re'isi, one of Khosrowshahi's colleagues at Tehran Refinery, was directly connected with the Fada'is and used the refinery's printshop to print leftist books. The way Re'isi became involved in the leftist circles is not accidental; it is in fact exemplary of the way some workers became involved in leftist circles. Leftist ideologies influenced a small number of workers, not so much through direct contact between leftist activists and workers, but rather through the media coverage of the guerrillas and the government's anti-propaganda against them, which helped to create a mythology of resistance. Also important was the expansion of schools and the fact that many ex-university students, sometimes inspired by leftist ideologies, travelled as part of voluntary corpses to villages and small cities, or were employed there as teachers, and brought leftist ideas to workers' children. Re'isi was partly influenced by his experience in the oil industry's training school (*amuzeshgah*) in Aghajari, where two leftist teachers inspired the students with their talks about injustice and books such as John Steinbecks' *Grapes of Wrath*. Most significantly, however, Re'isi, like many others, was drawn to the leftist organisations in prison through discussions with incarcerated members.[844]

As mentioned above, there were still older oil workers who played an important role in transmitting parts of the experiences of past struggles to the new generation. This was particularly the case in Abadan, where Re'isi started to work in late 1965 and was trained in order to be transferred to Tehran Refinery. He recounts his encounter with one of the old workers, who was a Tudeh Party veteran. Having noticed the political utterances of Re'isi, one day the old worker pulled a practical joke on him to teach him a lesson: he asked "Aren't you too young to work here? You don't even have your wisdom teeth! Let me see." When Re'isi opened his mouth, the old worker threw some dirt in it and started laughing, saying: "Never open your mouth to a stranger!" Re'isi remembers this old worker as the one who taught him to struggle for a better life not only for himself, but also for the future generations after him. In this period, Re'isi was also contacted by Jasemiyan, an experienced worker and the leader of the Tudeh Party branch in Khuzestan, who gave him advice and leftist literature. Besides the Tudeh perspective, there was also a second source of

[843] Although Khosrowshahi never publicly acknowledged his membership of any political organisation, he sympathised with the Fada'is according to Ali Pichgah, a labour activist in Tehran Refinery. Interview with Ali Pichgah, 15 March 2015, Sundsvall (Sweden).
[844] Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 17 May 1995 (Tape 8), Berlin.

encounter with leftist ideas: the Maoist literature (mainly from a Tudeh split) that entered Abadan from bordering Iraq.[845]

In 1968, Re'isi was transferred to the Tehran Refinery and was confronted with conditions that were worse than in Abadan; the wages were 25 percent lower (no weather allowance), there were no company houses, leaving workers to rent their own houses, and rents were high. But even before arriving in Tehran, Re'isi encountered his first confrontation with the authorities. While the 100 trainees had signed a contract stating a wage of 15.6 toman (per day), the authorities wanted to deduct 25 percent for "bad weather allowance," which had been included. In response, they staged a sit-in; Re'isi was taken to the SAVAK office and beaten. According to Re'isi, the wages were not enough to pay the high rents in Tehran. Therefore, he and his brother, who was a university student, rented an apartment with some other young workers for 4,000 Rial.

"In Tehran," Re'isi explains, "We met a new climate. We had contact with students and intellectual milieus, and we could buy books, such as those of Maxim Gorki. Reading illegal books like *Kharmagas* [*The Gatfly*] was very difficult, and if you were caught reading them you could be punished." *The Gatfly* by Ethel Voynich, set in the 1840s Italy of the Risorgimento movement, became very popular in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s. It influenced a generation of young radicals who sympathized with the revolutionary fervour of the main figure (Arthur Burton), who renounced his religious dispositions to devote his life to struggle.[846]

Re'isi was increasingly torn between the ideas he had learnt from his Tudeh mentors who favoured syndicalism and the radical students who propagated guerrilla warfare. By 1969, there was a network among some workers in Abadan and Tehran refineries. The group in Tehran Refinery counted five left-leaning workers, including Re'isi, and discussed work-related issues. At one point they decided to boycott the cafeteria to protest their low wages, but only 50 workers participated.[847] After the first failed strike, they started to reconsider their strategy and came to the conclusion that they should invest more energy into bridging the ethnic divides among the workers (Kermanshahis, Tehranis and Khuzestanis) and take control over the official syndicate. They were inspired by the syndicalist activities of the Syndicate of the Pipelines and Communication department, which was under the influence of Tudeh members. "We wanted to turn this yellow syndicate into a red, radical

[845] Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 4 May 1995 (Tape 3), Berlin.
[846] *The Gadfly* was extremely popular in the Soviet Union, and it probably spread to Iran through the writings of pro-Moscow authors and intellectuals connected to the Tudeh Party.
[847] Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 4 May 1995 (Tape 5), Berlin.

syndicate," explains Re'isi, and in 1970, they won the elections of the syndicate.

Re'isi was, however, less involved in legal activism and engaged more so in illegal activities, mainly publishing leftist books such as those of the Fada'is (Ahmadzadeh and Pooyan) in the printshop where he worked. Re'isi recounts that after the 1971 Siahkal attack, "cherik" (guerrillero) became a well-known term and that the 50 or so left-leaning workers started to debate the guerrilla strategy. This led to an ideological crisis as Re'isi was attracted to guerrilla-struggle because of its emotional and radical attraction, but on the other hand, the theories and strategies of "classical Marxism" (Tudeh) related better to his own experience.[848]

In Abadan, the Left had weakened after the 1953 coup d'état, but its members were still very present, as discussed above. Here, the Left's influence spread through intellectual circles, a number of workers and organisations.[849] Mansour Khaksar (1939-2010, Abadan), whose father worked in the oil industry, was barred from NIOC's Abadan Institute of Technology due to his political ideas. In 1966, he started publishing the *Honar va Adabiyat-e Jonub* (Art and Literature of the South) journal in 1966 together with Nasser Taqva'i, but was soon arrested. In prison, he was attracted to Marxist ideas and joined the Fada'is after his release.[850] His brother Nasim Khaksar (1944, Abadan) was also a Leftist author, and both were part of the Leftist milieu that influenced young students and workers. Their brother Nasser Khaksar (1935, Abadan) is a veteran activist of the labour movement who started his career in 1945 in the Abadan Refinery. He had joined the Tudeh Party in his youth, but gravitated towards the Fada'is in the early 1970s. He had a critical position in labour activism before and during the revolution, as we will see below.[851] The Khaksar brothers, including Mashallah, held important roles in Abadan; they were well known and respected among the intellectual circles, the students and the oil workers, while they were able to connect the various groups to one another.

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[848] He also read Trotsky's *My Life* and was shocked by the fact that someone who had served workers' struggles was so vilified by communists, but his friends gave him books by Stalin to counter this "deviation." Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 4 May 1995 (Tape 5), Berlin.

[849] From a broader perspective, the cultural scene in southern Iran produced a great number of high profile writers, poets, filmmakers and photographers, many of whom sympathised with the Left and were directly influenced by what Amita Ghosh calls the "oil encounter". Amitav Ghosh, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel," in *Incendiary Circumstances : A Chronicle of the Turmoil of Our Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005). On the impact of oil on the literature of the south, see Nooriyan and Hatampoor, "Naqsh-e San'at-e Naft Dar Zohur-e Se Nevisandeh-ye Saheb-e Sabk-e Maktab-e Dastan Nevisi-ye Jonub [the Role of the Oil Industry in the Emergence of Three Authors of the Southern School of Fiction Writing]."

[850] Khosrow Davami, "Mansour Khaksar," *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2 August 2011. Available at http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/Mansur-khaksar (accessed on 22 January 2016).

[851] Interview with Nasser Khaksar, 10 February 2013, Shahin Shahr.

In 1976, an accident happened in Abadan that made the name Fada'is reverberate through the population. The incident, which some of the oil workers I interviewed remembered as one of the first signs of the pre-revolution political rumblings, was a shootout between the Abadan security forces and Iraj Sepehri and Mohammad Hormatipoor, two Fada'i members.[852] Iraj Sepehri was a worker born in Babol (1948), who according to the Fada'i literature in the 1960s, became conscious of the fact that "the dictatorship of the dependent bourgeoisie had by repression made it impossible for workers to organise." His two brothers were involved in the Siyahkal attack, leading to his arrest and torture in late 1971. After his release in 1972, he went to Palestine and joined the People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). On their return from Palestine, they were noticed on 24 August 1974 by the police, and in the ensuing shootout, Iraj Sepehri used his hand grenade and blew himself up in order to remain out of the hands of SAVAK, but Hormatipoor managed to escape. Afterwards, the Fada'is distributed pamphlets in Abadan, narrating how Sepehri had rather taken away his own life than risk injuring bystanders by using his hand grenade to escape.[853]

### *5.4.3 Islamist activists*

While the Left had a long history among oil workers, the influence of the Islamist movements was taking roots in the oil industry, as well, in the 1970s. Unsurprisingly, the movements' role is exaggerated by the official historiography of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and widely ignored in accounts of secular scholars and activists.[854] The ideas of Ali Shariati and those of Ayatollah Khomeini and his clerical supporters were the most important sources of influence on those looking to Islam to provide a political answer. Oil workers encountered the former mainly through colleagues, cultural activities, books and the Islamic Associations at universities, and the contacts with the clerics ran mainly through colleagues, mosques, *hosseiniyehs*, *hey'ats* and various publications.

Khomeini's ideas reached some oil workers through the distribution of pamphlets and cassettes, but also through the Iraqi television that often had

[852] Interview with Ali Reza Ashrafpour, 10 February 2013, Isfahan
[853] Payam-e Fada'i, Farvardin 1384/March-April 2005.
[854] The number of Islamist groups that rapidly emerged in 1978, suggests that a network of Islamist activists existed prior to the revolution. In my search in the IRDC archives, I encountered the following organisations in Khuzestan: Mojahedin-e Paygah-e Haviye Ostan Bushehr; Kanun-e Farhangi-Nezami-ye Enqelabiyun-e Mosalman-e Khorramshahr; Goruhi az Javanan-e Mosalman-e Mottahed-e Khuzestan; Mardom-e Mosalman-e Khuzestan; Javanan-e Mosalman-e Kuy Reza'I (Zeytun-e Kargari); Javanan-e Mosalman-e Khuzestan; Goruh-e Shahadat; Rah-e anbiya.

anti-Shah programs. A SAVAK report from Abadan, for instance, states that on 13 June 1973 the reporter of the Basra television channel read out one of Khomeini's declarations, referring to Khomeini as "the great leader of Islam."[855] A number of oil workers were directly linked to Islamist circles. Mohammad Zeyd Behbahani (12 October 1929) was born in Mahshahr into a religious family which had made a living as petty traders.[856] At the age of 14, he started working in a tailor's shop in the oil workers' quarter in Abadan. In 1945, he started working in the construction department of the Mahshahr oil facilities, performing simple tasks like painting. This was a period of intense labour activism under leftist leadership that not only worried the British officials and the Shah, but also religious conservatives like Behbahani, who "prayed to God so He would destroy the Tudeh Party . . ."[857]

In the 1960s, he became an ardent supporter of Khomeini, receiving and distributing his tracts. In 1966 he was interrogated by the SAVAK and was exiled to Gachsaran, where he was first employed in the construction department and then transferred to the materials depot of NIOC in 1970. He resented the fact that while performing the tasks of a white-collar worker, he was treated and paid as a blue-collar worker, because he didn't have a high school diploma. In Gachsaran, he organised religious meetings that were held at someone's home or at the mosque of the oil workers (currently the Al-shohada Mosque), bringing together a number of bazaaris, students, teachers and oil workers.[858] When he was transferred to the oil workers' shop, he made comments on the consumption of alcohol as a sin, and he was transferred once again, this time to the NIOC hospital. After Seyyed Mohammad Jazayeri, a cleric who led the Friday prayers at the oil workers' mosque, complained to Behbahani about the fact that the oil workers' shops sold alcohol, he wrote a letter to SAVAK, threatening that "if all the alcohol is not removed from the shops, it will be set on fire, and SAVAK will be responsible."[859] During his stay in Gachsaran, he remained in contact with Islamists in Mahshahr. He became a key organiser of pro-Khomeini demonstrations in Gachsaran during the revolution, as he helped to organise and finance the oil strikes while bringing them under clerical control, as we will see in the following chapter.[860]

'Abdolhassan Moqtada'i (1955, Abadan) is another important Islamist activist who was born into a religious family. His father did not allow a TV or

[855] SAVAK, Document 854 108, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[856] Mohammad Zeyd Behbahani, *Majarahaye Man [My Adventures]* (Ahwaz: Tarava Publication, 1391/2012), 13-14.
[857] Ibid., 47.
[858] Ibid., 228-31.
[859] Ibid., 238.
[860] Behbahani was appointed Attorney General of Behbahan after the revolution, and was elected as one of the region's representatives in the first parliament.

radio in the house and worked in the construction department of NIOC. Like in most other oil workers' families, the children had to work in order to make ends meet. So while in high school, Moqtada'i started working as a delivery boy, sold scrap metal, worked for a construction contractor of the refinery, drove a taxi and worked in a shop. He attended but did not finish his education at Moffateh High School, which was one of the places of political activities in which a particular teacher, Mohammad Rashidian (1938, Behbahan), played an important role. Due to his political ideas, Rashidian was exiled to Tehran in 1965, where his political ideas were further shaped in contact with pro-Khomeini clerics like Rafsanjani and Beheshti. In Tehran, he gained his sociology BA in 1969, and after a short period of imprisonment for his political activities, he moved to Abadan in 1970. In Abadan, he gathered students, bazaaris and a few oil workers around and he stood at the centre of a pro-Khomeini network that included Ayatollah Jami. After the revolution, Rashidian became a key member of the Abadan Committee of the Islamic Revolution and was elected to the Assembly of Experts; he also served three terms in the Iranian parliament. Shariati's writings were another source of inspiration for Moqtada'i.[861]

In 1977, Moqtada'i successfully took part in the NIOC entry exams and started working as a white-collar worker in the Abadan Refinery's maintenance department, first in the transport reparations section and then in the Central Workshop. Moqtada'i belonged to the new generation of workers who entered the oil industry in the years before the revolution, but while many of that generation were attracted to leftist and religious-nationalist ideas, he and a few others gravitated towards Khomeini. From the 150 workers that were recruited in the summer of 1977, only a few fasted during the Ramadan, he remembers, adding, "but there were also others with us who couldn't fast and behaved modestly in the workplace, and this enabled us to find each other before the revolution. We had formed a group that met during the free time we had in our apprenticeship period; we discussed religious issues and joined the strikes together."[862]

Davoodi is one of those workers that Moqtada'i befriended in the maintenance department, and whom I managed to interview inside the Abadan Refinery in 2013. Like many others, Davoodi, who started working the Central Workshop in 1974, was influenced by the oppositional culture in which literature and religious writings played an important role. "I used to read a lot. I read Shariati, Mottahari, Sadeq Hedayat and *Kharmagas* [*The Gadfly*]." In 1976, he was elected as workers' representative of the Central Workshop.

[861] Moqtada'i, *Az Kudak-e Kar Ta Ostandar [from a Child Worker to Governer]*
[862] Ibid., 76.

> Before the revolution, there were no clear ideological divisions. It was only in 1978 that within a year different positions crystallized and the various organisations recruited among the oil workers. . . . I was called "seyyed," so everyone knew me as a religious person. I had a couple of older colleagues who were religious themselves; they influenced me. One of them even paid attention to my family issues. The Mojahedin [during the revolution] invited me for discussion, but someone from the Abadan Oil College also spoke with me frequently, and he knew everything of the political organisations and gradually I was drawn to the [pro-Khomeini Islamist] activists of the Abadan Petroleum College [Abadan Institute of Technology before the revolution].[863]

As various SAVAK documents confirm, from the late 1960s, the Abadan Institute of Technology became a hotbed for oppositional ideas and activities. In the Institute, the Islamic Association was very active and played an important role in propagating the ideas of political Islam in its various forms. It also played a mediating role between a number of oil workers and the clerical leadership in the city, including Hojjatolislam Jami. The Islamic Association also had connections to other Islamist circles. In 1974, for instance, SAVAK reported that the Islamic Association had a close relationship with the Hosseiniyeh Ershad in Tehran, where Shariati gave his lectures.[864]

SAVAK held a close eye on the Islamic Association of the AIT.[865] In late 1968, Ali Shariati visited the AIT to give a talk at a meeting of the Islamic Association. In one of its reports, it writes: "At 13:30 on Friday 31 October 1968, the Islamic Association organised a Friday prayer in the restaurant. Then Mr. Shahriyar 'Azimzadeh, one of the Association's members, gave a talk on the general principles of socialism, and the history of its ideology from Greek philosophy to Karl Marx." The SAVAK agent adds that it is the first time that the members of the Association are talking about socialism and communism in order to refute them from a religious perspective, which suggests that the members were increasingly being exposed to leftist ideas in the AIT.[866] Another report (10 November 1969) describes a meeting after the Friday prayer, in which Mohammad-Baqer Ghanizadeh – the chair of the Islamic Association – gave a talk about the holy month of Ramadan and the role of intellectuals, explaining that fasting is not only physical, but also mental: "we have to think about those who are hungery in Ahmadabad and Hasirabad [poor neighbourhoods of Abadan."[867] Mohammad Javad Tondguyan, who who

[863] Interview with Davoodi, 6 February 2013, Abadan.
[864] SAVAK, Document 505/274 (26 Dey 1352/16 January 1974), IRDC archives, Tehran.
[865] Pro-Khomeini activism was observed at AIT as early as 1963, the year of major protests in Iran called by Khomeini. SAVAK, Document 00116051, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[866] SAVAK, Document 00383003, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[867] SAVAK, Document 383 004, IRDC archives, Tehran.

became the first Minister of Oil under the Islamic Republic, was one of the leading members of the Islamic Association at AIT (deputy chair), where he studied refinery engineering from 1969 to 1972. After his graduation, he started working at the Tehran Refinery in 1972, but according to SAVAK reports, Tondguyan regularly travelled to Abadan and maintained contacts with at least one oil worker and the students at AIT.[868]

During the 1970s, a number of students at AIT were in close contact with Hojjatolislam Jami. This included Mohammad Bakshi, who entered the AIT in 1974 and was introduced to Jami though his contacts in Qom, where he had moved in Islamist circles. Rokn al-Din Javadi recounts, "After entering AIT after the summer of 1975, I met Jami. It was in early 1977 that we launched the Islamic Association and went to Jami with the others who were active in it and maintained contacts. He informed us about the developments around the Imam and gave us his speeches and statements."[869]

In these years, opposition among students, including those in NIOC's educational institutions, was becoming more palpable. In November 1973, pamphlets were distributed at AIT that called upon students to oppose the repressive climate at the institute and to demand the sacking of two teachers.[870] In early 1974, the students of the Accountancy and Finance College of NIOC in Tehran organised protests against their conditions. This worried some SAVAK officials to the extent that they proposed to fire the second-year students who stood at the core of the protests, to only accept 100 candidates per year and to recruit them from the NIOC staff.[871] In 1974-75, the students at AIT organised its biggest strike, which resulted in a monthlong sit-in and closure of the institute.

Another institution that connected religious oil workers was the Society of Islamic Benefactors (*Jam'iyat-e Nikukaran-e Islami*). "There were a couple of *karmands*, who were involved in the Anjoman-e Hojjatiyeh," one oil worker remembers.

> Hojjatiyeh had a building where it ran the *Ja'miyat-e Nikukaran-e Islami*. It was a charity organisation, providing, for instance, healthcare to the poor. In 1975 they made me a member, but I later dropped out when I discovered it was political [late 1976]. Hojjatiyeh was supported by the local clerics and some bazaaris. They asked me and friends to do some reparations in that building whenever it was needed. At that time you could ask the Financial Department of the refinery to withhold a

[868] SAVAK, Document 00383022, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[869] Mohsen Kazemi, *Neveshtam Ta Bemanad: Yaddashtha-ye Roozaneh-ye Jang-e Ayatollah Jami [I Wrote So It Will Not Be Forgotten. Daily Notes on the Days of War by Ayatollah Jami]* (Tehran: Sureh Mehr, 1387/2008), 481.
[870] According to the SAVAK document the pamphlets were probably not distributed by students but by Tondguyan who had been arrested in Tehran. SAVAK, Document 00383079, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[871] SAVAK, Documents 26789063-2678906, IRDC archives, Tehran.

> monthly amount from your wage for charity, I did this for the *nikukaran*, about 50 Rial. I dropped out when I saw the Hojjatiyeh was taking us to a direction that I didn't trust.[872]

Contacts were often made on an individual basis rather than through organisations, as organisations were not permitted to have a pubic presence.

> In 1977 the situation had changed and everybody was talking about politics. I remember that one of the first political pamphlets I received was from Imam, in February 1977. One of the colleagues gave it to me. When I was in the office, I closed the doors and we read it with 7 or 8 colleagues. We were thinking what to do with it, if we should pass it to others or not. But because we didn't know who to trust, we got rid of it. The person who gave me the pamphlet was a carpenter in the refinery, Sa'adati, but he left his job and went to the seminary. I really became fond of him, and he of me. This happened as follows: I was very good in rasping metal into all kind of small objects for friends, like rings, earrings, hearts, ties. Once I made a ring that had a rectangular part, on which I had scraped the word "Allah." So he once saw it on my finger and said, "Give this to me, I will make you whatever you want." I couldn't say no and liked him from that moment. I told him to make a box for milk bottles and a picture frame. This created a bond between us. He was very pious and practiced religious rituals. He was also much older than me, and he gave me that pamphlet.[873]

According to Re'isi, there was an Islamist group of four workers within the Tehran Refinery whom had been recruited from Tehran and who distributed pamphlets and books of, among others, Ayatollah Makarem-Shirazi. Re'isi recounts that one day, a member of the group gave Khomeini's *Velayat-e Faqih* to him. He was asked to meet three of them and cleric in downtown Tehran to discuss the book. These workers were not active in the syndicate.[874]

### *5.4.4 Clerics and the mosques*

Furthermore, it is worthwhile to mention several clerics here, given their direct influence within the networks to which a number of oil workers belonged. Long before the revolution, pro-Khomeini clerics were active in Abadan and the rest of Khuzestan. In the early 1960s, Khomeini sent one of his students, Mohammad Mofatteh, who later became an ayatollah, to Abadan in order to mobilize against the Shah. He was active here until SAVAK arrested him in

[872] Interview with Foroozandeh, 6 February 2013, Abadan.
[873] Interview with Foroozandeh, 6 February 2013, Abadan.
[874] Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 9 May 1995 (Tape 5), Berlin.

early May 1966 and put him on a train from Ahwaz to Qom.[875] But this was not the end of Khomeini-supporters in Abadan. A SAVAK report from 29 July 1968 stated that leaflets referring to Khomeini's statements were found near the Oil Distribution Company.[876] Before the revolution, pro-Khomeini clerics were active in Khuzestan. A SAVAK report (24 June 1974) noted the following clerics who were under observation due to their anti-regime stance: Hojjatolislam Seyyed Assadollah Nabavi (Dezful); Hojjatolislam Mohammad-Taher Shubayr al-Khaqani (Khorramshahr); Hojjatolislam Sheikh Saman al-Khaqani (Khorramshahr); Ayatollah Sheikh Ahmad Sanabadi (Abadan); Ayatollah Abdolrasul Qa'emi (Abadan); Ayatollah Mansur Sabtalsheikh (Dezful); and Hojjatolislam Mohammad Taqi Musavi (Khorramshahr).[877]

In early 1976, SAVAK reported that Mostafa Hashemi, the Friday Prayer leader of Izeh and representative of Ayatollah Golpayegani, had invited some clercis from Qom to come to Khuzestan for "religious propaganda" and the promotion of Ayatollah Khomeini.[878] In early 1976, the Khuzestan office of SAVAK reported that the cleric Gholamreza Golsorkhi Kashani had delivered an inflammatory talk at the *hosseiniyeh-ye* Isfahani-ha in Abadan in which he attacked the regime. The report states that in the past, he had been an active member of the Fada'ian-e Islam and had organised support for Khomeini.[879] In July 1977, the Khuzestan office of SAVAK identified ayatollahs Sheikh Ahmad Sanabadi and Abdolrasul Qa'emi in Abadan as "extremists" and "supporters of Khomeini." Ayatolloh Nasser Makarem-Shirazi was another pro-Khomeini cleric who visited Abadan. In a sermon at the Behbahaniha mosque in mid-February 1976, he proclaimed that, "The Quran says that every society has to change its own destiny. When we have done our outmost effort, and nothing is left to do, only then can we reach our hand out to God."[880] Religious places like the Behbahani-ha, Isfahani-ha and Homayunshahri-ha mosques were also frequented by oil workers, which suggests that at least some of them were influenced by Khomeinist ideas.

Hojjatolislam Gholamhossein Jami was the most important pro-Khomeini cleric in Abadan before, during and after the revolution. His Dashtestaniha mosque was an important place for the recruitment of the youth to the Islamist movement. Jami had contacts with a number of oil workers, including Mansour Amini, a veteran white-collar worker who had been

[875] Rahim Nikbakht, *Zendegi Va Mobarezat-e Ayatollah Shahid Doktor Mohammad Mofatteh [Life and Struggle of Martyr Ayatollah Mohammad Mofatteh]*, 25 vols., vol. 16 (Tehran: Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Islami, 1384/2005), 143-45.
[876] SAVAK, Document 1310000001 (7 Mordad 1347/29 July 1968), IRDC archives, Tehran.
[877] SAVAK, Document 192054, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[878] SAVAK, Document 7770000099, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[879] SAVAK, Document 3350000063 and 3350000064, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[880] SAVAK, Document 1219000008 and 1219000009, IRDC archives, Tehran.

employed in the refinery since 1945 and had set up the first television station of Abadan.[881] As Ja'far Madanizadegan, who started working at the Abadan Refinery in August 1977, remembers,

> No cleric was able to attract the workers of the refinery because of their position and worldview. Jami, however, entered their hearts and was able to become the joint pin among them. Due to his way of thinking, they all turned to him for the final word. Those students at the AIT who were intellectually engaged wouldn't listen to others, but they followed Jami and coordinated their activities with Jami. . . . This resembled the role Mottahari had among [university, PJ] students.[882]

## 5.5 Industrial relations and labour activism in the 1970s

As the American Embassy's "Assessment of Labour Affairs in Iran" stated in 1970, "The fundamental goal of the Government of Iran's labour policy remains to insure that labour contributes fully to and does not impede economic development." Hence it follows a dual policy: "1) improving the basic conditions of employment . . .; 2) developing the foundations and framework necessary to enable workers to look increasingly after their own economic interests in dealing with employers."[883] Both elements, of course, had much to do with the government's attempt to avoid labour unrest and increase its control over the labour force. There was, however, a third policy, namely direct control through surveillance and repression of labour activists and organisations. I have already discussed the government's attempt to improve the material conditions of workers in an overall framework of authoritarian paternalism, which only yielded partial and uneven results. I will, therefore, discuss here other aspects of industrial relations, defined as the "process of control over work relations."[884] This approach to "work relations" is theoretically informed by the notion that conflicting power relations are fundamental to the capitalist process of production, and therefore, "in every workplace there exists an invisible frontier of control, reducing some of the

[881] See for instance the telegraph he co-signed with Jami in May 1978 to Ayatollah Golpayegani and Ayatollah Shari'atmadari. SAVAK document in Markaz-e Barresi-ye Asnad-e Tarikhi-ye Vezarat-e Ettela'at, *Yaran-e Imam Be Revayat-e Asnad-e Savak: Hojjatolislam Gholamhossein Jami [Imam's Fellows According to Savak Documents: Hojjatolislam Gholamhossein Jami]* (Tehran: Markaz-e barresi-ye asnad-e tarikhi-ye vezarat-e ettela'at, 1392/2013), 170.

[882] Kazemi, *Neveshtam Ta Bemanad: Yaddashtha-ye Roozaneh-ye Jang-e Ayatollah Jami [I Wrote So It Will Not Be Forgotten. Daily Notes on the Days of War by Ayatollah Jami]*, 484.

[883] Chaquèri, *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran: A Documentary History*, 3, 230. For a general discussion of the Labour Law and workers' conditions in the 1970s, see T. Jalil, *Workers Say No to the Shah: Labour Law and Strikes in Iran* (London: Campaign for the Restoration of Trade Union Rights in Iran, 1977). Committee Against Repression in Iran (CARI), *The Iranian Working Class: A Survey of Conditions, Repression and Struggles*.

[884] Hyman, *Industrial Relations : A Marxist Introduction*, 12.

formal powers of the employer: a frontier which is defined in a continuous process of pressure and counterpressure, conflict and accommodation, overt and tacit struggle."[885] Hence the focus in the final part of this chapter will be on the official labour organisations, collective bargaining and labour activism.

The industrial relations regime was based on the state's two-pronged strategy of incorporation and repression of the industrial working class, a policy that suited the Shah's "authoritarian modernisation."[886] Through wage policies, pension schemes, insurances and profit-sharing, the state tried to appease workers and promoted labour patriotism. This approach was clearly stated in publications like *The Iranian Worker in Today's Iran*: "The Iranian worker has a high and respected status in today's Iranian society . . . [because of] the attention for labor issues and all policies that place the Iranian worker on a level . . . that he deserves . . . in the era of 'the Great Civilisation.'"[887] While the Shah was prepared to give industrial workers a certain level of economic prosperity, he denied them any form of political autonomy. The Shah tried to create a corporatist model based on collective bargaining through state-controlled trade unions and employers' organisations. Thus, industrial relations in the 1970s exhibit the same contradictory nature that could be found in the political approach of the Shah more generally. On the one hand, they represent a genuine attempt to formalise and legalise the relations between the state, employers and workers and allow some form of worker participation through, for instance, collective bargaining, albeit on the other hand, the state intervenes in a directly repressive way in the day-to-day relations within the workplace and the economy as a whole.

Trade unions were banned in 1957, but with the ratification of a new Labour Law in 1959 and the adoption of additional rules regulating the formation of syndicates, blue-collar workers received the formal right to organise. However, it would take a few years before even a controlled syndicate was allowed. In August 1962, the state organised a "labour conference" in which only loyalist workers' representatives participated, but which nevertheless gave a number of concessions to workers, including the revision of minimum wages, the application of the Labour Law to agricultural workers, the prevention of layoffs and the enhancement of workplace safety.[888] In 1966, the Labour Law's coverage, which was limited to workers in the

[885] Ibid., 26. The original discussion on the "frontier of control" is in Goodrich, *The Frontier of Control*.
[886] Touraj Atabaki and Erik Jan Zürcher, *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Ataturk and Reza Shah* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004).
[887] N.N., *Kargar-e Irani Dar Iran-e Emruz [the Iranian Worker in Today's Iran]*, 124-25.
[888] *Tehran Economist*, 24 Shahrivar 1341/15 September 1962, quoted in "Moruri Bar Mobarezat-e 'Etesabi-ye Kargaran-e Iran Ta Pish Az Enqelab-e Bahman-e 1357 [a Review of Workers' Strikes in Iran before the February 1979 Revolution]," https://avayekar.org/?p=2964.

industry, was extended to workers in the service sector, as well, e.g. electricity and telecommunication companies and restaurants. In the 1960s, collective bargaining was introduced in a number of large industries, such as the oil industry.

In order to regulate industrial relations, the state also made some legal-institutional changes. In 1970, the Labour and Welfare Institution (*Mo'assesseh-ye Kar va Ta'min-e Ejtema'i*) was established to provide education and training to the employees of the Ministry of Labour and Welfare in industrial relations. In the same year a "training" (*karamuzi*) law was introduced to create supervision of the various training centres and in order to raise the skill levels of workers. In 1973, job classification for industries was stipulated in law, and a year later, a Labour Law for agricultural workers was approved.[889]

The state also promoted the establishment of trade unions, while imposing strict restrictions and surveillance on them. By 1971, there were 397 yellow trade unions, 26 of which belonged to blue-collar oil workers.[890] According to a government survey conducted among industrial workers in 1972, 22.3 percent of the respondents were members of a syndicate, but one third of the members believed the syndicate was either "not useful" or had no opinion about this matter. About 20 percent of the workers were member of a cooperative.[891] By 1978, the number of official unions had reportedly increased to 1,023.[892] These yellow trade unions were organised in a deliberately fragmented way (according to departments within a particular factory such as the Abadan Refinery) in order to limit their cooperation and collective power. In many workplaces there were no trade unions at all, and in case of conflicts with the management, workers would elect a representative to conduct the negotiations.

On the national level, the state's most important labour institution was the Iranian Workers' Organisation (IWO, *Sazman-e Kargaran-e Iran*), which was established in 1967 as an umbrella organisation of the trade unions. According to government officials, the task of the IWO was to help insure that unions and workers did not engage in unacceptable forms of political activity.[893] The American Embassy's 1975 *Annual Labor Report* states that no longer the Ministry of Labour, but the IWO had become, in cooperation with the SAVAK, the main watchdog over the workers' organisations. The IWO,

[889] Kamali, *Eqtesad-e Siyasiye Ravabet-e Kar Dar Iran [the Political Economy of Labour in Iran]*, 146-48.
[890] *Labor Legislation, Practice and Policy. Ilo Mission Working Paper Ix*, (Geneva: ILO, 1973).
[891] Pakdaman, "Workers' Syndicates."
[892] Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, 203.
[893] Chaquèri, *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran: A Documentary History*, 3, 231.

headed by Mohsen Kia-Kojuri since mid-1974, had 17 member federations, representing approximately 600,000 workers in the textile, food and drinks, oil, medical, heavy and light metal, transportation, construction, bakery and confectionary, chemical and retail trades. These federations encompass about 700 local unions in the mid-1970s. [894] It organised the Annual Labor Conference with worker representatives and government officials, and it represented Iran in the ILO. By the end of 1977, the IWO encompassed 21 federations and 852 syndicates, i.e., plant-level trade unions.

In order to form a syndicate, at least 100 workers needed to be members, and three syndicates were allowed to form a federation. According to the IWO chairman, Hossein Qorbaninasab (February 1977 – late 1978), the IWO had 56 offices throughout Iran. He described the function of the IWO not as a labour organisation, but rather as "working with the Labour Ministry and private enterprise to realize the Shah's goal of making Iran into a modern industrial society."[895]

In 1974-75, the Shah's pro-worker rhetoric changed. In reaction to the increasing number of labour protests (see previous chapter and below), the government passed a law in April 1974 that allowed "industrial saboteurs" to be jailed for 15 years or even to be sentenced to death. It created the Office of Security Affairs, which was staffed by ex-military officers in direct contact with the SAVAK, to supervise all activities in the major industries, including oil, petrochemicals and gas, steel, aluminium refining, machine tool factories in Tabriz and Arak, and helicopter and airplane manufacturing. [896]

The second, related factor that contributed to this change was the aggregation of economic troubles in the mid-1970s. The regime hardened its stance to raise productivity, while the IWO was used to propagate this intensified position and increase the pressure on workers. Its Third Congress in April 1976 was opened by Prime Minister Hoveyda's speech, in which he reiterated the government's commitment to workers' welfare, but stated that the workers' new motto should now be "A greater productivity for a stronger and more prosperous Iran."[897] This Congress also adopted a resolution calling for the establishment of compulsory arbitration councils in event of labour-management disputes, which the American Embassy interpreted as "an admission that there is more labour ferment in Iran than reaches the eye."[898] The IWO effect was probably more destabilising than stabilising, not only

[894] Ibid., 233.
[895] Ibid., 259-60.
[896] M. Ivanov, *Tarikh-e Novin-e Iran [Modern History of Iran]* (Stockholm: Tudeh Publication, n. d.), 299. Cited in Parsa, *States, Ideologies, and Social Revolutions : A Comparative Analysis of Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines*, 167.
[897] Chaquèri, *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran: A Documentary History*, 3, 245-46.
[898] Ibid., 247.

because it was not seen as a genuine organisation by most workers, but also because it managed to spur workers to voice their grievances, without taking any action and gaining any significant results. According to the report, "Managers and factory owners are more concerned, at the present time, with workers possibly being carried away by enthusiasm mounted by the government's own programs for sharing the profits and distributing company shares than with Communist propaganda from abroad."[899]

It is worthwhile to mention, among other important institutions regulating industrial relations, the High Council of Labour, which was chaired by Prime Minister Hoveyda. This council facilitated a corporatist arrangement, in which the state, private capital and labour could negotiate, but the state of course outweighed the other two. Parallel to the legal and institutional mechanisms, the state intervened through direct surveillance and repression to control the workforce. The SAVAK, the security personnel of individual companies and their industrial relation departments played a crucial role in this respect.[900] In many workplaces, the workers' representatives were either under heavy surveillance of SAVAK, or they were handpicked by it or were on its payroll. In one sample, five out of 12 factories investigated had "workers' representatives" who were employed by SAVAK.[901] Reports on the union activities in the Shiraz refinery in 1974-75, for instance, show how closely labour activists were supervised by the SAVAK.[902] In the Abadan Refinery, the "industrial relations department" worked under the supervision of SAVAK. SAVAK reports reveal that its informants observed the activities in and around the refinery very closely.[903] Documents obtained by workers during the revolution revealed that SAVAK had dozens of informants in the oil industry. Nevertheless, workers were sometimes able to even use the official unions to voice their demands and organise protests, as they did through the syndicates of the Tehran and Abadan refineries.

The mechanisms of control that the management and the state applied in workplaces could not, of course, prevent individual and collective resistance. The frontier of control can shift forward and backward, but rarely does it make place for total managerial control, and workers always find new ways and techniques to defend their interests. In the 1970s, these forms were mainly informal and individual, and the acts of resistance varied from stealing to working slowly or sabotage. In 1977, the latter even took a more organised and

[899] Ibid., 235.
[900] Jalil, *Workers Say No to the Shah: Labour Law and Strikes in Iran*.
[901] Asef Bayat, "Workers' Control after the Revolution," *MERIP Reports*, no. 113 (March-April 1983): 21.
[902] SAVAK, Dcouments 31437000002-5 (24
[903] The Abadan Institute of Technology and its Islamic Association, and the official syndicate were SAVAK's favourite targets.

collective form, just before Iran was to enter into a revolutionary situation. From July to mid-October, a number of violent acts of sabotage by young workers were reported when about 130 factories were partially destroyed by arson. On 24 July 1977, for instance, 300 workers were arrested after the General Motors plant in Tehran was set on fire.[904]

Another important development in the 1970s was a modest increase in the number of strikes and other forms of overt collective protests. During a meeting with industrialists on 22 October 1975, the Minister of Labour declared that the number of strikes had increased from five in 1969-70, to 12 in 1970-71, to 20 in 1971-72 and reached almost 50 in 1972-73.[905] According to another report, the number of strikes rose from a "handful in 1971-73 to as many as 20 or 30 per year by 1975."[906] According to a report, the number of strikes jumped from 80 between March and August 1975 to130 in the following six months, involving 40,000 workers who were away from their jobs an average of one and a half days. The issues involved wages, inadequate medical care plans, workers' share of profit-sharing and poor living conditions. This trend is confirmed through a detailed study by Ahmad Ashraf based on leftist publications, which shows that the number of workers' collective actions, mainly strikes, increased from a handful in 1970-73 to more than 40 in the period March 1976 to March 1977, before dropping in 1977-78 as the revolutionary process started to gain momentum (Figure 66). The majority of the collective protests took the form of strikes, followed by complaints and demonstrations (Figure 67). In terms of demand, most of the strikes were about economic issues related to wages, bonuses and overtime; a small number were about job security and the right to collective organisation (Figure 68). It is also notable that 54 percent of the strikes ended with success, while only 20 percent resulted in an outright defeat.[907]

The rise in the number of strikes can be attributed to several factors. First and foremost was the fact that the process of working-class re-formation that had started in 1960, mainly due to rapid industrialisation, migration and urbanisation, had resulted in the emergence of a layer of workers in the manufacturing sector who had developed a sense of class solidarity and had gained enough experience and self-confidence to take collective action. Second, rising inflation, especially in the housing market, was an important economic incentive, and the budget cuts in 1975 also played a role. Thirdly, the

[904] Ramy Nima, *The Wrath of Allah : Islamic Revolution and Reaction in Iran* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 57.
[905] Quoted in *Ghiyam-e Kargar. Organ-e Kargari-ye Sazaman-e Mojahedin-e Khalgh-e Iran*, no. 2 (Esfand 1354/February-March 1976): 38.
[906] Halliday, *Iran: Dictatorship and Development*, 206.
[907] Ashraf, "Kalbodshekafi-ye Enqelab: Naqsh-e Kargaran-e San'ati Dar Enqelab-e Iran [Anatomy of the Revolution: The Role of Industrial Workers in the Iranian Revolution]," 78.

shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers strengthened their position and raised their self-confidence. Fourthly, higher oil incomes and the Shah's pro-worker rhetoric, including promises to increase wages, raised workers' expectations, and consequently, facilitated their mobilisation. Fifth, the high oil income allowed the government to make concessions. And finally, many workers felt a general discontent which was shared across society and concerned the illegitimacy of the Shah's power following the 1953 coup d'état, his dependence on the US and growing inequality.

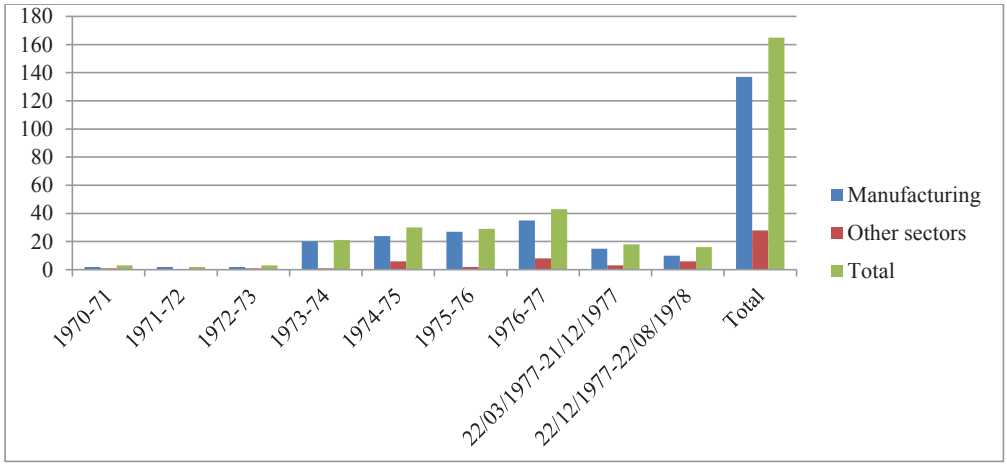
The following examples of strikes illustrate how these factors gave rise to new techniques in collective protest among workers, who sometimes appropriated the official language and symbols to further their own cause. In the early 1970s, for instance, a campaign began to build houses for workers. After the Shah declared on television that all factory owners must build houses for their employees, workers in one plant went on strike to demand the immediate implementation of the Shah's directive. When a number of members of parliament visited the plant to quiet down the workers by saying that His Majesty's orders required time, they were accused of betraying the "Shah-People Revolution." The same technique of resorting to the official discourse and symbols in order to voice demands was exhibited when oil workers in Abadan prevented their managers from leaving by pasting pictures of the Shah on their car doors and chanting "*javid Shah*" ("long live the king"). This slogan was also raised by the workers of Chit-e Jahan textile factory in 1976, when they faced troops while holding pictures of the Shah, and by the workers of Iran National automobile factory, when they disrupted the speech of their managers.[908]

Thus, by the time that the revolutionary upsurge started in early 1978, Iran's industrial workers had gained some valuable lessons in taking strike action. However, this experience was limited to a small number of workplaces as the repression and the lack of independent organisations prevented most workers from taking industrial action. But even in early 1978, when the political temperature was rising rapidly, a number of strikes occurred. More than 10 strikes were called during the first three months of 1978, and three more occurred in the spring and the summer. The most significant of these strikes was that of 2,700 machine-tool workers in Tabriz in April, as it foreshadowed the role that the industrial working-class was to play during the mass strikes in the fall of the same year. Next to economic issues, the strikers "issued a number of political demands, including the prohibition of forced attendance by workers at government rallies; release of all political prisoners and return to Iran of all exiles, especially Ayatollah Khomeini; the dissolution

[908] Bayat, "Workers' Control after the Revolution," 22.

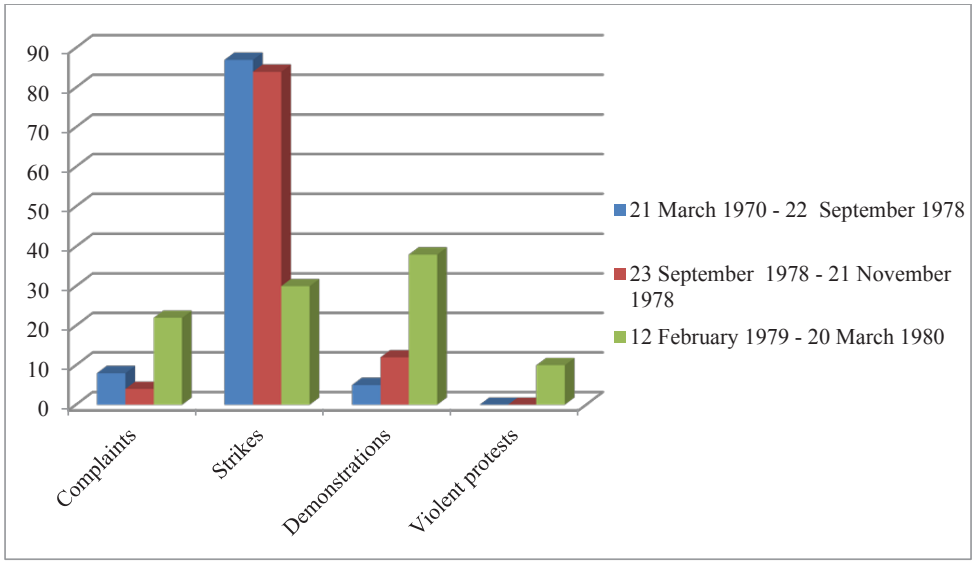
and expulsion of SAVAK agents from factories, universities, and other social institutions."[909] As we will see below, the trend of increasing labour activism was simultaneously visible in the oil industry.

**Figure 66 Number of strikes, 1970 – 1978.[910]**



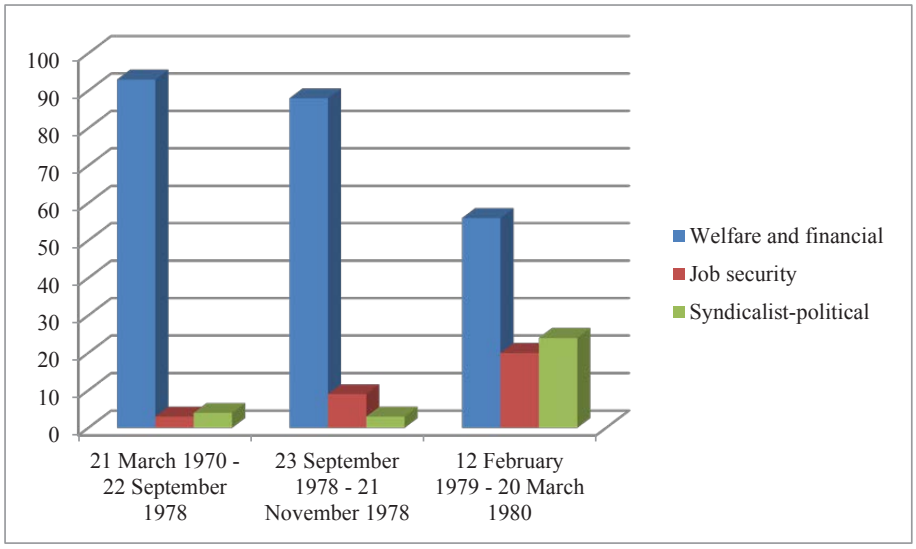

*Note*: the years start on 21 March and end on 20 March unless indicated differently.

**Figure 67 Forms of collective action, 1970-1980 (percentage).[911]**




[909] Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 144.
[910] Ashraf, "Kalbodshekafi-ye Enqelab: Naqsh-e Kargaran-e San'ati Dar Enqelab-e Iran [Anatomy of the Revolution: The Role of Industrial Workers in the Iranian Revolution]," 59.
[911] Ibid., 60.

**Figure 68 Demands of workers' collective protests, 1970-1980 (percentage).**[912]




[912] Ibid., 63-64.

## 5.6 Formal and informal labour activism among oil workers

Following the 1953 coup d'état, all trade unions were banned, but oil workers continued to organise through informal networks. In the 1960s the government also started to promote collective bargaining and the formation of the aforementioned controlled trade unions. In the Abadan Refinery, for example, there were a number of "Aid Funds" (*Sandoq-e Hamyari-ye Kargaran*) to which around 20 workers contributed 100 Rial every two weeks, and from which they could receive a rent-free loan. The responsibility for collecting the contributions rotated among the members. Later, the membership of these funds grew to include 200-300 workers.[913] Their independency was short-lived, however, as they were turned into a formal consumptive cooperative with a constitution and an elected board in the 1960s. Under Manuchehr Iqbal, the chair of NIOC, the election of the board was cancelled and its members (*karmands*) were appointed by NIOC, but in 1974 the Tehran Refinery workers managed to reclaim the right to elect their own board.

Heshmat Re'isi mentions that in the late 1960s, numerous workers' reading groups had been established in a number of places, most importantly the Tehran and Abadan refineries. Heshmat Re'isi worked in the publishing house of the Tehran Refinery, where he also published forbidden books (*jeld sefid*, "white cover") on topics such as Marxist political economy. They formed a reading group around these publications.

Formal organisations had a presence, too. Many militant oil workers were fired or sent off with retirement after 1953, but some remained in the oil fields and the refineries, passing their experiences on to a new generation in the 1960s. In Abadan Refinery, for instance, Babakhan Mohaqeqzadeh played an important role in drawing a number of younger oil workers such as Majid Jasemiyan, Hooshang Ramzi, Parviz Jafari and Yaghub Bani Sa'dun into labour activism.[914]

According to Ladjevardi, "Although a syndicate of the employees of the National Iranian Oil Company of Tehran, led by Heidar Rahmani, was allowed to register [in 1960], no syndicate was permitted in the oil fields. Efforts to form an oil workers' syndicate 'were frustrated by the Labor Ministry's refusal to accept registration in spite of provision under the law permitting it.'"[915] In 1964, however, the government started to formally encourage the formation of

[913] Khosrowshahi, "Bar Ma Cheh Gozasht [What Happened to Us]," 416.
[914] Mohammad Mazra'ekar, "'Etesab-e Kargaran-e Naft Dar Sal-e 57 Va Zamineha-ye An. Bakhshe Avval [the Oil Workers' Strike in 1978-1979 and Its Causes. Part I]," *Kargar-e Komonist*, no. 78 (21 February 2008), http://www.wpiran.org/00-k-komonist/kk78/html/kk78-sm.htm.
[915] US Government, "Labor Report-1960, 18a. Quoted in Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*, 219.

syndicates throughout the oil industry, and the Consortium agreed to organise a series of training seminars for its managers about collective bargaining and trade unions. A year later, 15 syndicates had been formed in the oil industry, including five in Abadan Refinery, but the Labour Ministry delayed their official registration.[916] Despite its formal pro-syndicate stance, the government acted very cautiously in the first half of the 1960s when dealing with syndicates. It feared, as an aerogram of the US Embassy in Tehran to the US State Department illustrated, that syndicates would pose a threat. As such, the government wanted to make sure that they would be put under strict state control:

> [T]he Government and the Oil Consortium are proceeding cautiously with the establishment and eventual registration of labor syndicates in the oil industry. The key problem is how to assure that the syndicates will have responsible, mature leaders who will support the regime and not hinder the operations of the oil industry. To achieve positive security, two full field checks on every proposed syndicate official are being made, one by the State Intelligence and Security Agency (SAVAK) and one by the Ministry of Justice. To diffuse the power of any individual syndicate, the Government plans to create fifteen separate syndicates in the oil industry including five in the Abadan Refinery alone. To assure greater discipline among the syndicates, the Government intends to superimpose a more highly selected Federation structure over the oil syndicates. . . . [T]here are accepted reports that many of the syndicate officials are, in fact, Government agents.[917]

By 1971, there were 26 syndicates composed of blue-collar oil workers.[918] Collective bargaining was introduced in the oil industry in the 1960s. According to Yadollah Khosrowshahi, anybody who wanted to become a representative in refinery could get a form that had to be signed by a fourth of the workers in his department in support of his candidacy. After about four weeks, he would receive a four-page form in which he had to give detailed information about his work and family history. Depending on this form and other information, the SAVAK would then approve or disapprove his candidacy and set a date for the elections. The elected representatives would travel to Tehran every two years for a period of one to two months to negotiate a collective agreement with NIOC. This was the only time that they met and cooperated formally.[919] Until 1972, only the oil workers in Khuzestan, who were employed by the Consortium, had the right to collective bargaining, but in

[916] Chaquèri, *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran: A Documentary History*, 3, 208.
[917] Quoted in Jefroudi, "Revisiting "the Long Night" of Iranian Workers: Labor Activism in the Iranian Oil Industry in the 1960s," 190-91.
[918] *Labor Legislation, Practice and Policy. Ilo Mission Working Paper Ix*.
[919] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 10.

that year the workers of the Tehran Refinery who were employed by NIOC were allowed to participate, as well.[920]

Despite the government's rigorous efforts at maintaining control, trade unions played an important role. From 1965, there were four syndicates in Abadan Refinery. These included the Syndicate of the Central Workshop and Refinery Maintenance (*Sandika-ye Kargah-e Markazi va Ta'mirat-e Palayeshgah*), the Syndicate of the Process and Filtration Department (*Sandika-ye Proces va Tasfiye-ye Naft-e Kham*), Syndicate of Transport and Bus Service (*Sandika-ye Transport va Haml va Naghl-e Otobusrani-ye Kargaran*) and the Syndicate of the Materials Department (*Sandika-ye Edareh-ye Kala*). The meetings of the Abadan Refinery syndicates took place in a building in the working class neighbourhood of Farahabad, along the Bahmanshir River, at the corner of the bazaar at station seven.[921]

The syndicate membership fee was withheld from the blue-collar workers' wage, but not everyone participated in the meetings and elections. According to one oil worker,

> The candidates for elected positions had to be confirmed by the SAVAK . . . so those who had a flexible attitude towards the system were elected, but to be fair, they were very knowledgeable and eloquent. They [board of the syndicate] included Kavakebi, Makvandi, Gholamhessein Vaghef, Khanzadeh and Bahrami. It doesn't mean they were agents of the system, but they weren't also seen as rebels or real defenders of the working class. . . . Some of us [the younger workers] would go to the meetings and make some noise, but nothing organised and we were not acting from a political ideology.[922]

In the eyes of many workers, particularly the younger generation, they were nevertheless seen as a part of the system. In Tehran, NIOC applied a creative control mechanism to weaken trade union organisation. As the Labour Law only gave blue-collar workers the right to form trade unions, many workers in Tehran Refinery were recruited as white-collar workers, particularly in the sensitive departments like process.[923] Nevertheless, oil workers founded trade unions in the Tehran Refinery, as well, which illustrates the important role of militant oil workers. In 1968, Yadollah Khosrowshahi was sent to Tehran as a part of a delegation to finish the building of the Tehran Refinery and to start its operation. There were around 400 workers from Abadan and around 100 from Tehran. This division presented a potential source of tension,

[920] Ibid., 17.
[921] Mazra'ekar, "'Etesab-e Kargaran-e Naft Dar Sal-e 57 Va Zamineha-ye An. Bakhshe Avval [the Oil Workers' Strike in 1978-1979 and Its Causes. Part I]".
[922] Interview with Foroozandeh, 6 February 2013, Abadan.
[923] Interview with Ali Pichgah, 15 March 2015, Sundsvall.

which was at times actively stirred by the SAVAK.[924] There was an active group among the Abadani workers that included Khosrowshahi, Hamid Jagarani, Rasul Foqozadeh, Heshmat Re'isi and Khosrow Ghadiri. They met outside the workplace in cafes (*meykadeh*) and clubs to discuss their grievances and strategies.

In the early 1970s, when a number of their children went to university, this group developed contacts with the radical student milieus. This was only possible after they requested Iqbal to give the blue-collar workers' children a university grant, which had been made exclusively available for the children of the white-collar workers. The workers even invited some students to give summer classes to the oil workers' children who had failed school; the majority of these students were leftist activists.[925] These students became the mediators between the militant oil workers of the Tehran Refinery and the leftist student milieu that was under the influence of the Fada'is.

In early 1971, this informal group decided to nominate 19 candidates for the election of a workers' representative in order to diminish the chance that SAVAK would disapprove of their favourite candidate. One of the Tehrani workers also nominated himself, so there were 20 candidates. On 21 April 1971, the majority of the Tehran Refinery workers elected Khosrowshahi as their representative.[926] Soon after, some workers handed a list of demands to Khosrowshahi under the heading "demands of the toilers of the oil industry." After a number of other oil workers' representatives of the refinery co-signed the letter, Khosrowshahi wrote to the Ministry of Labour, NIOC and SAVAK. The usage of leftist terminology revealed the existence of a militant leftist group among the workers and brought Khosrowshahi under the attention of the SAVAK.[927]

After his election, Khosrowshahi noticed that his wage had increased drastically and was told by the head of the Industrial Relations Department (Noruzi, an Assyrian) that his predecessor had received this amount and that

[924] According to Khosrowshahi, SAVAK brought in two workers from the oil storage installations in Rey, who started to create tensions among the workers from Abadan and Tehran. After the revolution it was revealed that they were employed by SAVAK. The fact, however, that the Abadani workers were organizing collectively, and that the workers from Tehran had to nominate their own representative suggests that there were real divisions as well. Khosrowshahi justifies the fact that they didn't nominate anyone from Tehran by referring to the fact that "They were all new. They had no experience and knowledge. These guys [from Abadan] had each 15 to 20 years experience when they moved from Abadan to Tehran." Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 11.

[925] One of them, Musa Kalantari, became the minister of transportation in the cabinet of Bani-Sadr and died in the bombing of the office of the Islamic Republic Party.

[926] Khosrowshahi, "Bar Ma Cheh Gozasht [What Happened to Us]," 418.

[927] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 12.

the head of the refinery had decided to continue the payment. Khosrowshahi then copied the letter of the refinery director and pasted it on the refinery walls in order to expose the practice of buying off representatives. There was no office for the workers' representatives, and Khosrowshahi went to the workers every day to collect their individual problems and needs. There were, however, around 3,000 to 4,000 blue-collar workers in the Tehran Refinery according to Khosrowshahi, and it was impossible for him to combine his regular work in the repair department with his function as a workers' representative. After a while, the oil company agreed to make the representatives free for their function.[928]

The collective issues were discussed in irregular general assemblies. In 1971, Khosrowshahi and a number of other worker activists decided that it was time to establish a trade union in the Tehran Refinery. There were already three syndicates in existence, the Central Offices Syndicate, the Syndicate of the Distribution Department and the Syndicate of the Oil Storage of Naziabad, which were united in the defunct Syndicate of Tehran Oil Workers. Within a year, they managed to develop trade unions in different sections of the Tehran Refinery: the Maintenance Department, the depots in Rey, the Pipelines and Communication Department and the Exploration and Exploitation Department. [929] They drafted a constitution that was discussed and approved in a general assembly, and then they sent their remarks to the Ministry of Labour, which also gave its approval. The constitution stated that the membership fee was 50 Rial, which should automatically be deduced from the wages of all workers unless they notified the company otherwise, given that they did not want to join the union. It also included the right to have a magazine, sport centres, a consumptive cooperative and a cooperative credit fund. During the elections for the steering committee of the union, nine workers plus a number of substitute members were elected. The Tehran Refinery Workers' Syndicate was founded on 7 May 1973, and Khosrowshahi was elected as its president. [930]

One of the first actions of the syndicate was organising the more than 400 contract workers of the refinery and ensuring that the contractors paid the money that was deduced from their wages for insurance to the insurance company. The SAVAK did not intervene against this, despite loud protests from the contractors. The syndicate made sure that the workers were made

[928] Ibid., 14.
[929] Ibid., 24.
[930] Khosrowshahi, "Bar Ma Cheh Gozasht [What Happened to Us]," 418.

aware of its activities by organizing general assemblies and publishing a frequent four-page newsletter.[931]

## 5.7 Revival of strikes among oil workers

The policies of rewarding and organizing around highly hierarchical status categories had created an individualistic culture among large sections of the oil workers in the south, which meant that individual solutions and progress were seen as the primary key to better living and working conditions. This, however, also created tensions when opportunities for individual progress seemed restrained. Moreover, among a considerable population of workers, the culture of collective activity had survived and was reproduced in novel ways, both through the official channels of collective bargaining and through radical ideas that some of the new recruits brought with them when entering the oil industry.

Protests among oil workers could take many forms. The most common form was the individual act of defiance.

> These discriminations [between white-collar and blue-collar workers] sometimes irritated us and forced us to pull pranks. I was a white-collar worker but my mind and spirit was that of a blue-collar worker . . . so sometimes I pulled jokes on my white-collar colleagues. After using their bathroom, the white-collar workers put the key in a box in the office of the Central Workshop head. One day, I locked the bathroom and threw the key on the roof and told my friends. . . . They [white-collar workers] came one after one and couldn't find the key . . . while me and my friends were laughing.[932]

However, the trend of increasing strike activity in the 1970s also prevailed in the oil industry. Based on leftist newspapers, the Annual Labor Reports of the American Embassy in Iran and some of its cables (published by Wikileaks), I have explored the following strikes from 1970 to the end of 1977.

In 1970, workers of the drilling company Reading and Bates went on strike for higher wages. Despite arrests by SAVAK, the strike continued and only ended after the company made concessions. The workers of the same company went on strike again in early 1976, but this time the strike was successfully repressed and two strike leaders (Borzu and Kalantar) were arrested.[933]

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[931] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 15.
[932] Moqtada'i, *Az Kudak-e Kar Ta Ostandar [from a Child Worker to Governer]*
[933] "Mobarezat-e Kargaran-e Sherkat-e Haffariye Iran Redding and Bits [the Struggles of the Workers of the Iran Reading and Bates Driling Company]," *Kar*, 18 Mordad 1358/9 August 1979.

On 24 March 1970, about 4,000 workers in Abadan Refinery and its port in Mahshahr went on strike in protest against the introduction of a new job classification scheme. The Abadan Refinery workers were unsatisfied with the fact that the new scheme favored some while giving only limited promotion and pay increases to others. As a result of the scheme, 15 percent of the workers received substantial raises, 40 percent received a small increase (one to five Rials a day) and about 45 percent received no increase. The latter category comprised unskilled workers in support services like maintenance and transportation. As an account of the American Embassy in Tehran demonstrates, labour activists raised economic demands and refrained, very consciously, from confrontational tactics, even appropriating the symbols of the regime:

> The strike started apparently spontaneously and the workers remained without identifiable leadership. Nevertheless, the strikers soon developed an effective informal organisation. At key points at the various oil installations in Abadan, the strikers set up "strike centres" manned by workers, from which they elicited support for the strike. Many strikers and members of their families went from door-to-door trying to sell pictures of the Shah, presumably to earn money to support their cause. . . . Not only was there no anti-state political content but the workers carefully tried to sanctify their effort through identification with the Shah. Pictures of the Shah garlanded with flowers were set up at the strike centres and workers read aloud from the Shah's book: White Revolution. Workers returned to work on April 4th and were paid fully for all the strike period.[934]

On 17 September 1973, again a strike was organised in the Abadan Refinery.[935] According to the US embassy's Khorramshahr principal officer, the Abadan strike involved a sit-down in some sections "over ration cards for cheap purchase at company store of foodstuffs and other essential commodities. Many workers apparently had sold their ration cards, but recent price increases throughout Iran prompted their demand for new ones. Management has made offer involving issuance of new ration cards. . . ."[936] The sit-down then became a strike on 22 or 23 September, involving 3,800 workers and causing the production to drop from 480,000 to 220,000 b/d. The strike spread from Abadan to NIOC facilities in Bandar Mahshahr (port), leading to concerns among the managers: "refinery officials are concerned that

[934] Jefroudi, "Revisiting "the Long Night" of Iranian Workers: Labor Activism in the Iranian Oil Industry in the 1960s," 185.
[935] "E'tesab kargaran palayeshgah-e shahre rey va palayeshgah-e Abadan [the Strike of Workers of Rey and Abadan Refineries]," *Nabard-e Khalq: Organ-e Sazman-e Cherikha-ye Fada'i-ye Khalq-e Iran*, no. 1 (Bahman 1352/January-February 1974): 17-19.
[936] US Embassy in Tehran to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 22 September 1973; Document Number 1973TEHRAN06747; Electronic Telegrams, 1973; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

workers in the fields may also join in." The demand of the workers included a 20 percent increase in salaries to offset rising food costs. According to the report, management was only prepared to offer a 10-15 percent increase, "since any increase given [to] refinery workers would have to be met by similar hikes to oil company employees elsewhere in the country." To resolve the issue, NIOC's deputy chairman based in Abadan travelled to Tehran for talks with NIOC chair Iqbal, and while no violence was involved during the strikes, the SAVAK units were sent to the refinery to "ensure security."[937]

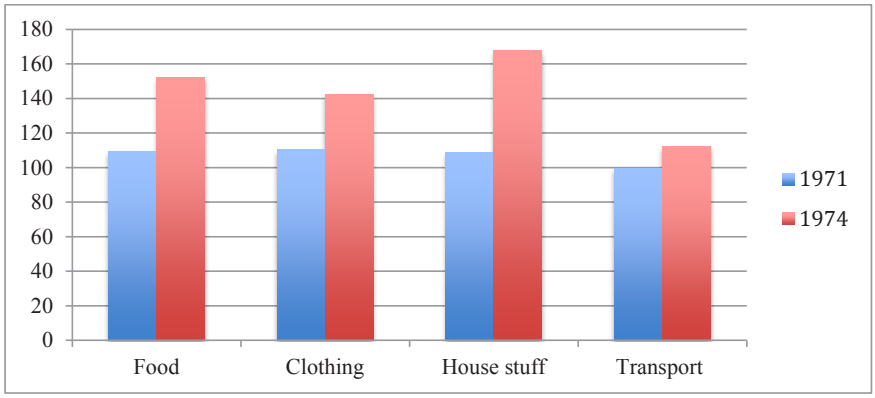
According to the US Consul in Khorramshahr, the strike ended on 26 September.[938] In its subsequent report, the consul attributed the strike's peaceful termination to the "management's success in restraining SAVAK military from intervention," while agreeing with a 10-15 percent ration increase. After a few weeks, this concession was followed by a 10 percent wage hike to offset inflation of about 15 percent. According to the report, inflation had been the main cause of the strike, despite some officials blaming "outside agitators,"; therefore, the risk of discontent unfolding into new strikes remained real as inflation continued to rise, while management had ruled out a further wage hike. This is a plausible account, given the significant increase in the cost of living in Abadan in this period (see Figure 69), which one has to remember was lower than in Tehran, as both the Abadan municipality and NIOC were exercising a tighter control on prices. While in the three years between 1968 and 1971 the price of food in Abadan increased by 10.4 percent, it increased by nearly 40 percent in the following three years.[939] The report also stated that "hardly any arrests or dismissals have taken place, nor have any labor syndicate leaders been removed. No visible attempt has been made to penalize workers involved in the strike."[940]

According to another account, the Abadan Refinery strike in September 1973 was mainly organised by the central workshop workers, who had more demands than rations; they also demanded a five-day working week of 40 hours; collective agreements to be reached by genuine representatives of the workers; and an increase of the food rations in goods instead of payments in cash. Moreover, unlike the consulate report, Manouchehr Iqbal, the director of

[937] Secretary of State to US Embassy in Ankara, 24 September 1973; Document Number 11973STATE189924; Electronic Telegrams, 1973; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
[938] US Embassy in Tehran to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 26 September 1973; Document Number 1973TEHRAN06861; Electronic Telegrams, 1973; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
[939] Calculated from the figures of the Statistical Year Book 1973, provided in Lahsa'izadeh, *Jame'eh Shenasi-ye Abadan [the Sociology of Abadan]*, 348.
[940] US Consulate in Khorramshahr to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 8 January 1974; Document Number 1974KHORRA00004; Electronic Telegrams, 1974; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

NIOC, agreed to increase the wages, but the strike was repressed and its main leaders, Babakhan Mohagheghzadeh, Majid Jasemiyan and Hooshang Ramzi, were exiled to Khorasan. Following the arrests, a number of radical workers organised the Workers' Finance Fund (*Sandogh-e Mali-ye Kargari*) in order to support the families of arrested workers. The meetings of the Fund were held in secret. The Fund also gave mortgages to low-income workers without rent. The workers received their wages every two weeks, and some made a voluntary contribution to the Fund. Yaghub Bani Sa'adoon was one of the key figures in gathering money for the Fund; he died during the Iran-Iraq War. [941]

**Figure 69 Change in cost of living in Abadan, 1971-74 (1969=100).**[942]




From 1972 to 1974, tensions began rising in Tehran Refinery. As mentioned above, collective bargaining in the oil industry only applied to the workers of the Consortium in Khuzestan until 1972. The representatives of oil workers employed by the Consortium signed a collective agreement in negotiations with representatives of NIOC and the Ministry of Labour. In the first week, the workers' representatives drew up a list of demands that were presented to the employers' representatives who then had one week to consider them. The negotiations lasted at least one month, and when an agreement was reached, all three parties signed it. The main issues of the agreement included

[941] Mohammad Mazra'ekar, "'Etesab-e Kargaran-e Naft Dar Sal-e 57 Va Zamineha-ye An. Bakhshe Avval [the Oil Workers' Strike in 1978-1979 and Its Causes. Part I]," *Kargar-e Komonist*, no. 78 (21 February 2008). In this account Mazraekar refers to the big strike of 1351, thus 1972 or early 73, instead of September 1973. However, the demands and magnitude of the conlict very much resemble the 1974 strike. This could be a conflation.
[942] Planning and Budget Organisation of Iran, Statistical Year Book 1972 and 1975, cited in Lahsa'izadeh, *Jame'eh Shenasi-ye Abadan [the Sociology of Abadan]*, 346.

the wage rates, the number of holidays and various allowances.[943] The wages for the oil workers in the north were determined by reducing 25 percent from the wages of oil workers in the south – the extra wage of Khuzestan oil workers was an allowance for "bad weather conditions."[944]

The Tehran Refinery workers urged to be included in collective bargaining, to which NIOC finally agreed in 1972. In that year, oil workers' representatives came to Tehran from various places and stayed in a hotel where they discussed their demands and agreed upon a common agenda. Contacts had been established before, because the representatives could use the internal phone system of the oil industry to call each other, while they also travelled for deliberation.[945]

During the negotiations of 1972, the representatives of the Tehran, Tabriz and Kermanshah refineries demanded that oil workers in the north, like their colleagues in Khuzestan, should receive food rations. In the north, oil workers did not receive food rations, but instead were given an allowance that did not increase with inflation and was insufficient in their view. After their request was rejected, the leaders of the Tehran Refinery Syndicate continued their campaign for demanding food rations, and they also protested against the fact that blue-collar workers did not receive the allowances that white-collar workers received, for instance when working with toxic gas.[946] Another issue that was raised by the Tehran Refinery Syndicate was that the management had appointed a *karmand* as the head of the blue-collar workers' cooperative, whom the workers accused of being corrupt.

In March 1974, the first eruption of the tensions that had built up since the 1972 collective bargaining occurred after the oil company's announcement that workers would only have three holidays for the Iranian New Year (20/21 March). This triggered a strike at Tehran Refinery, during which workers demanded better payment for overwork, regular transport and a wage increase for those who worked at a height of five meters.[947] A confidential cable from the US Embassy to the Department of State gives the following account:

> Benedict of Fluor Corporation, National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Contractor for Tehran Refinery expansion project, informed the embassy on 18 March that 3,000 construction workers hired by Fluor were on sit-down strike demanding 20 percent

[943] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 22-23.
[944] Ibid., 17.
[945] Ibid., 23.
[946] Ibid., 18.
[947] "E'tesab-e Kargaran-e Sherkat-e Naft [The Strike of Oil Company Workers]," *Jangal: nashriyeh-ye Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran [Jangal: journal of the People's Mojahedin of Iran]* (Mordad 1353 July-August 1974): 50-51.

> pay increase, Nowruz (Iranian New Year) bonus, bus service from homes to work site, and reduction of work week from six to five days while being compensated on prorated basis for non-worked sixth day. Strike so far peacable (sic), with workers displaying pictures of Shah and placards claiming royal support for Nowruz bonus.

The cable further states that the labour official of the embassy estimated there to be 2,000 strikers instead of the reported 3,000, and that some of the workers' demands were reasonable while others were not. According to the Iranian intelligence service, the strike was well organised "despite apparent absence of elected worker representatives."[948] Iran's Ministry of Labour did not support the strike, as the workers had refused to elect "competent representatives." The strike ended on 25 March, with none of the workers' demands fulfilled.[949]

This strike, however, was a prelude to a larger eruption. In early June, tensions sparked as workers in the Tehran Refinery maintenance department talked with the Abadan and Shiraz refineries workers, who had come over for the overhaul of the Tehran Refinery. After protests in Shiraz Refinery in early 1974, one of the troublemakers (Mohammad Sadegh Khorram) was transferred to the Tehran Refinery. On his instructions, Khosrowshahi went to the director of the Tehran Refinery telling him to put pressure on the officials of the Shiraz refinery to take back Khorram. In the SAVAK report, the liaison officer of the two refineries gives the same advice, arguing that he had received 15 complaints from workers, and that if Khorram was not reinstalled in Shiraz, the Shiraz workers might do "dangerous stuff. It is impossible to silence the workers with the bayonet."[950] Other SAVAK reports point to the contacts and networks among the workers of the Shiraz and Tehran refineries. On 12 June 1974, for instance, a dozen workers from Shiraz Refinery who visited Tehran Refinery for maintenance operations met Khosrowshahi in the restaurant of the refinery and were asked questions about their arrests and experiences with the security services. One of the workers told Khosrowshahi that they were blindfolded and taken away to a place and were further released after being interrogated and promising to avoid future protests. The worker then added, "We are not afraid anymore, and will do whatever you say." [951] On 15 June 1974, a group of workers from Abadan Refinery and a number of workers of the Tehran Refinery gathered in front of the gate of the refinery and demanded

[948] US Embassy in Tehran to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 19 March 1974; Document Number 1974TEHRAN02222; Electronic Telegrams, 1974; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives.
[949] US Embassy in Tehran to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 1 April 1974; Document Number 1974TEHRAN02507; Electronic Telegrams, 1974; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
[950] SAVAK, Document 31437 001, IRDC archives, Tehran.
[951] SAVAK, Document 31437 003, IRDC archives, Tehran

the provision of snacks in the afternoon. One of them stated that the Labour Law from 1949 is British and should be amended.[952]

The grievances over the unresolved issues from 1972 – rations, white-collar workers' allowances and control over the oil workers' cooperative – boiled over into a full-scale strike in late June 1974. "We decided to focus our demand on the rations and to continue the strike until it was fully met," Khosrowshahi recounts. Because the operation of the Process Department of the Tehran Refinery was in the hands of white-collar workers, the blue-collar workers, many of whom had come from Abadan, started their strike during the overhaul procedure so they could delay the resumption of production.[953] According to a US embassy cable, the "special labor force brought up from Abadan for temporary refinery operation conducted peaceful sit-down strike for five days over working conditions, access to company canteen for after-hours meal service. Security forces were at hand but did not become involved as problem settled without violence or threat of it." The strike came at a tense moment in labour relations, however, as workers of Iranya tile company threatened to use violence during a strike if demands were not met, and after a week of strike, two bombs were set off at company headquarters in Tehran on 25 and 27 June. The cable concludes "that ministry of labor as industrial relations arbiter cooperates closely with security authorities who observe very closely but do not become involved unless violence or threat of violence is entailed."[954]

After the head of the refinery and the head of the local SAVAK (Ma'sumi) failed to convince the workers to resume work, the workers' representatives of Tehran Refinery and other oil installations were invited to meet Iqbal, the head of NIOC. Iqbal agreed to grant oil workers in the north the food rations they demanded, and he also allowed the oil workers to run the cooperative.[955]

Thus at the end of June 1974, the strike of the Tehran Refinery workers ended in a victory, but on 6 August, Khosrowshahi was arrested along with a number of other workers and sent to the SAVAK in Abadan for interrogation. After Khosrowshahi was arrested, the Tehran Refinery workers organised a

[952] SAVAK, Document 31437 004, IRDC archives, Tehran
[953] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 19.
[954] US Embassy in Tehran to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., 10 July 1974; Document Number 1974TEHRAN05630; Electronic Telegrams, 1974; Central Foreign Policy Files; General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59; National Archives at College Park, Maryland.
[955] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 20.

strike to demand his release.[956] SAVAK then noticed that the pamphlets the workers were distributing had the same paper as the illegal books they had been looking for; they proceeded to search the refinery print shop, leading to Re'isi's arrest on 19 August 1974.[957] From 1970 until his arrest in 1974, Khosrowshahi had helped Heshmat Re'isi, who worked in the Tehran Refinery's print shop, to print and distribute illegal leftist literature. Khosrowshahi had taken them off the refinery in his own car for distribution among students. Khosrowhshahi was tortured and forced to read a statement in front of his striking colleagues, calling on them to end the strike.

Khosrowshahi's arrest and the repression of the strike destroyed the plans to organise a confederation of oil workers' unions outside of Khuzestan. Pending his trial, he was tortured (he was hung from the roof and received electric shocks) and developed health problems. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison. In the Qasr prison, Khosrowshahi noticed that the political prisoners mainly belonged to the guerrilla organisations and that they had little interest in workers' issues, because they believed that repression had made it impossible to organise among workers. Nevertheless, he was impressed by their dedication to fight injustice and the communal life they had organised in the prison, sharing everything among themselves, reading together and dividing the tasks fairly.[958]

In 1974, labour activism at Tehran Refinery suffered a huge blow after the subsequent arrest of some of the key activists. Moreover, about 50 other workers were barred from any union activity.[959] Despite this shock to the movement, however, union activism resurfaced two years later. In 1976 the workers managed to organise elections and elect a new steering committee.[960] Khosrowshahi was released in March 1979, after the victory of the revolution.[961]

Despite SAVAK's consequential setback to labour activism in the Tehran Refinery, oil workers' protests were not silenced after 1974. In

[956] SAVAK, Document 31437 005, IRDC archives, Tehran

[957] He was badly tortured with the so-called "Apollo" device, which the prisoners believed SAVAK had received from Israel. During the torture he lost his consciousness several times, had blood in his urine and had to undergo foot surgery and kidney treatment. In Qasr prison, he was influenced by members of leftist organisations, intellectuals and artists who had been imprisoned. He was released in early 1977 as the regime was relaxing its repressive policies under the influence of the "Carter breeze." Interview by Ahmadi with Heshmat Re'isi, 9 May 1995 (Tape 6-8), Berlin.

[958] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 25-26.

[959] *Kar* (Majority), 15 Mordad 1382/6 August 2003.

[960] Fattahi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-ye Showra-ye Kargaran-e Naft. Goftogu-ye Mohammad Fattahi Ba Yadollah Khosrowshahi [Oral History of the Oil Workers' Council. Interview with Yadollah Khosrowshahi by Mohammad Fattahi]*, 28.

[961] Khosrowshahi, "Bar Ma Cheh Gozasht [What Happened to Us]," 420-22. The solidarity strike ended after the authorities agreed to continue paying Khosrowshahi's wage to his wife.

September 1975, the workers of the Tabriz refinery staged a brief strike in protest against low wages, which they said was held at 130 Rial per day.[962] On 13 January 1976, around 300 blue-collar workers of the central workshop and overhaul maintenance of Abadan Refinery went on strike, partially to demand payment for technical work, which they argued was done by them, while white-collar workers reaped the rewards. They also called for a seven-hoursworking day, which they claimed was their right according to international regulations signed by the Iranian government; improvements to healthcare facilities and Iranian midwives instead of Indian men; full remuneration for "grades" (70 instead of 62 Rial); and inclusion of oil workers in the profit-sharing scheme. [963]

In late March 1977 the contract workers of RemainCo (about 540) who were working on the expansion of the Abadan Refinery went on strike, because their wages had not been paid for three months. SAVAK reacted immediately and approached Nasser Khaksar, who was the top supervisor working for RemainCo, accusing him of "damaging the company image as the strike was publicized by the BBC." SAVAK also contacted RemainCo's manager, but after finding out that the delay in the payment had been caused by the refinery, it pressured the refinery director. The strike ended quickly as the money was arranged and the wages were paid. SAVAK, however, insisted on the departure of Khaksar, who was dismissed by the company.[964]

[962] *Mardom*, 11 November 1975, 2.
[963] "Abadan," *Nabard-e Khalq: organ-e sazman-e cherikha-ye fada'iye khalq-e Iran [Nabard: organ of the Organisation of the People's Fada'i Geurrillas of Iran]*, no. 7 (Khordad 1355 /May-June 1976).
[964] Nasser Khaksar, interview by author, Shahin Shahr (Isfahan), 10 February 2013.